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### United Nations Children's Fund

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### **Update on the implementation of the recommendations made in the independent panel review of the UNICEF response to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and the report of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority**

#### *Summary*

The present report is submitted pursuant to Executive Board decision 2020/21, which “*requests* UNICEF to continue to provide updates to the Executive Board on how UNICEF is preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in its policies, procedures and operations at all levels, taking into account the recommendations from the independent review”;...“requests UNICEF to highlight in particular its actions taken in implementing the Independent Task Force’s recommendations related to abuse of authority in its next update on this matter at the annual session of 2021”; and “*Takes note with appreciation* of the establishment of an Internal Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination and requests UNICEF to report to the Executive Board at the annual session of 2021 on the work of this task team and on UNICEF actions to prevent and respond to all forms of discrimination, including racism and racial discrimination, in its policies, procedures and programmes.”

The report provides a progress update on the work of UNICEF to improve its organizational culture, including its efforts on anti-racism and discrimination, as well as actions taken to implement its strategy to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

Elements of a draft decision for consideration by the Executive Board are included in section VI.

\* [E/ICEF/2022/1](#).



## I. Overview

1. UNICEF continues its progress on follow-up actions to implement the recommendations made in the independent panel review of the UNICEF response to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse; the Morgan Lewis report on sexual harassment investigations conducted by the UNICEF Office of Internal Audit and Investigations (from 2013 to 2017); and the report of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority. This update covers the period March to October 2021.
2. The UNICEF overall strategy towards these issues is grounded in the organization's core values of care, respect, integrity, trust and accountability. There is zero tolerance for any form of sexual exploitation and abuse, sexual harassment, discrimination, racism, or other forms of misconduct. UNICEF is working to strengthen monitoring and reporting systems, and trust in these systems among employees; to build capacities to manage people more effectively and respectfully; and to ensure appropriate and timely actions are taken to address workplace issues.
3. UNICEF has made continued progress in addressing sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment since its last report presented to the Executive Board at the annual session of 2021. Additional training resources have been made available to personnel. Almost all of UNICEF civil society partners have now been assessed for their capacity to protect populations served against sexual exploitation, and UNICEF is prepared to share these assessments with other United Nations entities. More country offices have engaged with communities, often in novel ways, on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and its reporting. Victim assistance was widely offered and provided in most UNICEF cases and in cases involving other entities. Guidance on victim assistance, for which the work has been led by UNICEF, has also been broadly communicated among United Nations entities. UNICEF actively collaborates with other United Nations agencies on sexual misconduct issues, at the principal and technical level.
4. Continued work is required to strengthen inter-agency coordination; prevention (vetting and training, and risk assessment and management of programmes, personnel and partners); reporting, including in the community; investigations by partners; and the availability of quality comprehensive victim assistance. Some of these challenges are pronounced in civil society partnerships: only a quarter of national non-governmental organizations have adequate capacity to investigate and respond to incidents. Within UNICEF, gender parity in staffing and accountability in addressing sexual exploitation and abuse across all functions is vital. The fundamental drivers of sexual exploitation and abuse, including gender inequality and discrimination and gender-based violence, persist; they demand gender-transformative programming across sectors, including education and health. The challenges are significant and require long-term engagement by UNICEF and its partners.
5. Since the last update to the Executive Board at its annual session of 2021, the organizational culture work has grown in two main areas. First, it now has a much stronger emphasis on anti-racism and discrimination. Since the work of the internal Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination was completed in May 2021, UNICEF has been working on implementation of the Task Team's recommendations. Having reviewed all its recommendations carefully, UNICEF has accepted or partially accepted for implementation all but 4 of the more than 100 recommendations.
6. Second, there is an increased focus on institutionalizing the work on organizational culture through monitoring and reporting, with the introduction of the Pulse Check on the workplace culture in June 2021. All employees were asked to respond to nine questions, and to provide their perceptions of different aspects of the

workplace culture in their offices. Various communication tools, products and channels were used to promote the Pulse Check. The final response rate was 70 per cent globally, with more than 12,500 employees responding to the survey. About 90 per cent of offices/business areas reached the minimum 60 per cent response rate. Follow-up actions and support to offices are ongoing. The Pulse Check will be administered on a biannual basis, with the next one scheduled for December 2021.

7. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic continues to affect the UNICEF organizational culture. Many offices have adopted hybrid working modalities to allow maximum flexibility for employees to manage within COVID-related restrictions while continuing to deliver results for children. Building on the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as approaches to modernization of human resources, UNICEF is developing guidance on new work modalities, including options such as work from anywhere arrangements.

8. Future priorities with respect to improving the organizational culture will include further institutionalizing the Pulse Check and its follow up; implementing the recommendations from the internal Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination; and further improving communications and staff engagement in all aspects of organizational culture. A new interactive tool (the Spectrum of Behaviours Tool) is expected to be finalized in early 2022, to help employees to better understand the range of behaviours and responses available to them, for example, through recourse to the Division of Human Resources, Peer Support Volunteers and management; mediation; guidance from the Ethics Office; and, when dealing with possible misconduct or inappropriate behaviour, reporting to the Office of Internal Audit and Investigations.

9. To address sexual misconduct and implement the outstanding recommendations of the independent panel review, UNICEF is implementing its 2019 strategy to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. The organization will continue to improve vetting, training and accountability of personnel and partners, in all contexts, including at the onset of emergencies. Communities will be engaged in the design of reporting mechanisms for sexual exploitation and abuse that can reach larger populations. Ensuring access to quality victim assistance will remain a programmatic priority. UNICEF will work with its partners and other United Nations entities to address these issues, including by improving the capacity of civil society organizations to investigate allegations and provide quality support to victims.

## **II. Introduction**

10. In its decision 2020/21, the Executive Board requested UNICEF to provide updates to the Executive Board on how the organization is preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in its policies, procedures and operations at all levels, taking into account the recommendations from the independent review. UNICEF also reports on its organizational culture work (in response to the 2019 report of the Independent Task Force) as part of this agenda item, including its efforts on anti-racism and discrimination, since the 2020 annual session.

11. This document is being submitted to the Executive Board in fulfilment of those requests. It contains an update on the progress made since the 2021 annual session in countering sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, and in improving the organizational culture.

12. Although the work of UNICEF on sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment is closely linked to efforts to improve its organizational culture, this

update separates the two workstreams, with the linkages between them highlighted throughout the document.

13. UNICEF is committed to realizing the rights of the children and communities it serves to have access to the protection and assistance to which they are entitled, without the fear or actual occurrence of sexual exploitation and abuse, and to ensuring that all UNICEF staff can work in a respectful and empowering environment free of sexual harassment, racism, discrimination and all other forms of workplace abuse.

### **III. Update on the progress on implementing the UNICEF strategy to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment**

14. The UNICEF strategy to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment structures its work relating to sexual misconduct. In the six months since the last report to the Executive Board, there has been continued progress in this regard.

15. Ninety-two per cent of the recommendations in the independent panel review of the UNICEF response to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse have been completed or integrated into ongoing work; the remainder are delayed. Preliminary results are available from the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network assessment of UNICEF, which, for the first time, addressed protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. The assessment indicated that there are good systems upon which to build.

16. Annual plans to improve systems for the protection from sexual exploitation and abuse are set using United Nations system-wide templates. Entity-level and country-level action plans are developed and shared, respectively, with the Secretary-General or among the United Nations country teams. Country offices that receive funds dedicated to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse are required, and other offices are encouraged, to report using a prescribed monitoring framework. At year-end, UNICEF will collate the data from country offices on the progress made on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. A total of 91 offices reported progress in 2020.

