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Report of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund on the work of its annual session of 2020

(29 June–2 July 2020)*

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I. Organization of the session

A. Adoption of the provisional annotated agenda, timetable and organization of work

1. The Executive Board adopted the agenda, timetable and organization of work (E/ICEF/2020/6 and E/ICEF/2020/6/Corr.1) for the session.
2. In accordance with rule 50.2 of the rules of procedure, the Secretary of the Executive Board announced that credentials were submitted by 41 observer delegations, including one intergovernmental organization, two international organizations, 12 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and 10 National Committees for UNICEF.

B. Opening statements by the President of the Executive Board and the Executive Director of UNICEF

3. The President of the Executive Board and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations, H.E. Mrs. Rabab Fatima, opened the annual session of the Executive Board, noting that it was the first formal session to be held on a virtual platform, a testament to the new normal of online engagement and business continuity.

4. She thanked the Executive Director of UNICEF and all UNICEF staff for their dedicated and courageous efforts to respond to the many impacts of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. She highlighted the severity of this unprecedented crisis for children who, despite not being the face of the pandemic, may still bear the brunt of it. She noted the many alarming challenges children may face, including learning disruptions, rising malnutrition, serious mental-health impacts, increased risk of violence, abuse and exploitation, immunization disruptions and increased extreme poverty.

5. She commended UNICEF for its rapid response to the crisis and thanked donor countries for their generous and timely assistance. She encouraged UNICEF to reflect on lessons learned from the pandemic and to continue to assess the effectiveness of its approaches and interventions going forward. She affirmed that the Executive Board stood firmly behind the efforts of UNICEF and was ready to provide it with strategic guidance and support as it moved towards the achievement of a stronger, safer and more equitable world.

6. The President stressed that the response required effective collaboration between stakeholders and that UNICEF had a central role to play, leveraging its comparative advantage, expanding partnerships and developing innovative approaches to build back better. The pandemic response and recovery plans must complement and support Governments without compromising the regular mandated programmes of UNICEF.

7. Recognizing the efforts of UNICEF to improve its humanitarian response coverage and quality, the President underlined the growing complexity of humanitarian situations and the need to strengthen UNICEF capacity in emergency preparedness and response.

8. Underlining that 74 per cent of the targets in the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 had been achieved by its midpoint, the President congratulated UNICEF on its achievements over the previous year. She remarked on the tangible progress made in working with other United Nations entities under the common chapter. She stated that

the pandemic could be a litmus test for the reform of the United Nations development system, as global solidarity could foster innovative inter-agency partnerships at all levels.

9. The President expressed concern that UNICEF received less core funding in 2019 and encouraged more support and more flexible funding to help the organization respond quickly and effectively in its core areas and to the unprecedented needs created by the pandemic. She called upon UNICEF to continue to explore means to expand its funding base.

10. The President concluded with a call to reimagine together a fairer, more inclusive and greener world by supporting the most vulnerable children so that they had a fair chance in life and could shape their own futures.

11. The Executive Director of UNICEF underlined the important opportunity to reimagine together how UNICEF could deliver results for children and young people. She stressed that, while work on the priorities discussed at the first regular session continued and would be reflected across the areas of the new strategic plan, it was important to take into account the impact of the pandemic on the situation of children and on programming.

12. She stated that UNICEF had quickly adapted and scaled up its programming in response to the pandemic. The pandemic had also brought inter-agency collaboration to a new level, showing the ways in which the United Nations could deliver as one.

13. Underscoring a trend towards more inequality due to the pandemic, the Executive Director highlighted examples, including in access to water, testing and protective equipment as well as online learning. She noted the increased risk of abuse and violence. She emphasized the opportunity to look ahead, reimagine what a lasting recovery could look like and shape the world in a more equal way.

14. She proposed four areas to urgently address to emerge from COVID-19 stronger than ever. First, routine immunizations must be maintained for all children. Referencing the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator initiative, of which UNICEF was a partner, she stressed that once a vaccine was developed, it must be quickly and equally distributed and delivered to people, no matter where they lived or their ability to pay. Second, as education was a great equalizer for children, it was imperative to support Governments to safely reopen schools and address the learning crisis. She underlined the new Learning Unlimited initiative, which was aimed at providing learning and skills for every child and young person. Its goal was for 500 million children and young people to be engaged in digital learning by the end of 2021, and all 3.5 billion by 2030. Third, the Executive Director underscored the importance of clean water and supporting Governments to invest in stronger water systems for all communities, including through innovation and private-sector involvement. The fourth area involved supporting mental-health and psychosocial programming for children and young people. The President endorsed the Executive Director's call to prioritize these areas.

15. As part of the ongoing work to improve the organizational culture of UNICEF, the Executive Director affirmed that an internal task team on discrimination had been launched and measures were being developed to address and end racism and discrimination in UNICEF and in the entire United Nations workplace.

16. She stated that UNICEF planned to present a detailed report on the ways in which its financial situation had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic at the next Board session. She highlighted a worrying decline in regular resources contributions from both the public and private sectors, and asked delegations to help to advocate with their capitals the flexible, unearmarked resources that were critical for UNICEF. The organization was also proposing the creation of a revolving working capital fund

to effectively address programmatic needs. The Executive Director underlined significant achievements in efficiencies and cost savings, an effort that would continue as UNICEF strove to focus every available resource on supporting children more efficiently and effectively.

17. She concluded with a call to reimagine together, making sure that equality of access and opportunity was embedded throughout every aspect of the organization's work.

18. A video was screened about the experience of a young boy from the Democratic Republic of the Congo whose school was closed due to the pandemic; the video highlighted some of the challenges of distance learning. The President then opened the floor for general statements.

19. Several delegations applauded the efforts of UNICEF in responding to the pandemic and thanked its staff around the world for their tireless work.

20. Commending the leadership shown by UNICEF to increase collaboration within the United Nations development system, delegations called for continued efforts to strengthen complementarity, efficiency and coherence, including beyond the pandemic. The need for further joint implementation at the community level was highlighted.

21. Delegations noted that, even before the pandemic with its short- and long-term impacts, many of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals were off track. The pandemic had further exacerbated the challenges and evidenced stark inequalities. Reaffirming the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, delegations stressed the need to protect advances made so far and accelerate the implementation of the Goals. They noted the key role that UNICEF must play, particularly in achieving child-focused targets and closing the gaps to ensure that no child was left behind. A group of delegations mentioned the role of the Accelerator Labs. A delegation asked how UNICEF would systematically prioritize the most vulnerable, including disadvantaged children, forcibly displaced people, migrants and children with disabilities, despite increased needs and stretched resources due to the pandemic. The Executive Director confirmed that UNICEF would continue to be a strong leader at the country level to deliver results for children. UNICEF was gathering the United Nations agencies at the country level around the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic on children and their caretakers, advocating for countries to invest in children. Furthermore, UNICEF would continue to systematically include the most at-risk children in all its programmes.

22. Several delegations expressed support for the equalizer priorities proposed by UNICEF. Many highlighted the importance of ensuring equal opportunity in access to online learning and supported the Learning Unlimited initiative. Some underlined the importance of protecting children from harmful online practices, abuse and exploitation. Additional efforts to ensure security and equal opportunity for girls and children with disabilities were needed.

23. Several delegations called upon UNICEF to continue to promote and advance a strong focus on innovation and partnerships.

24. Numerous delegations emphasized the importance of achieving gender results, with a particular focus on protecting girls during the crisis, which was echoed by the Executive Director. A group of delegations expressed support to UNICEF and partner countries for their efforts towards ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health services and supporting women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights, of which a vital component was comprehensive sexuality education. The Executive Director underscored that UNICEF would carry on work on the important issues of girls' health and SRHR.

25. Several delegations referred to the important role of UNICEF across the development and humanitarian spectrum. A delegation noted that the global fall-out of the pandemic had highlighted the need for building resilient communities. The Executive Director noted that UNICEF was uniquely positioned to work on the ground, as most of its partners were local organizations.
26. Noting the decline in regular resources, the group of delegations reiterated the importance of flexible and predictable funding, which remained a cornerstone of the ability of UNICEF to deliver on its mandate.
27. A delegation welcomed the commitment to intensify advocacy for addressing the climate crisis and efforts to make climate resilience a cornerstone of UNICEF programming.
28. A representative of World Vision proposed that faith leaders play a critical role in strengthening preparedness; behaviour change; and protecting children, particularly in the context of the pandemic.
29. The Executive Director thanked the speakers for their valuable remarks and insights and for their kind words of appreciation for the work done by UNICEF staff around the world.

