



**United Nations**

# **Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund**

**Report on the first and second regular  
sessions and annual session of 2020**

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**Report on the first and second regular sessions and annual  
session of 2020**



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[23 October 2020]

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**Part one**  
**First regular session of 2020**

**Held at United Nations Headquarters from  
11 to 13 February 2020**



## **I. Organization of the session**

### **A. Election of officers of the Executive Board**

1. The Executive Board elected as President the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations, Rabab Fatima and, as Vice-Presidents, the following Permanent Representatives to the United Nations: Omar Hilale (Morocco) and Audra Plepytė (Lithuania); and the following Deputy Permanent Representatives to the United Nations: João Genésio de Almeida F. (Brazil) and Dominique Michel Favre (Switzerland).

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

2. The President welcomed the delegates and acknowledged the dedication of the global UNICEF staff. She also paid tribute to former UNICEF Executive Director James Grant, stating that his lifelong efforts advocating for a better world for children would always be remembered. A fitting tribute to his legacy would be to carry on his work with the same passion and commitment.

3. The President recalled the UNICEF mandate to protect the rights of children, and the centrality of the nurturing they needed to grow into happy, healthy and productive adults. They should also be imbued with the values of peace, non-violence and empathy. She looked forward to working with the Board and UNICEF to make progress towards a better present and brighter future for children.

4. The President noted that 2020 marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations; the midterm review of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021; the negotiation of a new quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR); and the launch of the Decade of Action towards the Sustainable Development Goals, an effort intrinsically linked to children, as today's children were tomorrow's future. It was also the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It was important to remember that too many girls still faced discrimination and were being left behind.

5. The President cited examples of the significant progress achieved for children globally, including a sharp decline in under-five mortality and stunting, gains in antiretroviral treatment coverage for pregnant women living with HIV and, even in the face of humanitarian crises, millions of children accessing education and receiving vaccinations against measles.

6. The President also enumerated challenges, including child poverty; child labour; cybercrime; children out of school and unprepared for adulthood; and children and young people leaving their homes because of poverty, violence, conflict or climate change, many of them, especially girls, falling prey to violence and trafficking.

7. UNICEF needed to continue to strengthen the humanitarian-development continuum, especially as the number of protracted emergencies grew. Poverty, violence and emergencies disproportionately affected children. An effective response must include investing in preparedness and resilience, addressing fragility, building peace and strengthening accountability to affected populations. This work called for reliable, flexible funding and continual innovation.

8. The President highlighted that the United Nations development system reform process had provided a mandate for improving the Board's working methods. As an organization with profound significance and with operations in 190 countries,

UNICEF must always be open to innovation and adaptive to change, building upon the good progress made so far. The Board would continue to support the innovative approaches required for efficient service delivery. In this regard, the Board welcomed the progress made the previous week in the Executive Board session of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS).

9. The President commended the increase in 2019 in the diversity of voices it heard from the field during the sessions, especially those of children, and pledged to continue to incorporate such representation as a constant reminder that the Board's discussions made a difference on the ground.

10. The President highlighted some of the agenda items, including the update on the midterm review of the Strategic Plan and the country programme document (CPD) presentation around the theme of early childhood development (ECD). She also praised the efforts of UNICEF towards organizational culture change.

11. The President listed some issues that would take centre stage during her presidency, including the continued gender gap for girls; children with special needs and disabilities of all types; South-South and triangular cooperation; and capacity-building for sustainable development. Noting the vulnerability of her own country, Bangladesh, to climate change, she expressed satisfaction that the issue would be embedded into all future UNICEF work.

12. The President expressed confidence in the possibility of innovating and making a real difference for children in 2020 and she looked forward to a fruitful session. She acknowledged the dedication of the UNICEF staff around the world and thanked the participants for their support and commitment.

13. The Executive Director expressed her appreciation for the Board's planned focus on girls' empowerment and education, among other priorities. Support for the rights of girls and women, including SRHR, had been at the core of UNICEF work for over 70 years and remained at the heart of its programming and Strategic Plan. Citing the Decade of Action towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, she emphasized the need for acceleration.

14. The United Nations reform was an important accelerator for working more efficiently and effectively as "one United Nations development system". UNICEF fully supported the resident coordinator system. The Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund had brought agencies together around common themes. UNICEF had received funds for 33 out of 36 countries to scale up protection programming in vulnerable communities, inspiring accelerated partnerships with its sister agencies.

15. Together with UNDP, UNICEF had been working on joint solutions built around youth programmes and innovation. With the World Food Programme (WFP), UNICEF was investing in programmes to prevent and reduce wasting. UNICEF was scaling up school health and nutrition programmes and strengthening the supply chain for ready-to-use food. A two-year collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 10 countries included helping refugees and returnees to access national services and providing technical, financial and programmatic support to host countries.

16. Despite increases in overall UNICEF income in 2019, regular resources had declined by 4 per cent. Those flexible, predictable unearmarked funds were critical to a swift emergency response and could provide seed capital for new programmes and for leveraging additional funds. The Executive Director urged Member States to strive towards achieving their funding compact commitments of 30 per cent of overall contributions for regular resources. She expressed satisfaction that the Board

of Auditors had provided an unqualified audit opinion for 2018. UNICEF remained committed to earning the Board's trust through the sound management of its finances.