17. One outcome of the organization's work on preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse is reflected in related staff perceptions. Annual, confidential, multi-agency protection from sexual exploitation and abuse surveys measure how well obligations are understood; how well processes for addressing sexual misconduct are known; and how well UNICEF is perceived to be handling sexual misconduct. In 2021, the survey scope doubled, with more than 4,000 personnel and 116 country offices participating.

18. As noted in previous reports to the Executive Board, sexual misconduct is an intractable problem, with individual, organizational and external drivers. UNICEF is committed to taking long-term action to address the issue. To that end, for the first time, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and organizational culture, and associated indicators, feature in the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025.

#### **A. An organizational culture of zero tolerance built through accountability, prevention and gender equality**

19. Zero tolerance at UNICEF means no allegation is ignored. All allegations warrant careful examination and assessment of the needed response. No sexual misconduct is acceptable. Proven cases all warrant robust consequences, within UNICEF as well as for the perpetrator's future employability. Zero cases is the goal

of UNICEF prevention efforts, keeping in mind that unreported cases are harder to address than reported ones.

20. The UNICEF strategy to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment recognizes that gender inequality in the UNICEF workplace contributes to sexual harassment and other forms of misconduct. An organizational culture that is conducive to addressing power imbalances is required. Indicators in the new Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, will measure gender imbalances in staffing, management training on gender equality, and perceptions relevant to reporting concerns.

21. UNICEF is continuing work on a safeguarding accountability framework. In parallel, UNICEF has revised its staff performance management framework. Starting in 2021, it has been made explicit to all staff that they may be assessed on whether they are upholding their commitments to reducing safeguarding risks. Managers are subject to a performance assessment criterion of whether they have fostered an environment of openness, transparency and accountability, where safeguarding concerns are recognized, confidently raised and proactively and safely addressed, by the manager and the team.

22. UNICEF staff are provided skills training in order to uphold these commitments: 96 per cent of staff have completed the mandatory training on prevention from sexual exploitation and abuse, and 95 per cent have completed the mandatory training relating to sexual harassment and other workplace abuse. Most staff (97 per cent) have reported positive experiences after completing the courses. Supplementary training has been released to complement the mandatory training. In 2021, an Inter-Agency Standing Committee/International Organization for Migration-facilitated course on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse was adapted for UNICEF in-person or remote training.

23. UNICEF must manage the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse in its partnerships with civil society organizations. In early 2020, UNICEF released a comprehensive procedure for managing those risks, with an accompanying tool kit to help partners to address them. The procedure has since been adapted for a United Nations-wide harmonized approach to partner capacity assessment. As at 25 October 2021, a total of 3,830 UNICEF partners had been assessed (98 per cent of total civil society partners), the majority of which were assessed as either moderate risk (49 per cent) or high risk (14 per cent) and requiring significant support to raise their capacity. An analysis of the assessments reveals a consistent lack of organizational capacity to respond to potential incidents, including gaps in reporting systems, ensuring assistance to and referrals for victims, as well as investigations. Initiatives to address those gaps are discussed below.

24. In 2021, UNICEF initiated a review of how its supply processes might be further strengthened to better safeguard against sexual exploitation and abuse, by identifying high-risk services and making the capacity of suppliers to mitigate those risks a screening or evaluation criterion.

25. The UNICEF enterprise risk management framework now captures risks of sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse as discrete risk categories. Identification and effective management of safeguarding risks is included as an indicator in the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025.

## **B. Reporting mechanisms that are safe and trusted**

26. Community access to safe reporting mechanisms is vital. UNICEF continues to explore new approaches to effectively consult with communities about protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. Ten country offices have included digital

platforms in their efforts. For example, the country offices in Afghanistan, Malawi, Nigeria and the Philippines used U-Report to send out polls to assess knowledge and raise awareness of sexual exploitation and abuse and available reporting channels. Data from the polls were used to adapt risk management and programming. During 2021, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela launched a UNICEF and an inter-agency feedback mechanism, both of which are accessible through multiple channels with trained operators, data protection and safe and efficient referrals. In Yemen, a new grievance redress mechanism was created, with options for calling or registering complaints in-person, and the confidential handling of complaints by trained personnel. UNICEF has captured best practices in a digital innovations package to inform safe digital engagement in programming for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

27. At the end of 2021, UNICEF will collate data from country offices on the estimated number of children and adults who have access to safe channels to report sexual exploitation and abuse. In 2020, 44 million children and adults had such access.