II. Deliberations of the Executive Board

A. Report on the midterm review of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 and annual report for 2019 of the Executive Director of UNICEF

30. The President introduced the report on the midterm review of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 and annual report for 2019 of the Executive Director of UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2020/8](#)), its addendum ([E/ICEF/2020/8/Add.1](#)) and its annexes.
31. The Director, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, presented the main results.
32. Delegations thanked UNICEF for its comprehensive presentation of the results and commended its staff for their work for children, stating that UNICEF played a vital role in responding to crises and contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals before and during the pandemic.
33. A group of delegations commented on the implementation of the common chapter of the strategic plans of the United Nations Development Programme, (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNICEF and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). Noting that the common chapter was a key driver of improved collaboration, the group underscored that it must be fully operationalized, with a proper framework to be implemented as part of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, with the evaluability assessment of the common chapter offering valuable lessons on how this could be achieved. Thanking the four entities for the evaluability assessment, they noted that as a framework for the operationalization, follow-up and evaluation of the common chapter had not been developed, an evaluation might be premature. They further stressed that United Nations development system entities should reflect their contributions to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in their strategic plans. They emphasized that clarity was needed on where synergies lay at the country level and how they were leveraged for a coordinated and efficient country team, standing with the resident coordinator, especially in core areas of policy advice and normative frameworks. The group underscored that they would hold UNICEF to

account for delivering the common chapter and expect the funds and programmes to further integrate the reform mandate of 2018 into the remaining implementation of the current strategic plans. They noted that lessons learned from this implementation would provide guidance in identifying how the concept of the common chapter should be refined for the next strategic plan period. Noting that the common country assessments and United Nations development cooperation frameworks were the planning instruments at the country level, the Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, said that UNICEF would ensure that the common chapter dovetailed with them and did not create parallel processes or an additional reporting burden. He highlighted that the collaboration of UNICEF with its sister agencies went beyond the common chapter.

34. Recognizing the data-driven approach in UNICEF programming, a delegation highlighted the need for robust, consistent and comparable data to assess the COVID-19 response and progress against the Strategic Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as to inform decisions, particularly in fragile settings. They enquired about the enhanced focus on data and evidence. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, emphasized that UNICEF generated the bulk of children's data used globally for the Goals and for the public good, inviting delegations to visit data.unicef.org. He stressed that while data was something that everyone wanted, UNICEF was struggling to find resources to fund this work.

35. Underscoring the need for UNICEF to remain vigilant and flexible and to adapt to fast-moving environments, including the pandemic, a delegation noted the importance of multi-year flexible resources. The Chair of the Standing Group of National Committees looked forward to a thorough analysis of the financial impact of COVID-19 on the projected results for children to help to develop strategies to overcome longer-term financial risks. Concerned with the overall decline in regular resources, he welcomed the UNICEF plan to redouble efforts to demonstrate to supporters the ways in which such resources improved results for every child. The President also noted the call for more flexible and predictable funding under the new circumstances.

36. A delegation stressed the importance of expanding the donor base and strengthening partnerships with the private sector to reduce dependency on traditional sources. The Executive Director said that she would welcome the recommendations of the Member States for good partnerships.

37. A delegation asked how UNICEF would balance the need to increase progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals with its increased role in the global pandemic response. The Director, Programme Division, responded that the two efforts were mutually reinforcing and that lessons from the pandemic offered opportunities to accelerate progress towards the Goals. He gave the example of immunization disruptions and efforts to identify gaps. The Executive Director emphasized that UNICEF was accelerating and innovating while responding to the pandemic, seeking both frugal innovations and complex technologically advanced innovations that would foster a leap forward. The midterm review process had provided the opportunity for reflection on the ways in which this could be accomplished.

38. Several delegations enquired about the strengthening of linkages between development, humanitarian and peacebuilding programming, including by embedding preparedness and risk mitigation into programming, particularly as it related to conflict and climate change. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, confirmed that UNICEF would focus on this linkage in its humanitarian briefing at the next Board session, focusing on 10 emergency countries. The Director highlighted the work of UNICEF to help to build resilient systems and ensure risk-informed programming, with guidance being provided to country offices, including on conflict-

sensitive programming and programming approaches for COVID-19. The Executive Director underscored the importance of Governments thinking about investing in the short- and long-term needs of their people. She emphasized that, being on the ground, UNICEF was uniquely positioned to support Governments in guiding this investment, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

39. A delegation asked how UNICEF would step up efforts in the areas of strengthening social protection and advocacy and advisory work with Governments on child poverty, reiterating their support for this transformative work. Another stressed the importance of further developing mechanisms to measure child poverty and equity in social-sector spending. The Director, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, stated that UNICEF was scaling up its work in social protection, which was an important tool for addressing the crisis and supporting families and children. UNICEF supported Governments to strengthen social-protection systems, using its child poverty analysis and knowledge of the situation of children to help guide investments in a holistic manner, working with Governments, the United Nations and international and regional financial institutions. The Director stressed the importance of systems-strengthening and data and evidence generation. UNICEF intended to scale up its work in the measurement of child poverty, including in predictive data analytical work.

40. Emphasizing the importance of distance learning, a delegation looked forward to the contribution of UNICEF to innovative learning to empower children and young people. The President underscored the importance of investing efforts in distance learning. The Director, Programme Division, said that UNICEF was supporting the safe reopening of schools closed during the pandemic, learning from this process to reopen schools better, while ensuring that methodologies and technologies were available to complement and improve the learning outcomes of children, including through the Learning Unlimited initiative.

41. A delegation highlighted that the issue of violence against children required further effort, and noted that it was likely to be exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis.

42. A delegation praised UNICEF for adding a fifth enabler to its Strategic Plan, on organizational culture rooted in core values, and hoped that other agencies would follow its lead.

43. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/8 (see annex).

UNICEF report on the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit

44. The UNICEF report on the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit ([E/ICEF/2020/9](#)) was presented.

B. UNICEF response to the COVID-19 pandemic

45. After introductory remarks by the Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, the Director, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, presented an overview of the UNICEF response to the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by a presentation by the Director, Programme Division. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, a.i. provided additional comments.

46. Underlining the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on children, several delegations expressed support for UNICEF efforts in the multidimensional response to the pandemic on the three front lines: the health crisis, the socioeconomic impact and the humanitarian crisis. A delegation proposed that the multifaceted issues facing children also be addressed from a human-security perspective.

47. A group of delegations noted that the pandemic underscored the urgency for a joint commitment to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, including improving access to universal health coverage, and for the need to establish a mechanism to prevent future pandemics and bolster emergency planning and preparedness. UNICEF was a crucial actor in this response.

48. Referring to the pandemic as a litmus test for the United Nations reform, several delegations stressed the importance of coordination to address its spread and impact, and urged agencies to work coherently together at all levels and in accordance with their comparative advantages. Pleased to see the fast development of the Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan, the Global Humanitarian Response Plan and the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund, the group of delegations underlined that well-coordinated funding mechanisms were needed, and encouraged joint proposals through these mechanisms. They emphasized the critical role of the resident coordinators in ensuring a connected country-team response while progressing towards the Sustainable Development Goals. A delegation enquired about new opportunities and challenges in cooperating with international financial institutions to mitigate the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic.

49. The Director, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, noted that in its work on vulnerability mapping and assessment, trends and data, UNICEF was collaborating with the United Nations system and the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other international financial institutions on economic data, aligning policies and measurements and developing innovative data-collection methods, in addition to undertaking joint advocacy efforts. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, acknowledged the research and funding provided by the World Bank and the regional banks. The Director, Programme Division, highlighted the strong cooperation with international financial institutions on social protection and social assistance. He noted good examples of coordination with sister agencies, including the framework for reopening schools safely, the global initiative on handwashing and the group on risk communication and community engagement co-led by UNICEF. Another delegation requested clarification on the ways in which UNICEF would work with other agencies to ensure a clear allocation of procurement and distribution roles for tests and equipment during the pandemic. The Director affirmed that UNICEF was working closely with the World Health Organization and its allocation framework to look at the best principles and methodologies to ensure that global assets were deployed and used on the basis of principles of vulnerability and equity.