28. As the reach of UNICEF reporting mechanisms has increased, reports of sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse have remained roughly stable between 2020 and the first three quarters of 2021.

29. From 1 January to 30 September 2021, the Office of Internal Audit and Investigations received and registered 249 new cases, including 110 concerning alleged misconduct by UNICEF staff members. In addition, 266 cases were carried over from 2020 to 2021, including 140 cases concerning misconduct by UNICEF staff members. Of the 249 new cases, the largest category was sexual exploitation and abuse (18 per cent). The second largest category was fraud involving misuse of programme funds by third parties. Over the same period, sexual harassment cases accounted for 4 per cent of all new cases, or 10 out of a total of 249 cases, similar to the sexual harassment intake in 2020 (15 of 308 cases).

30. UNICEF publicly reports, almost in real time, allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving its personnel and the partners implementing its programmes. From 1 January to 30 September 2021, it reported 39 sexual exploitation and abuse allegations, involving 54 victims and 45 perpetrators, including 4 UNICEF personnel and 41 personnel of partners implementing its programmes. The total numbers were roughly comparable to 2020 (zero allegations involving UNICEF personnel and 42 involving personnel of partners implementing its programmes); and 2019 (allegations involving 10 UNICEF personnel and 40 personnel of partners implementing its programmes), and a significant increase from 2017 and 2018. Additional information on UNICEF allegations reported since 2017 can be found on the website of the United Nations Special Coordinator on improving the United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse.<sup>1</sup>

### **C. A quality, survivor-centred response**

31. UNICEF programming on child protection and gender-based violence in emergencies includes risk mitigation, prevention and response. In 2020, this three-pronged approach reached 17.7 million people in 83 countries, and more than 210,000 UNICEF and partner personnel were trained on risk mitigation and safe referrals for services. (Data for 2021 were not available at the time of writing.)

32. Two thirds of all victims in reported cases of sexual exploitation and abuse in the first three quarters of 2021 received victim assistance (33 of 50). In the remaining

<sup>1</sup> <[www.un.org/preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/content/data-allegations-un-system-wide](http://www.un.org/preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/content/data-allegations-un-system-wide)>.

cases, the person affected declined or did not seek assistance, was unreachable, or the status of assistance was being confirmed.

33. UNICEF continues to promote the implementation of standards for the survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse. UNICEF led the development of the technical note on the implementation of the United Nations protocol on the provision of assistance to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, which is being widely communicated within the organization and across United Nations agencies. In humanitarian settings, virtually all UNICEF appeals for humanitarian action for children include targets for addressing gender-based violence in emergencies.

34. UNICEF has worked with the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to improve the legal assistance available to victims. A framework was created for a roster of lawyers and/or legal aid organizations willing to offer pro bono legal assistance to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations staff and related personnel. The assistance will address criminal and/or civil proceedings, including in relation to paternity and child support claims, as permissible under applicable national laws. The framework will be piloted in select countries in the fourth quarter of 2021.

35. UNICEF continues to offer staff who have experienced sexual misconduct access to in-house psychosocial, medical and human resources support.

#### **D. Investigations and sanctions that are swift and credible**

36. The Office of Internal Audit and Investigations investigates allegations of sexual misconduct by UNICEF personnel. Institutional contractors, implementing partners and other third parties bear primary responsibility for investigating wrongdoing by their own personnel.

37. The capacity of these parties to appropriately investigate allegations of sexual misconduct varies. To help to raise their capacity, in 2021, investigators from the Office of Internal Audit and Investigations collaborated with the CHS Alliance to develop investigative training, which is expected to be available to partners in the fourth quarter of 2021. In some situations, investigations by UNICEF, or by qualified external investigative entities, might still be required. The Charter of the Office of Internal Audit and Investigations, which was revised in 2021, recognizes its authority to investigate wrongdoing by institutional contractors, implementing partners and other third parties, or to refer such matters to the investigative functions of third parties, as appropriate.

38. As at 8 October 2021, of the four allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving UNICEF personnel publicly reported in 2021, the investigation of one case had been concluded. Of the 35 allegations involving implementing partner personnel reported in 2021, 9 were closed. Five cases were closed because the alleged perpetrators were found to have committed sexual exploitation and abuse and dismissed from the hiring entity; four cases were closed because there was a finding that the allegations were unsubstantiated.

39. In 2021, based on data through 30 September, the Office of Internal Audit and Investigations closed 96 per cent of cases of sexual exploitation and abuse within nine months.

40. As at 30 September 2021, UNICEF disposed of 28 cases that had been referred for possible disciplinary action. These included 23 cases received in 2021 and 5 cases that were carried over from 2020. In 18 cases involving serving staff members, misconduct was established and disciplinary measures were imposed. In seven cases involving staff in service, it was found that no misconduct was established. However,

in six of these cases, administrative or managerial measures were imposed to address shortcomings in behaviour. In relation to one former staff member, a note was placed in their official file, noting that a matter was pending at the time of separation. In relation to two former staff members, a note was placed in their official files, stating that a disciplinary process would be initiated if they returned to UNICEF. Five cases remained under review at the time of writing, including the two cases of alleged sexual misconduct received in 2021.

#### **E. Engaging partners in the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment**

41. With the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNICEF co-leads Inter-Agency Standing Committee groups focused on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and accountability and inclusion. UNICEF also provided personnel to support the creation of an Inter-Agency Standing Committee field support team for prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. UNICEF supports more than 50 inter-agency prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse coordinators. In 2021, UNICEF led the creation of an accountability and inclusion portal that offers resources pertaining to community-based complaint mechanisms and other resources.

42. UNICEF regularly participates, at the principal and technical level, in work coordinated by the Office of the Special Coordinator on improving the United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse and the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate.

43. In 2021, UNICEF engaged with the United Nations Development Coordination Office on revisions to the Management and Accountability Framework of the UN Development and Resident Coordinator system, to foster better country team coordination on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

44. UNICEF is working with other United Nations entities to align plans to combat sexual misconduct following the adoption of the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system.

45. In the framework of the United Nations System Chief Executive Boards for Coordination task force on addressing sexual harassment within the organizations of the United Nations system, UNICEF and the World Food Programme continue to co-chair a sub-working group on improved reporting of sexual harassment. In 2021, the sub-working group administered an updated annual survey of the 27 participating United Nations entities on reporting of sexual harassment. Analysis of the survey is under way. The results will allow the task force to identify: (a) progress in the United Nations system-wide efforts to eradicate sexual harassment; (b) risk indicators to allow for more focused prevention initiatives; and (c) areas in which entities can strengthen how they address sexual harassment.

### **IV. Organizational culture**

46. Progress continues towards full implementation of the accepted recommendations from the Independent Task Force report, with 50 per cent of the recommendations completed and closed, and 36 per cent on track or in progress (these are recommendations that are ongoing and without a time limit or end point). Nine per cent of the actions are delayed but under way, while 5 per cent were not accepted for implementation by UNICEF, as of November 2021

47. UNICEF conducted its first-ever Pulse Check on the workplace culture in June 2021. All employees were asked to respond to nine questions, providing their perceptions of different aspects of workplace culture. Various communication tools,



products and channels were used to communicate about and promote the Pulse Check. The final response rate was 70 per cent globally, with more than 12,500 employees responding. About 90 per cent of offices/business areas reached the minimum 60 per cent response rate.