50. The group of delegations stressed the need to focus on inclusion and to prioritize the most vulnerable, using a human rights-based approach, particularly focusing on women, children and persons with disabilities, and including the voices of marginalized groups. They noted that recovery measures must be aimed at strengthening resilience and sustainability through more-effective policies that include a gender perspective. They also underscored the importance of the continuity of all essential health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, and that internationally recognized human rights, including the right to health, should be respected, protected and progressively realized during the crisis.

51. As the pandemic required an immediate and significant shift in agencies' operations, the group urged United Nations partners to communicate their efforts to reprioritize programmes and resources in response to the crisis. The United Nations must continue to ensure that its programmes, actions and behaviours remained grounded in respect for human rights, gender equality and the responsibility to do no harm.

52. Noting the major losses in learning caused by the pandemic, which had underlined the need to modernize education systems, several delegations commended UNICEF for its efforts to support online learning. They stressed that the digitalization of the education sector must be done without compromising children's well-being. UNICEF could support safe and inclusive online platforms, building awareness and prevention skills and improving prevention reporting, response and support measures. A delegation reiterated the importance of Internet access.

53. The Chair of the Standing Group of National Committees underlined the importance of a truly universal child-rights approach to advocate for children everywhere. The representative of the NGO Committee on UNICEF stressed the need to defend the right of children to be heard, incorporating their views on progress achieved into reports. The representative of ChildFund Alliance spoke of its members' efforts to protect children.

54. Delegations called on UNICEF to continue to proactively update and engage the Executive Board on the COVID-19 response.

C. Annual report on UNICEF humanitarian action

55. The President introduced the annual report on UNICEF humanitarian action ([E/ICEF/2020/10/Rev.1](#)). The Director, Office of Emergency Programmes, presented an overview of the report.

56. Several delegations expressed appreciation for the frank report and the work of UNICEF, particularly in adapting and responding to the impacts of the pandemic.

57. A group of delegations stressed the need to invest in preparedness, prevention and resilience, and welcomed efforts made so far. UNICEF was asked about its strategic approach to preparedness, including any strategic framework for joint planning and programming to leverage development investments, and about developing a more systematic approach to resilience-building. They encouraged UNICEF to apply a risk-based lens to the preparedness focus on 28 countries. The Director underscored that UNICEF was working on better defining resilience, collaborating with United Nations humanitarian and development-system partners on common guidance, and had taken several steps towards operationalizing resilience-building efforts, including providing guidance on risk-informed programming and capacity building.

58. Several delegations raised the importance of linkages across humanitarian and development programming, and welcomed the planned review in 10 countries. A delegation enquired about inconsistencies or institutional constraints that might prevent such linkages. The Director confirmed the organization's strong commitment on the issue. The review, which would be presented to the Board at its next session, would study the ways in which the linkages were implemented and identify inconsistencies and difficulties, including in funding streams.

59. The group of delegations enquired about plans to strengthen capacities in shock-adaptive social-protection systems. The Director gave the example of cash transfers as an important tool in humanitarian action, and said that UNICEF was expanding its work in this regard, using existing government systems when appropriate. It was also investing in making its business model fit for purpose, working with sister agencies.

60. Appreciating the frank assessment of the implementation of the recommendations made in the 2018 evaluation of the coverage and quality of the UNICEF humanitarian response in complex humanitarian emergencies, several delegations encouraged UNICEF to continue to focus on the issue and update the Board at future sessions. Delegations also urged UNICEF to prioritize the

implementation of the recommendations made in the humanitarian review process in the coming year.

61. A delegation underscored that the pandemic had revealed the need for an enhanced multilateral response. Recognizing the role of UNICEF in humanitarian coordination, a delegation asked how it continued to fulfil its cluster-lead commitments and responsibilities, and why cluster performance milestones were lagging behind. A delegation asked for an update on improving joint needs assessments and intersectoral analysis frameworks to inform better-prioritized appeals. Another stressed the importance of the leadership of the resident humanitarian coordinator. The Director responded that UNICEF had increased its investment towards cluster capacity. He emphasized the efforts to convene the humanitarian community towards systematically integrating gender analysis and gender sensitivity, including gender-based violence, into humanitarian programming.

62. Underscoring the need to reach the most vulnerable, the group of delegations stressed the importance of the proper collection, analysis and use of disaggregated data in all phases of humanitarian response. UNICEF was encouraged to share examples of how it had addressed the needs of particular groups of vulnerable children, including adolescent girls. The organization was urged to further strengthen work on gender and include it in its future reporting. The group also asked how UNICEF would address sexual and gender-based violence in humanitarian settings, while a delegation requested more information in future reports on the observation of sexual and reproductive health and rights in humanitarian action. The Director noted ongoing efforts to improve data disaggregation and reiterated the organization's commitment to reaching the most vulnerable. UNICEF had made progress and was committed to doing more on gender equality. He noted that through its cluster leadership as well as its lead position of responsibility in child protection, UNICEF was working to systematically integrate gender and gender analysis into its standard assessment tools and operational programme guidance. He added that UNICEF would be able to report increasingly positive action on gender equality in humanitarian action.

63. A delegation urged UNICEF to continue efforts to prevent and address sexual abuse and exploitation in humanitarian settings, ensuring accountability, and to provide an update on measures to address fraud, waste and abuse in emergency contexts. Another delegation enquired how UNICEF ensured the quality of partners working on social protection and child protection. The Director stressed the importance of building common standards together with partners and ensuring their monitoring and accountability, including through programme cooperation agreements.

64. The group of delegations urged UNICEF to continue efforts to share security, protection and health-risk information with partners and to provide sufficient funding for overhead costs and duty of care for frontline responders. A delegation asked what donors could do to support UNICEF in its work with local partners. The Director noted ongoing efforts to develop a new approach to the localization of humanitarian action, working closely with local partners from the very start in planning humanitarian responses.

65. The group of delegations requested further information on the Access Framework and its modalities to ensure the systematic delivery of quality and integrated humanitarian programmes. The Director noted that it was a set of tools to support field colleagues facing difficulties in access.

66. A delegation enquired about how the organization's humanitarian expenditure was distributed across the 96 countries reported and whether UNICEF leveraged development banks and the financial sector. The Director responded that some of these were countries covered by a humanitarian action appeal and others had specific

emergencies for which costs were partially absorbed by the reallocation of resources. He reiterated the importance of resilience-building in those countries with the support of financial institutions.

67. Another delegation requested further information on the joint fund between UNICEF and the Islamic Development Bank. The Director, Public Partnerships Division, noted the good progress made in broadening and diversifying partnerships with financial institutions.

68. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, appreciated the inputs and support received. He noted that UNICEF would report at the next Executive Board session on the implementation of the recommendations from the evaluation and the humanitarian review. He emphasized that UNICEF was working closely with its sister agencies on cash programmes, aiming to make them more effective and efficient. He underscored that humanitarian and development integration was among the organization's top priorities; UNICEF had updated its policies, procedures and staff training accordingly. UNICEF would continue to build on good practices to integrate sustainable development whenever implementing humanitarian programming.

69. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/9 (see annex).

D. Annual report on the implementation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2018–2021

70. The Vice-President of the Executive Board, H.E. Ms. Audra Plepytė, Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations, introduced the annual report on the implementation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2018–2021 ([E/ICEF/2020/11](#)).

71. After introductory remarks by the Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, the Principal Adviser, Gender Equality, presented the report.

72. A group of delegations commended UNICEF for its efforts to highlight the unmet needs of women and girls, especially in light of the pandemic, which was disproportionately impacting them and required a gender-sensitive response. They noted the good progress made on reaching gender targets, including for adolescent girls and in several thematic areas, and appreciated that more-targeted actions were being considered in critical areas of gender equality.