48. The Pulse Check is intended to be a complement to the more comprehensive Global Staff Survey, which is run every two years. In contrast, the Pulse Check is deliberately brief. An analysis of the survey data was made available to all of UNICEF just two days after the close of the survey. Pulse Check will be shared with all staff every six months, and the data are intended to inform ongoing and new efforts to improve the workplace culture across offices.

49. The Pulse Check data are available to all UNICEF employees, and include gender-disaggregated data. Results can be compared across offices and over time, thus enabling the identification and sharing of good practices and creating positive competition between offices. The data are also available as part of the Office Performance Scorecards, together with other key performance indicators related to alliance building and partnerships, people management, programme delivery, financial management and quality assurance. The Office Performance Scorecards are monitored regularly by country offices as part of country management team meetings, and they are also monitored by regional offices as part of their oversight role.

50. To support offices to take action on the Pulse Check data, a detailed guide has been prepared. Several short videos were also produced to help offices to access and understand their data. Nine tip sheets have been prepared and shared, to help offices to understand how they can take action to follow up on their Pulse Check results. These Pulse Check materials are available in four official United Nations languages: Arabic, English, French and Spanish.

51. UNICEF is the first United Nations agency to develop and implement a Pulse Check on the workplace culture that is integrated into its routine monitoring and accountability systems. There have already been requests from other United Nations entities such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the World Food Programme, to learn more about the survey and for UNICEF to share its experiences.

52. The response to the Pulse Check has been very positive. Within days of the data from the first survey being shared with all employees (on 1 July 2021), many offices organized all-staff meetings to discuss the results. Discussions focused on the data itself, comparisons to the Global Staff Survey 2020 data, and how to follow up on the findings. One innovative example comes from the Côte d'Ivoire Country Office, which used the main issues arising from their Pulse Check data as the basis for a series of skits that were developed and performed by their employees during a staff retreat.

53. The areas where UNICEF scored the highest (most positive) on the Pulse Check were: empowerment; work-life harmony; and internal communications.

54. The areas where UNICEF scored the lowest (least positive) were: psychological safety and trust; performance management; appreciation and recognition; and standards of conduct.

55. Important differences were seen in the survey responses by gender, with men generally responding more positively than women. The Pulse Check will be administered every six months to facilitate monitoring of trends over time.

56. The Humans of UNICEF programme remains a major initiative supporting a more values-based culture. It was designed to facilitate both personal and team

appreciation across UNICEF. Between its launch in February 2020 and the end of September 2021, a total of 1,350 UNICEF employees had been nominated by their peers as ‘Humans of UNICEF’ who are living the organization’s core values. In addition, the programme has generated close to 5,000 engagements from employees, i.e., comments, likes and feedback through different channels. Nomination forms have been made available in English, French and Spanish.

57. In October 2021, the fifth annual Ethics Month was held, with a focus on the core value of “care”. The events of the month highlighted different dimensions of care: the care that UNICEF demonstrates for its employees; care that employees demonstrate for UNICEF through ethical behaviour; care that employees demonstrate to each other; and care that employees demonstrate to implementing partners and the children the organization serves. A global webinar highlighted employees from country offices who shared heartfelt and engaging stories about how they personally demonstrate these different aspects of care and how they have benefitted from the care shown to them by others.

58. UNICEF continues its practice of scheduling periodic conversations with senior leaders (Representatives and Director-level staff) on leading during the COVID-19 pandemic. In September 2021, the eighth round of these conversations was held, with the participation of some 120 leaders over three sessions. The topics discussed in 2021 to date include: dealing with employees’ concerns about the COVID-19 vaccination; encouraging back-to-office working arrangements where it is safe to do so; supporting employees’ mental health during lockdowns/working from home; and sharing experiences related to use of the Pulse Check data.