73. The group urged UNICEF to match its high ambitions for gender equality with clear accountability demands for the delivery of gender-equality results, adequate staff resources and sufficient financial resources across all levels of management. They appreciated the work on gender parity and capacity-building for staff. They encouraged UNICEF to clearly communicate the existing corporate principles of accountability for gender equality throughout UNICEF, and to further enhance capacity development at various levels of the organization. A delegation enquired about institutional arrangements and strategies being considered to ensure broad-based accountability and ownership across UNICEF. The Principal Adviser referred to accountability tools, such as the Gender Action Plan Staffing and Programmatic Guidance, the Gender Programmatic Review tool and the Gender Equality Marker for funding, and noted the role of the Gender Action Plan Steering Committee in overseeing programme and workplace results.

74. Other delegations asked about gender specialist positions in country offices and about gender parity in higher positions. The Principal Adviser responded that to address parity, UNICEF would take action as part of the Economic Dividends for Gender Equality Action Plan 2020–2021, including to consistently apply the family-friendly policy agenda, foster mentoring models, monitor recruitments and invest in

making the workplace safer and better for female staff. She noted that offices must be compliant with the Gender Action Plan Staffing Guidance. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, underscored the focus on incorporating gender expertise into programmatic areas in country offices to facilitate gender integration into programmes. The Director of Human Resources noted the multi-year efforts made to consider gender parity in succession planning and building talent groups in programmatic areas.

75. The group of delegations praised UNICEF for its commitment to the United Nations system-wide policy on gender equality and the empowerment of women and its significant achievements in the area. They encouraged UNICEF to take a more gender-transformative approach to overcome gender stereotypes and tackle the root causes of gender inequality.

76. Commending the efforts by the gender unit to engage in global inter-agency partnerships, the group encouraged UNICEF to show leadership in country teams and to continue to work closely with sister agencies on gender issues in areas in which mandates were related and overlapped.

77. They highlighted the importance of increasing the collection, use and analysis of gender data to strengthen gender-responsive policies and programming, especially in humanitarian contexts and during the pandemic.

78. The group of delegations applauded community-level interventions, including the inter-agency programme 2gether 4 SRHR, and welcomed a stronger emphasis on supporting partner-country efforts to strengthen sexual and reproductive health and rights, including comprehensive sexuality education, in UNICEF programming. The group expressed concern about the tentative progress made to address HIV among adolescents, particularly girls. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, agreed that the area of HIV, especially among adolescent girls, required more joint efforts.

79. A delegation enquired about policy efforts to harmonize system-wide actions to address systemic barriers compounding the learning crisis. Another asked how the pandemic was affecting work on child marriage, and if UNICEF would develop new approaches to combat it in light of the changed circumstances.

80. The Principal Adviser confirmed that the global programme to end child marriage with UNFPA remained active, including making services virtually available, where possible, increasing outreach to girls through online chat forums and supporting increased community-based monitoring efforts. UNICEF was also bolstering partnerships with women's rights organizations and adolescent girls' networks.

81. Another group of delegations welcomed the plan to develop an ambitious gender policy linked to the next gender action plan, focussing on structural barriers and transformative action. It was paramount to ensure gender mainstreaming in both humanitarian assistance and development programmes. The Deputy Executive Director underlined the global partnerships and joint efforts needed to work together to address this issue.

E. UNICEF programme cooperation

(a) Country programme documents

82. The President introduced the country programme documents (CPDs) for Ethiopia ([E/ICEF/2020/P/L.7](#)) and South Africa ([E/ICEF/2020/P/L.8](#)), and noted that a thematic discussion would showcase the work of UNICEF in social protection.

83. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, made introductory remarks on the critical role of social protection in reducing child poverty and inequality, particularly in the context of mitigating the impact of the pandemic. The UNICEF Associate Director, Social Inclusion and Policy, provided an overview of the role and added value of UNICEF in this regard. UNICEF supported over 150 Governments across different contexts to enhance the impact and sustainability of social-protection systems, ensuring they were multisectoral, inclusive, gender- and child-sensitive, adequately financed and risk-informed. The organization's commitment to inclusion, innovation and expertise, its ability to mobilize, convene, coordinate and partner and its longstanding and trusted ground presence helped UNICEF to provide evidence-based guidance to influence policy and financing decisions for children. Ethiopia and South Africa provided good examples of leading the way in social-protection work. The Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa highlighted that, in both countries, there was strong commitment towards achieving human-capital development, which had been key to building strong cooperation around social protection, addressing multidimensional poverty and generating data.

84. The Minister of Social Development, South Africa, Ms. Lindiwe Zulu, noted that the South Africa CPD was aimed at consolidating achievements made and was aligned with the National Development Plan, which accorded a central role to social protection to address poverty within a rights-based framework. She noted the broad reach of the social-protection programmes in South Africa, which included the child-support grant, aimed at combating multidimensional child poverty. Further social safety-net measures had been developed to address the impacts of the pandemic. She acknowledged the consistent advocacy and support of UNICEF in working with the Government to expand the social-protection programme.

85. The Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations, Mr. Taye Atske-Selassie Made, affirmed that social protection was a crucial investment in human capital and an essential component of his country's long-term development strategy. He highlighted that the country's safety-net programme responded to climate shocks. In addition, community-based health insurance had been expanded to respond to the short- and long-term impacts of the pandemic. He noted that UNICEF provided support to ensure that these programmes were implemented with a gender and child focus. The Permanent Representative acknowledged the longstanding support of Ethiopia to improve the lives and rights of children in the country. He said that the new CPD had been prepared in consultation with the Government and key actors, and was in line with national development priorities and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

86. Several delegations expressed strong support for the two CPDs and the important work of social protection. A delegation noted that the international community could take lessons from the two countries' experiences. The Regional Director highlighted that best practices from the countries were indeed enabling UNICEF to learn and expand that knowledge to other countries.

87. A delegation asked, given the need for high-quality data to address child poverty, about using these two successful cases as examples for connecting improvements in quality data collection and the roll-out of social-protection systems.

88. The UNICEF Representative in Ethiopia spoke about work to strengthen information management systems and to pilot the use of tablets to collect data. The UNICEF Representative in South Africa gave examples of data collection and generation. Referring to the use of technology, the Minister of Social Development, South Africa, underscored that systems must protect children effectively and highlighted the importance of sharing best practices as well as the role of such

multilateral organizations as UNICEF. The Executive Director underlined that strong partnerships made country programmes successful.

89. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/10 (see annex).

(b) Extensions of ongoing country programmes

90. The President stated that, in accordance with Executive Board decision 2009/11, the Board had been informed of the first one-year extension of the country programme for Algeria and the first two-month extension of the country programme for Côte d'Ivoire, both approved by the Executive Director.

91. The Executive Board was requested to approve a three-month extension of the country programme for the Syrian Arab Republic, following two previous one-year extensions and one nine-month extension, as proposed in document [E/ICEF/2020/P/L.9](#).

92. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/11 (see annex).

F. Evaluation reports and management responses

Annual report for 2019 on the evaluation function in UNICEF, and management response

93. The President introduced the annual report for 2019 on the evaluation function in UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2020/12](#)) and the management response ([E/ICEF/2020/13](#)).

94. The Director of Evaluation presented the report on the evaluation function, followed by a statement by the Deputy Director, Financial Reporting and Grant Management, on the management response.

95. A group of delegations commended the efforts of the Evaluation Office and the commitment to implement the new evaluation policy, and they encouraged UNICEF to further invest in the uptake of evaluations and share evaluation evidence in an easily accessible manner. Taking note of improvements in geographical coverage, the group invited UNICEF to further increase the number of submitted evaluations in regions with low submission rates.

96. Several delegations encouraged UNICEF to increase the coverage of humanitarian action evaluations to mirror humanitarian expenses, including in linking humanitarian, development and peacebuilding programming. The Director confirmed that UNICEF was working hard to complete ongoing evaluations, noting that virtual tools could allow advancement in areas with difficult access. The Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa confirmed several upcoming evaluations in humanitarian contexts.

97. Taking note of the commitment by UNICEF to gender equality and building staff capacity, the group of delegation requested an update in the next evaluation function report on trainings delivered and the percentage of staff covered.

98. A delegation enquired about the reasons for the low number of impact evaluations. The Director responded that UNICEF had conducted a few such evaluations and was developing a plan to step up this work, including in collaboration with the World Food Programme, which had more capacity in the area. He also noted that impact was one of the criteria used in the United Nations for evaluation in general. He welcomed Member States' support as UNICEF expanded its capacity for impact evaluation, which required specific technical skills. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, highlighted the importance of impact evaluations to assess the validity of theories of change.