59. UNICEF continued to promote the uptake of mediation and informal resolution as a non-intrusive and relatively fast way to resolve workplace conflicts. Following the organization’s adoption of a mediation pledge, the Executive Director shared an all-staff message on 2 August 2021 “encourag[ing] all staff, including management, to honor this commitment and make use, in appropriate cases, of the Global Mediation Panel featuring over 60 on-call mediators from around the globe.” The Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes has observed that staff need such encouragement to seek the mediation support, and to help to mitigate the fear of reprisal when seeking such support.

60. The Office of the Ombudsman has launched programmes to increase awareness of mediation services among staff and non-staff personnel. This included conducting global webinars and a training programme titled “A Conversation with the Mediator”, which was followed by an opportunity to have a confidential discussion with a mediator, for more than 25 country offices. This programme allowed staff to voice their concerns and discuss the possibility of using mediation to seek resolution for their workplace issues. A new e-learning programme on mediation was launched in 2021 by the Office of the Ombudsman.

61. As of October 2021, the number of mediation cases exceeded that of the entire 12 months of 2020, with UNICEF leading the other United Nations funds and programmes serviced by the Office of the Ombudsman in terms of the number of staff who continue to actively seek the support of the Mediation Unit, Office of the Ombudsman, in resolving their workplace conflicts. The most common workplace issues submitted for mediation continue to be supervisor-supervisee conflicts.

62. UNICEF is developing a long-term internal campaign around “living our values”, focused on staff engagement and behaviour change, which will be rolled out in the first quarter of 2022. As part of this campaign, a user-friendly online tool – the Spectrum of Behaviours Tool – has been developed. The tool was piloted with six

offices between August and October 2021 through a series of workshops, and using a behavioural science approach to staff engagement.

63. With respect to anti-racism and discrimination, UNICEF has developed its response to the recommendations from the internal Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination, submitted by the Task Team to the Executive Director in May 2021. All but four of the more than 100 recommendations made by the Task Team were accepted or partially accepted by UNICEF. Discussions are ongoing with different business owners and/or headquarters divisions, with implementation of several of the recommendations in progress.

64. One recommendation is related to building the capacities of employee resource groups, which are employee-driven groups around specific issues that are intended to make UNICEF a more inclusive workplace for all. For the first time ever, funding has been provided to these groups to enable them to increase their outreach to UNICEF employees, such as employees with disabilities or employees of African descent, and to identify ways to engage these employees on diversity and inclusion.

65. The organizational culture team will expand to include staff with expertise in addressing diversity and inclusion issues. This team will oversee, monitor and report on all the culture and diversity work taking place across the organization.

66. As part of implementing the recommendations from the Task Team, offices are undertaking courageous conversations about racism and discrimination. The country offices in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Malawi, Montenegro and the State of Palestine are some of the offices that have started these conversations. Other parts of the organization, such as the country offices in Senegal and Zimbabwe, and the Division of Global Communication and Advocacy, have prepared action plans and are building their capacity to address issues such as unconscious bias, microaggressions, and to become ‘upstanders’ (i.e., persons who speak out or act in support of an individual or a cause, particularly those who intervene on behalf of a person being attacked or bullied).

67. UNICEF has initiated the recertification process for the Economic Dividends for Gender Equality (EDGE), which is to be completed in 2022. The EDGE action plan 2020–2021 has been instrumental to reach virtual gender parity at the P5 level (within the threshold of 47 to 53 per cent) for the first time ever, with 47.2 per cent women at the P5 level as at 30 September 2021. New data analyses on separation data by gender, as well as exit interview data, are also products of the last EDGE certification exercise and are key to informing strategic decisions on flexible working modalities and organizational efficiencies initiatives. UNICEF expects the next EDGE action plan to have a deeper focus on country-related measures and ensure gender equality in emergency and non-family duty stations.

68. UNICEF is increasingly creating a space where employees with disabilities and employees who have children with disabilities can support one another and feel welcomed, through the creation and growth of employee resource groups. These networks have a clear mandate to support the de-stigmatization that comes with having visible and invisible disabilities at UNICEF and create a more pro-disability culture. The expanded use of reasonable accommodation, including during recruitment, is also having a positive impact on the candidate experience for applicants with disabilities. The recruitment and inclusive onboarding of 12 United Nations Volunteers with disabilities to UNICEF by the end of 2021/early 2022 will further help to promote this work across country offices. Lastly, accessibility of UNICEF offices is being promoted, with a focus on the accessibility of zonal offices and the availability of accessible vehicles for UNICEF offices.

**Working with other United Nations agencies on organizational culture**

69. UNICEF co-leads the new ways of working sub-stream of the High-Level Committee on Management's Task Force on the Future of Work. This task force is now in its second year of operation. In September, a new model policy on flexible work and a set of senior leadership commitments were approved by the High-Level Committee on Management.

70. UNICEF collaborates with other United Nations entities on anti-racism initiatives through its work on the Task Force, where one of the main deliverables for 2022 is a set of good practices on diversity, equity and inclusion. UNICEF remains engaged in an informal inter-agency group to convene colleagues across the United Nations system working on anti-racism and discrimination, and is co-leading, with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the development of an anti-racism tool kit.

71. UNICEF makes active contributions to the Secretary-General's task force working to develop a strategy and guidance on countering discrimination and violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer (LGBTIQ+) people, and to the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy as a member of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy focal points network, where the organization co-led in 2021 a webinar series on employment for employees with disabilities in international organizations. UNICEF is also an active member of the gender focal point network coordinated by UN-Women, where the organization continuously exchanges best practices on diversity, equity and inclusion in its internal operations.

**V. Next steps**

72. The 2019 UNICEF strategy to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment will continue to structure UNICEF priorities in preventing, detecting and responding to sexual misconduct. At the country level, UNICEF will commit resources to strengthen victim assistance and community reporting mechanisms. Activities to raise awareness among staff at all levels and to set clear expectations for setting safeguards and managing risks will be a global focus for 2022 and beyond. Work will continue, in cooperation with other United Nations agencies, to engage Governments, implementing partners and civil society in addressing sexual exploitation and abuse.

73. Future priorities with respect to improving the organizational culture will include further institutionalizing the Pulse Check and its follow up to help offices to continue to identify and implement actions related to changing behaviours at the individual and team levels. Implementation of the recommendations from the Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination will be a top priority in 2022. Strengthening internal communications around all aspects of organizational culture and diversity will be essential to inform and engage staff on these changes.

74. As 2022 marks the first year of the new Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, UNICEF will seize the opportunity to further accelerate efforts on improving the organizational culture, promoting diversity and inclusion, and ensuring protection from sexual exploitation and abuse across all its work. Sustaining efforts and embedding them into all systems, processes and ways of working will remain essential strategies.

## VI. Draft decision

### *The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note with appreciation* of the update provided by UNICEF on the implementation of the recommendations made in the independent panel review of the UNICEF response to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and the report of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority (E/ICEF/2022/6), and notes with appreciation the increasing inter-agency cooperation;
  2. *Notes* progress made and the need for continued effort and focus on preventing and taking immediate action on tackling sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment, including ensuring that policies and procedures deliver impact and are resourced sufficiently, and that proposed actions are implemented at the country, regional and global levels;
  3. *Also notes* the establishment of a dedicated Safeguarding Office;
  4. *Requests* UNICEF to continue to take action to ensure a victim-centred, system-wide and coherent approach to prevent and tackle sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, while leveraging its mandate, and to address the increased risk of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) response and recovery;
  5. *Also requests* UNICEF to maintain its progress on building a more values-based organizational culture, and expanding diversity, equity and inclusion efforts;
  6. *Further requests* UNICEF to provide an update to the Executive Board on how the organization is preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse in its policies, procedures and operations at all levels, at the annual session of 2023;
  7. *Requests* UNICEF to provide an update to the Executive Board on how the organization is improving organizational culture and on its actions to prevent and respond to all forms of discrimination, including racism and racial discrimination, and sexual harassment, in its policies, procedures and programmes, at the annual session of 2023.
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