99. Noting that the evaluation pool fund was a crucial funding instrument for building evaluation capacities, the group of delegations encouraged UNICEF to incorporate it into the integrated budget of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, which the Deputy Director, Financial Reporting and Grant Management, confirmed was being done. They also encouraged UNICEF to uphold its efforts to meet the target of 1 per cent of programming expenditure directed to evaluation.

100. The group of delegations requested UNICEF to accelerate its efforts to implement management-response actions in a timely manner, notably at headquarters. On joint and systems evaluations, the group encouraged UNICEF to take a leading role across United Nations agencies in developing evaluation capacity at the country level.

101. Several delegations also encouraged UNICEF to assess and evaluate its response to the COVID-19 pandemic to inform and enable adaptive programme management and organizational learning.

102. A delegation praised UNICEF for the launch of the new digital platform aimed at making evaluation knowledge more available to staff and said that UNICEF should continue its efforts to increase the use of evaluation knowledge within the organization.

103. The Executive Director noted that evaluations were important to enable UNICEF to learn, especially real-time evaluations, allowing for better-adapted approaches on the ground to impact results.

Evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, and management response

104. The President introduced the evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan (E/ICEF/2020/14) and the management response (E/ICEF/2020/15).

105. The Director of Evaluation presented the evaluation. The Director, Programme Division, and the Principal Adviser, Gender and Development, presented the management response, followed by remarks by the Deputy Executive Director, Management, a.i. on actions taken to make UNICEF a more gender-responsive workplace.

106. Several delegations thanked the Evaluation Office for the high-quality, comprehensive and consultative evaluation, and UNICEF for its ambitious management response.

107. A group of delegations was pleased that UNICEF was developing an ambitious gender policy and gender action plan focused on structural barriers and transformative actions, and that it planned to strengthen learning about gender from a human-rights perspective. They underlined the value of a vocal message from the Executive Director on the importance of incorporating this perspective into UNICEF work and of allocating sufficient funds. Other delegations asked how UNICEF would address the need for a new approach to gender mainstreaming.

108. The group underscored that clear guidance in the new gender policy and gender action plan was needed on combating structural educational barriers for girls, particularly as the pandemic was putting girls at greater risk of losing out on education as well as of becoming victims of gender-based violence and of setbacks in health services and sex education, resulting in early motherhood and underage forced marriage. They urged UNICEF to intensify its efforts to address these challenges.

109. The Principal Adviser noted that work on the policy had begun, with the development of background papers on key issues and the imminent formation of a special advisory group.

110. The group stressed that several of the evaluation recommendations were urgent and should be implemented as part of the midterm review adjustment. The Principal Adviser confirmed that implementation was ongoing and that steps were being taken at the global, regional and country levels.

111. The group of delegations enquired about plans to involve countries and affected populations in the revision and implementation of the Gender Action Plan. The Principal Adviser responded that this was critical to developing a smart and efficient policy. Contextually appropriate mechanisms for engagement and consultation would be undertaken, making use of technology, such as the U-Report platform, to include young people's feedback.

112. A delegation asked whether UNICEF would proactively ensure an explicit focus on adolescents in the development of its corporate policy. The Principal Adviser confirmed that UNICEF would increase its ambitions and targets to strengthen support for adolescent girls, including from health, education and skills-building perspectives.

113. The group of delegations welcomed the plan to include dedicated gender-equality benchmarks in humanitarian action, and highlighted that the revised Gender Action Plan must ensure a balance between humanitarian and development sections. A delegation enquired about the challenges of integrating gender equality into UNICEF core work, including in humanitarian assistance, and about whether the concerns of women and girls would be considered in the requirements of gender-analysis integration and programming across development and humanitarian contexts. They asked about UNICEF plans to expand the use of rapid gender analysis in rapid-onset humanitarian contexts and to incorporate dedicated gender-quality benchmarks in the revised Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action. The Principal Adviser noted that all country programmes underwent a gender programmatic review and that UNICEF was developing similar tools for addressing sudden-onset crisis responses together with other United Nations agencies. She detailed how, in response to the pandemic, UNICEF had developed technical guidance on prioritizing gender concerns, fostering the exchange of experiences and investing in more real-time assessments and impact evaluations.

114. On strengthening staff capacity, a delegation enquired about assigning additional senior technical experts to regional and country offices. Noting the efforts made to strengthen gender expertise at the regional level, another delegation asked why the same commitment was not seen at the country level, emphasizing the importance of preserving core resources for gender work. Underscoring the limited availability of gender expertise, the Principal Adviser noted that UNICEF was aiming to share expertise across agencies more effectively, notably by participating in capacity-development initiatives and trainings, seconding expertise where required. UNICEF was also determining which sectors should hire dedicated gender experts for sector teams, the measure that most effectively supported problem analysis and the development of appropriate solutions. UNICEF was also supporting the capacity development of programmatic staff and was helping country offices to comply with the Gender Action Plan Staffing Guidance. UNICEF hoped increasingly to support the recruitment and talent management of dedicated gender experts within sector teams for combined strategic and sectoral expertise. Preserving core resources was key to continuing this work.

115. A delegation asked how UNICEF would ensure that it worked in close collaboration with United Nations agencies to improve performance at the country level. Underscoring that the partnership with the United Nations system was critical, the Principal Adviser noted that UNICEF was learning from such programmes as the

Spotlight Initiative to maximize impact and was developing more joint action on influencing common country analysis and capacity-development initiatives.

116. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/12 (see annex).

G. Report on the midterm review of the UNICEF integrated budget, 2018–2021

117. The Vice-President of the Executive Board, H.E. Mr. João Genésio de Almeida, Deputy Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations, introduced the report on the midterm review of the UNICEF integrated budget, 2018–2021 ([E/ICEF/2020/AB/L.5](#)) and related documents.

118. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, a.i. introduced the report, followed by a presentation by the Comptroller.

119. Delegations thanked UNICEF for the report and the efforts to overcome funding challenges, leverage innovation, maintain the institutional budget and implement cost-saving efficiencies while ensuring continuity in programme implementation.

120. Several delegations emphasized the worrying trend of declining regular resources, stressing the criticality of stable, adequate and predictable regular resources for UNICEF to implement its mandate and country programmes and to respond quickly to changing priorities and emergencies. UNICEF should explore ways to further incentivize core funding. A delegation enquired about the long-term impact of declining regular resources on programme delivery and the attainment of strategic goals. The Comptroller responded that regular resources allowed UNICEF to protect its core structure and implement its mandate rather than merely implement projects. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, emphasized that the majority of regular resources for programmes went to least developed countries and that, without these resources, UNICEF would be limited to working in the 50 to 60 countries that received the bulk of other resources, thus undermining its universal mandate. Regular resources afforded UNICEF the flexibility to support Governments in the areas of policy, sector reform and capacity-building, whereas other resources targeted projects. Another area that would be impacted by a decline in regular resources was the role that UNICEF played in setting global norms for children and generating data for the global good. The Executive Director underscored the need for regular resources to invest in important areas that allowed UNICEF to modernize and adapt, such as information technology, which was critical to enabling the organization to continue to work during the pandemic. She expressed gratitude to those calling for increased regular resources, which were essential to UNICEF work, particularly in small countries and for responding to changing circumstances.

121. A delegation noted that such frank analyses as those in the midterm review and the humanitarian action report help to foster support for mobilizing regular resources.

122. The Chair of the Standing Group of National Committees underscored that more investment in private-sector fundraising was key to mobilizing regular resources and looked forward to working with UNICEF on creative ways to release investment capital. The Comptroller referred to ongoing discussions to find sustainable sources of funding. The Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, remarked that UNICEF would present to the Board at its next session alternative ways to invest in fundraising.

123. Some delegations enquired about adjustments in the budget, including decreased expenditure for development effectiveness, and asked how UNICEF would address the potential risk of insufficient support as well as programme-quality assurance. The Comptroller responded that the reported decrease was due to

expenditures not occurring in 2018, partly due to vacancy gaps, and did not represent a budget reduction. The maintained institutional budget was also being partly funded with increased cost recovery from the implementation of other resources. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, a.i. emphasized that a reduction in development effectiveness did not imply lower-quality programme delivery, as much of the quality assurance took place at the country level and was funded as direct programme cost. The Executive Director reiterated that UNICEF would not sacrifice quality and thanked Member States for their diligence.

124. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, a.i. highlighted the value of investing further in specific areas of work to increase efficiencies over time, including in technology for development, innovation and organizational culture.

125. A delegation asked whether the revolving Working Capital Fund would entail specific infrastructure, staff, offices or procedures. The Comptroller responded that UNICEF already had the required capacity and systems as part of its normal course of business.

126. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/13 (see annex).

H. Update on the implementation of General Assembly resolution [72/279](#) on the repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system

127. Following introductory remarks by the Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, the Deputy Director, Public Partnerships Division, provided an overview of reform efforts under way in UNICEF.

128. Delegations noted the organization's efforts towards United Nations development system reform, including during the pandemic. Some stated that the pandemic was a litmus test for the reform.

129. A group of delegations urged UNICEF to scale up the implementation of its funding compact commitments, encouraging a more in-depth discussion in the lead-up to the new strategic plan. The Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, confirmed that UNICEF remained fully focused on further stepping up its commitments. UNICEF identified four initial areas for improvement, including enhancing country-level cooperation, improving annual results reporting and increasing efficiencies and donor visibility. The structured funding dialogue, which would be presented at the next Board session, would provide an opportunity to monitor the implementation of the funding compact.

130. The group of delegations enquired about innovative actions by UNICEF and how the Strategic Plan would be adapted to reduce barriers to joint efforts. The Deputy Director noted that UNICEF worked mostly in partnerships and had significantly increased joint programming at the country level. It was developing a dedicated organizational strategy on joint programmes and pooled funding.

131. Several delegations welcomed the internal survey conducted by UNICEF to assess its representatives' perspectives on the ongoing reform, as well as the positive feedback. UNICEF was encouraged to continue conducting such surveys to help guide its future strategies and address any challenges. A delegation enquired about the mixed results on the perceived effectiveness of the reform. The Deputy Director noted that only about 5 per cent of respondents had expressed negative views, and

that work continued to make sure that all UNICEF representatives were committed to the reform process.

132. The group of delegations urged United Nations country-team members to improve cooperation, work together as one United Nations under the single leadership of the resident coordinator and support the resident coordinators in leveraging the knowledge and expertise of agencies. They welcomed UNICEF participation in the business innovations group. They also commended the significant progress on mutual performance appraisals and efforts to strengthen the resident coordinator talent pool. UNICEF was encouraged to continue to fund the resident coordinator system.

133. Noting that coordination and reporting to resident coordinators on resource mobilization were lagging behind, the group of delegations encouraged donors to continue to provide support to pooled funds. The Deputy Director noted that UNICEF used the management and accountability framework as its charter for resource mobilization. Representatives shared information with the resident coordinators. The representatives also had the ability to mobilize resources for UNICEF programmes.

134. The group of delegations urged UNICEF to ensure that all country and regional team members received consistent messaging and support on aligning country programmes with United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.

135. The Deputy Executive Director confirmed that UNICEF provided regular updates to the field and reiterated the full alignment of UNICEF country programmes with cooperation frameworks.

136. Commending UNICEF for the launch of a new portal outlining why child rights mattered in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, the group of delegations encouraged UNICEF to continue to strengthen its human rights-based approach to the principle of leaving no one behind. In her closing statement, the Executive Director emphasized the importance of thinking and acting as one, noting the strong commitment of UNICEF to the United Nations reform, and highlighted the organization's unique and powerful contribution through its work across humanitarian and development programming.

I. Update on the targets and corresponding efforts of UNICEF to make its global operations more environmentally sustainable

137. The Director, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, outlined UNICEF efforts to make its global operations more environmentally sustainable.

138. Several delegations expressed sincere appreciation and welcomed the systematic efforts under way.

139. A delegation enquired about challenges in making UNICEF partners' contributions more environmentally sustainable. Several delegations also asked about cooperation with United Nations entities, including the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), to ensure learning and harmonization across the organization. The Director noted that UNICEF was creating opportunities and forming partnerships, and had seen good cooperation, including with UNDP, on developing standards. She underlined that UNICEF partnered with over 10,000 civil society organizations and would undertake capacity-building efforts. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, underscored that UNICEF would work on joint efforts while undertaking its individual responsibility in its areas of work. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, a.i. noted that UNICEF worked closely with UNEP and was a member of its environmental management group, which coordinated and streamlined efforts across agencies. Eco-efficiencies could also be introduced through the United

Nations Business Innovations Group. The Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia highlighted the joint work on climate issues undertaken at the regional level through an issue-based coalition, led by UNEP. The Executive Director called for more capital investment, shared among United Nations entities, to take forward initiatives at the country level to improve operational eco-efficiency. She also underlined the value of investing in an innovation fund that would help UNICEF to support local and global innovation and encourage young people's involvement. The President echoed the Executive Director's call for more investment in these areas.

140. UNICEF was asked whether any requirements by donors regarding such issues as cost efficiency or time frames might compete with the goal of making programmes more environmentally sustainable. The Director reiterated that since the approach to climate programming was being mainstreamed, it involved normative work and advocacy, which required regular unrestricted resources.

141. Underscoring the importance of the proactive and innovative measures taken, a delegation was encouraged that UNICEF was developing a new and comprehensive policy on environmental and social safeguards. The delegation stressed the importance of further exploring the potential of local and indigenous practices and innovations, and asked how UNICEF would enhance its outreach to local communities on environmental management, including for building local capacity. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, confirmed that UNICEF would look at this as it developed its strategy, especially given its strong presence on the ground.

142. A delegation enquired about opportunities to foster the localization of procurement to support local economies. The Director of the Supply Division confirmed that UNICEF focused on championing local procurement, supporting the local production of many supplies and essential commodities. UNICEF worked closely with United Nations agencies in developing joint policies for sustainable procurement, including waste management.

143. The President concluded by underlining the importance of eco-efficiency and noted that the Executive Board would appreciate receiving updates on the matter.

J. Address by the Chairperson of the UNICEF Global Staff Association

144. The Chairperson of the UNICEF Global Staff Association highlighted work done to support UNICEF staff and relay their needs to management in real time, particularly in the context of the pandemic. He emphasized that, despite the lockdown during the pandemic, staff all over the world had remained dedicated to delivering results for children, coping gracefully with an enormously increased workload and challenges to their physical and mental health. He noted that some staff members had become infected with COVID-19 and some had unfortunately passed away.

145. He underscored the consistent and collaborative working relationship of the Global Staff Association with UNICEF management and human resources to focus on staff needs and concerns, including to address the impacts of the pandemic, with the production of guidelines on teleworking, the facilitation of financial support and the support of staff health, including mental health. He noted the commitment towards the path of organizational culture change and zero tolerance for all forms of harassment and abuse of authority. Efforts were being undertaken to develop the global staff survey.

146. The Chairperson requested the support of Member States in calling on the International Civil Service Commission to review how it determined compensation

for national staff. He joined the Executive Director in condemning all forms of racism and discrimination.

147. The President conveyed the Board's deep appreciation to all UNICEF staff for their dedicated work and commitment. Several delegations reiterated this gratitude. They also expressed appreciation for the feedback provided through the Chairperson, and invited him to provide further information on workplace culture change to the Board at its next session.

148. Some delegations asked to receive the results of the global staff survey, once available. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, a.i., confirmed that the survey would be presented at the next Board session.

149. A delegation requested an update on key results achieved on sexual exploitation and sexual harassment over the past year and on issues that required more attention from the Executive Board. Noting the close partnership with the Principal Adviser, Organizational Culture, the Chairperson said that staff was more empowered to speak up than previously. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, a.i. also noted the increase in the uptake of mediation and the cross-fertilization of ideas on positive changes. The Global Staff Association had been instrumental in key organizational culture initiatives and in conveying the voices of country offices. She underlined the commitment at all levels, as this remained a corporate priority.

K. Other matters

Provisional list of agenda items for the second regular session of 2020

150. The provisional list of agenda items for the second regular session of 2020 was presented by the Secretary of the Executive Board.

L. Adoption of draft decisions

151. The Executive Board adopted decisions 2020/8 through 2020/13 (see annex).

M. UNICEF Staff Team Awards and closing statements by the Executive Director of UNICEF and the President of the Executive Board

152. The Executive Director announced the winners of the 2020 UNICEF Staff Team Awards, which recognized the efforts of the organization's staff around the world. The awards went to five teams: the Benin Country Office; the Burundi Country Office; the Mozambique Country Office; the State of Palestine Country Office; and a collaboration between the Global Shared Services Centre and the Information and Communication Technology Division.

153. The President joined the Executive Director in congratulating the award recipients.

154. The Executive Director thanked the Board members and UNICEF colleagues for their flexibility in adapting to the new meeting style and for the Board's valuable guidance, advice and oversight of UNICEF work.

155. She reiterated the organization's strong commitment to United Nations reform, to working together across humanitarian and development programmes. Grateful for the comments and ideas received about the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, she emphasized the need to help countries to build back better, including through a focus

on continued immunization, the Learning Unlimited initiative, water systems and hygiene, mental health and scaled-up social protection. She urged all Governments to prioritize investments in education and to make quality distance learning a reality.

156. She highlighted the useful discussions held, which would help to shape the organization's Strategic Plan, 2022–2025. Noting that the pandemic was increasing inequalities, she underscored the need to build stronger, more-resilient systems through innovations and partnerships.

157. Appreciating the Executive Board's support for the Gender Action Plan, she noted that UNICEF would continue to rally the organization around the needs of girls and women everywhere, from a seat in the classroom to equal opportunities to gain skills and training, to SRHR, to maternal health and nutrition, to ending violence, to the expanding work of UNICEF around supporting adolescent girls. She highlighted that the same spirit of inter-agency collaboration that had transpired throughout the pandemic was shining through the country programmes of Ethiopia and South Africa.

158. Stressing the economic impact of the pandemic, she reiterated the call to stop the decline of resources, particularly regular resources.

159. Marking the milestone of 1,000 nominations for the Humans of UNICEF initiative, she concluded by thanking the Board for its support to the organization's culture-change efforts. She invited the participants to consider the notion of "for every child, a champion" and to join together to reimagine a world for all children.

160. The President of the Executive Board thanked the participants for an extraordinary and successful session, the first to be held virtually. She praised the efforts of the Board secretariat, the facilitators and the experts, which had enabled the adoption of six decisions and ensured the continuity of the Board's oversight function despite challenges and constraints.

161. She acknowledged the UNICEF efforts to continue its work and confront the pandemic with innovation and determination. She recognized the need for the continuous monitoring of the situation and its impact, underlining the importance of effective inter-agency collaboration in support of national Governments.

162. Concurring with the four equalizer areas presented by the Executive Director, she welcomed UNICEF plans to support Governments to build back better in a more equitable, inclusive and greener way and with a focus on innovation, efficiency and value for money.

163. Appreciating the remarks by the guest speakers, she noted that the thematic presentations of the country programmes highlighted the vital function of social protection and UNICEF work to support Governments in this regard.

164. She underscored the progress made on the Gender Action Plan as well as the remaining challenges, and the organization's priority to address gender-based violence in humanitarian action.

165. Highlighting the decline of regular resources and the need for longer-term funding for UNICEF to facilitate humanitarian and development programming, she called on countries' continued financial support to the organization.

166. She closed by thanking the Executive Director for her strong leadership and the senior management team and the Bureau members for their support. She offered special thanks to the UNICEF staff members around the world, who were the core of the organization.

Annex

Decisions adopted by the Executive Board at its annual session of 2020

2020/8

Report on the midterm review of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 and annual report for 2019 of the Executive Director of UNICEF

The Executive Board

1. *Takes note* of the report on the midterm review of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 and annual report for 2019 of the Executive Director of UNICEF, as well as the proposed revised results framework for the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021; the report on the implementation of the Integrated Results and Resources Framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021; the report on the implementation of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system; the report on the implementation of the common chapter of the Strategic Plans, 2018–2021 of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women); lessons learned; and the data companion and scorecard, and decides to transmit the reports to the Economic and Social Council, along with a summary of the comments and guidance of the Executive Board;

2. *Notes with appreciation* the UNICEF response to COVID-19 in line with United Nations system-wide efforts and requests UNICEF to provide an update on its work and contribution to the system-wide effort at the global, regional and country levels to address the impact of the pandemic on children and on its operations and programmatic activities, beginning with the second regular session of 2020;

3. *Calls* for UNICEF to ensure the delivery of the objectives of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, and to continue to work as part of a coordinated international response, with a focus on supporting programme countries to build back better while mainstreaming environmentally sustainable policies in its operational activities, leaving no one behind;

4. *Takes note* of the results achieved at mid-point, and requests UNICEF to accelerate efforts, while recognizing that the impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 during its second half is unknown;

5. *Notes* the priority of UNICEF to accelerate the mainstreaming of action on climate change, and requests UNICEF to report to the Executive Board in the annual report of the Executive Director on its operational and programming targets, corresponding efforts and results, including through its environmental and social safeguards, to make its programmes and operations consistent with climate resilience and low-carbon development as outlined in the revised results framework for the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021;

6. *Takes note with appreciation* of the clear and active commitment of UNICEF to building a positive work culture in response to the report of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority and the addition of the fifth “enabler” on organizational culture to the Strategic Plan to institutionalize accountability;

7. *Urges* UNICEF to improve progress towards the partially met outputs of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, including in the areas of education, HIV/AIDS and child poverty, and requests UNICEF to analyse and assess the targets set for the

outputs of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, especially those which have consistently been under- and over-achieved, and present the findings to the Executive Board in the context of consultation on the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, including by factoring in the challenges of the existing strategies to reflect new and revised strategies for achieving its outputs;

8. *Requests* UNICEF to take into account the lessons learned from the first two years of implementation of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, as well as from its previous strategic plans;

9. *Takes note with appreciation* of the course of action proposed in the midterm review of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, and requests UNICEF to start preparations early for the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, in full consultation with the Executive Board, taking into account the lessons learned from the midterm review, the joint report on the evaluability assessment of the common chapter, dated 30 March 2020, and the outcome of the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review for development of the United Nations system, and also requests UNICEF to ensure a participatory and timely process for the development of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, with sufficient time for all Member States to consult and to provide feedback on draft versions of the Strategic Plan, and to provide an indicative timetable at the second regular session of 2020;

10. *Welcomes* UNICEF progress towards achieving the outputs of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, and encourages UNICEF to further accelerate progress on the agreed commitments and mandates under the United Nations development system reform, including the funding compact and General Assembly resolutions on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, in the remaining period of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021;

11. *Takes note with appreciation* of the UNICEF commitment to United Nations development system reform and encourages UNICEF to continue to work closely with United Nations entities, under the leadership of resident coordinators and within United Nations country teams, as well as with relevant stakeholders and other development partners, to support country efforts towards the Sustainable Development Goals through the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework;

12. *Requests* UNICEF to accelerate its efforts to implement the common chapter, together with UNDP, UNFPA and UN-Women, including by developing the necessary tracking framework within the respective integrated results and resources frameworks of their current strategic plans, following the recommendations of the joint report on the evaluability assessment of the common chapter, dated 30 March 2020, and in the context of the repositioning of the United Nations development system, as laid out in General Assembly resolution [72/279](#), and also requests UNICEF to present a joint update on progress to the Executive Board at the second regular session of 2020;

13. *Notes* that UNICEF needs to scale up the implementation of its funding compact commitments, many of which are set for 2021, and requests UNICEF to continue the practice of providing a written update and informal briefing in the context of the structured funding dialogues, prior to the second regular session of 2020, on how the outcomes of the midterm review of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 relate to the effective implementation of the funding compact in the remaining period of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021.

Annual session
2 July 2020

2020/9

Annual report on UNICEF humanitarian action

The Executive Board

1. *Takes note with appreciation* of the annual report on UNICEF humanitarian action and welcomes the outlined efforts and planned measures to further improve the quality and reach of UNICEF humanitarian efforts, including in response to the lessons learned outlined in the midterm review of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021;

2. *Also takes note with appreciation* of the increased focus of UNICEF on the most vulnerable children in humanitarian response, and requests UNICEF to report on its efforts in this regard, as well as on taking into account the specific needs of girls and boys and the promotion of gender equality in humanitarian response as outlined under its own Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, within its annual report on UNICEF humanitarian action;

3. *Encourages* UNICEF to intensify efforts to provide quality education in humanitarian settings in light of the current learning crisis, including through the use of innovations and technologies.

Annual session
2 July 2020

2020/10

Country programme documents

The Executive Board

1. *Takes note* that the country programme documents, including aggregate indicative budgets, for Ethiopia and South Africa ([E/ICEF/2020/P/L.7](#) and [E/ICEF/2020/P/L.8](#)) were made available to Member States for their comments and input from 6 to 24 April 2020, in accordance with Executive Board decision [2014/1](#) on modifications to procedures for consideration and approval of country programme documentation;

2. *Approves* on a no-objection basis, and in accordance with decision [2014/1](#), the country programme documents, including aggregate indicative budgets, for Ethiopia and South Africa ([E/ICEF/2020/P/L.7](#) and [E/ICEF/2020/P/L.8](#)).

Annual session
1 July 2020

2020/11

Extensions of ongoing country programmes

The Executive Board

1. *Takes note* of the first one-year extension of the country programme for Algeria and the first two-month extension of the country programme for Côte d'Ivoire, both of which were approved by the Executive Director and are presented in table 1 of document [E/ICEF/2020/P/L.9](#);

2. *Approves* the three-month extension of the country programme for the Syrian Arab Republic, following two previous one-year extensions and one nine-month extension, as presented in table 2 of document [E/ICEF/2020/P/L.9](#).

Annual session
2 July 2020

2020/12

Evaluation reports and management responses

The Executive Board

1. *Takes note* of the following documents presented to the Executive Board at the annual session of 2020:

(a) Annual report for 2019 on the evaluation function in UNICEF (E/ICEF/2020/12) and its management response (E/ICEF/2020/13);

(b) Evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, its summary (E/ICEF/2020/14) and its management response (E/ICEF/2020/15);

2. *Also takes note* of the increase in overall evaluation expenditure to 0.86 per cent of total programme expenditure in 2019;

3. *Takes note with concern* of the substantial regional differences with regard to expenditures, requests UNICEF to increase the number of evaluations submitted per year by country offices in regions with low submission rates compared with other regions, recalls its decisions 2018/10 and 2019/14 and requests UNICEF to accelerate efforts to reach the target of 1 per cent by the end of 2020 without compromising the quality of evaluations;

4. *Takes note* of the delayed implementation of evaluation management-response actions, notably at headquarters, and calls upon UNICEF to accelerate their implementation across all regions;

5. *Encourages* UNICEF to continue to strengthen evaluation capacity at the regional and country levels;

6. *Takes note* of the importance of the Evaluation Pooled Fund for evaluation capacity development and the decentralized management of evaluations and encourages UNICEF to incorporate the Evaluation Pooled Fund into the integrated budget of the next UNICEF strategic plan to ensure, together with the allocation of other resources, the continuous funding of the evaluation function;

7. *Recognizes* the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and encourages UNICEF to commission different kinds of evaluative work that contribute to evidence on the effect of COVID-19 on the programmatic work of UNICEF and that enable adaptive programme management and organizational learning;

8. *Acknowledges* the conclusions reached by the evaluation offices of UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) in their evaluability assessment of the common chapter and requests management, in consultation with the independent evaluation offices, to develop the necessary tracking framework within the respective integrated results and resources frameworks of their current strategic plans, following the recommendations of the joint report on the evaluability assessment of the common chapter, dated 30 March 2020;

9. *Welcomes* the UNICEF management response to the evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan and notes with appreciation the UNICEF commitment to increase accountability and the mainstreaming of gender throughout the organization for improved gender-equality results;

10. *Requests* UNICEF to report to the Executive Board at the annual session of 2021, within existing reporting mechanisms, on the organization's sustained efforts to strengthen its gender-related expertise at the country level;

11. *Notes with appreciation* the commitment of UNICEF to a transformative approach to gender programming in line with its mandate and in collaboration with national authorities.

Annual session
2 July 2020

2020/13

Report on the midterm review of the UNICEF integrated budget, 2018–2021

The Executive Board

1. *Takes note* of the midterm review of the UNICEF integrated budget, 2018–2021, presented in response to the request of the Executive Board in its decision 2017/14;

2. *Approves* the revised integrated resource plan as the financial framework for the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, based on projections of resources available, utilization and working capital required for liquidity;

3. *Notes and approves* the proposal made by UNICEF for the following budgets:

(a) For the Global and Regional Programme, an increase in the approved budget from regular resources from \$220.0 million to \$243.5 million, subject to the availability of resources, and an increase in the ceiling from other resources from \$810.2 million to \$930.1 million, subject to the receipt of contributions to other resources, for 2018–2021;

(b) An appropriation for the institutional budget for the period 2018–2021 of \$2.3 billion to cover the costs of development effectiveness, United Nations development coordination, management activities and, within special purpose activities, capital investments, noting that the revised projected funding for the appropriation is \$1.0 billion from regular resources and \$1.3 billion from cost recovery from other resources;

(c) In addition to the appropriation of \$2.3 billion, the projected funding for the institutional budget of \$134.0 million from other resources for development effectiveness and United Nations development coordination, subject to the receipt of contributions to other resources;

4. *Notes*, within special purpose activities, the projected utilization of resources for:

(a) The amounts required in accordance with the UNICEF Financial Regulations and Rules to defray the costs of the administration by UNICEF of special accounts on behalf of others, including procurement services and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children;

(b) Private sector fundraising, for which budgets will be submitted annually for consideration and approval by the Executive Board at its first regular session;

5. *Requests* the Executive Director to:

(a) Provide actual financial information, following the format of the integrated resource plan, and assess performance against the integrated budget in her annual report to the Executive Board;

(b) Submit to the Executive Board for approval annually at its second regular session an updated integrated resource plan, following review of the financial projections on which the plan is based;

6. *Requests* UNICEF to include information on imbalances across programmatic and outcome areas as well as Goal Areas as part of existing reporting ahead of the structured funding dialogues at the second regular session of 2020 of the Executive Board;

7. *Notes* the information provided on the actual implementation of the revised cost-recovery methodology;

8. *Renews* the authority given to the Executive Director to establish additional senior-level positions on an as-needed basis, to be funded from within the approved institutional budget envelope for the planning period, and requests that the Executive Board be informed annually of the number of positions established, in the annual report of the Executive Director;

9. *Notes* that a revolving Working Capital Fund under the regular resources sub-account has been established, and will be funded by allocating a portion of the investment revenue as an internal financing mechanism under the regular resources sub-account;

10. *Approves* that the Executive Director, with the advice of the Comptroller, can advance funds from the revolving Working Capital Fund to offices and divisions for the implementation of country programmes to ensure the continued financing of projects within established risk-management parameters, on the condition that the funds be repaid within the period set;

11. *Requests* UNICEF to report annually to the Executive Board on the status of the revolving Working Capital Fund in the document entitled “UNICEF Strategic Plan: updated financial estimates”, which is presented to the Executive Board at the second regular session;

12. *Also requests* UNICEF to provide the Executive Board with the operational guidelines for the fund at the second regular session of 2020 of the Board;

13. *Further requests* UNICEF to ensure that the fund is managed effectively and transparently based on best practice from similar mechanisms; that advances from the fund are provided only where there is a high probability of repayment by donors, in line with the current practice; and that the fund does not contribute to a further increase in other resources at the expense of regular resources;

14. *Requests* UNICEF to review at the first second regular session after the first full year of operation of the fund to what extent the fund functions as intended and whether there are any unintended negative consequences of the establishment of the fund;

15. *Also requests* UNICEF to integrate into the structured funding dialogue at the second regular session of 2020, in alignment with the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Entity on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), an update on the impact of COVID-19 on UNICEF funding streams in terms of both volume and quality with regard to the extent and thematic focus of the earmarking of funds, taking into account the funding compact;

16. *Notes with appreciation* the efficiency gains and the relative increase in the programmatic budget, while noting the need to continue to ensure the highest quality of programming and requesting UNICEF to ensure adequate investments in corresponding development effectiveness activities.

Annual session
2 July 2020