17. The Executive Director paid tribute to James Grant, the architect of the child survival revolution, and Dr. Peter Salama, who had passed away in January 2020, and who could be found within every health crisis working, convening, convincing and innovating to save lives. She called for efforts to reach the Sustainable Development Goals to be guided by the spirit of service and commitment that had defined the people of UNICEF for over 70 years.

18. The President opened the floor for general statements. Several delegations highlighted the launch of the Decade of Action and the midterm review of the Strategic Plan, with a delegation calling for the review to identify priorities for inclusion in the next Plan in support of the Sustainable Development Goals. Several delegations noted the upcoming negotiation of the new QCPR.

19. A group of delegations and several other delegations called for closing the gender gap by focusing on girls' empowerment, rights, education, economic opportunity and access to health care and the elimination of harmful cultural practices, with several delegations mentioning the upcoming Generation Equality Forum, organized by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, noted that UNICEF was collaborating on the initiative, focusing on education and skills for girls.

20. Two delegations called for a rights-based, holistic approach to sexual and reproductive health and rights, with one of the delegations noting that supporting the needs and rights of women and girls included providing access to sexual and reproductive health information and services.

21. Several delegations called for UNICEF to strengthen the development-humanitarian continuum, while a delegation commended UNICEF for its commitment to delivering emergency humanitarian assistance and helping to build longer-term resilience and development capacities. Other delegations commended UNICEF for adhering to a rights-based approach to humanitarian action, while a delegation called for more focus on the protection of children on the move. A delegation encouraged the organization to strengthen its leadership role to ensure that the sectoral clusters were effective tools for joint analysis, priority setting and response planning and called for UNICEF to build strong synergies with other agencies for efficiency gains and economies of scale to ensure that the maximum amount of aid reached beneficiaries.

22. Several delegations called for respecting national ownership of UNICEF country programming, while a delegation called for the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) and CPDs to be in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and countries' needs. Several delegations supported the notable progress achieved in implementing the new resident coordinator system and building stronger United Nations country teams equipped to focus on common goals and accelerate progress. Several delegations noted the significant impact that climate change would continue to have on the lives of children and urged a continuous focus on environmental sustainability and climate change-related issues, particularly at the country level.

23. A delegation expressed concern that the Fourth Industrial Revolution was likely to further widen existing disparities across the development divide and heighten the vulnerabilities of children. It encouraged UNICEF to work closely with

Governments and all stakeholders to provide children with relevant knowledge and skills.

24. Two delegations highlighted the need to protect and promote the rights of children with disabilities, both physical and mental, who were more vulnerable and were often deprived of their basic rights.

25. Several delegations commended UNICEF for its leadership role in innovation, including in private sector engagement, and called for the organization to increase its collaboration and knowledge-sharing with other United Nations agencies, including on engagement with business, to speed up results on the ground. A delegation looked forward to learning how such engagement had improved internal operations, supply chains and results.

26. A delegation urged UNICEF to enhance its public communication regarding the achievements enabled by its regular resources to increase visibility and garner public support for public-sector contributions.

27. Several delegations commended UNICEF for its strong stance against sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and for working towards organizational culture change.

28. The representative of World Vision highlighted the need to maintain the spotlight on children's rights following the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and urged seizing of opportunities in the Decade of Action towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

### **C. Adoption of the provisional annotated agenda, timetable and organization of work**

29. The Executive Board adopted the agenda, timetable and organization of work ([E/ICEF/2020/1/Rev.1](#)).

30. The Secretary of the Executive Board announced that 28 observer delegations, including one intergovernmental organization, seven non-governmental organizations and seven National Committees for UNICEF had submitted credentials, in accordance with rule 50.2 of the rules of procedure.

### **D. Working methods**

31. The President introduced the item, noting that there had been many recent discussions on working methods, including the informal briefing held on 7 February 2020 following requests from the Bureau for more information, as well as the joint informal consultation on working methods that had taken place in late January 2020. The Executive Board had before it the joint response of the Executive Board secretariats on the working methods of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP.

32. A group of delegations emphasized the importance of revitalizing the governance of the funds and programmes with action-oriented and strategic sessions. Flexibility was key in considering session effectiveness and the optimal exercise of the oversight function. The Boards should strive for quality oversight, not quantity oversight, an oversight rooted in what was required and the evidence of past sessions.

33. The group of delegations said that flexibility was also important in considering the role of the joint meeting of the Boards as a forum for exchanging views on

issues of relevance to all the Boards, avoiding duplication and encouraging harmonized and holistic approaches. For items moved to the joint meeting, each Board could retain its individual decision-making capacity.

34. Some delegations expressed openness to the options outlined in the joint response as well as other configurations to achieve an appropriate level of accountability. One of the delegations said that moving to two sessions per year would cut costs and re-route savings to United Nations country teams, streamline a busy United Nations calendar, maximize participation by capital colleagues and alleviate pressure on smaller missions. It said that coherence was necessary, but deliberations should remain responsive to the different strategic priorities and workloads of the respective Executive Boards.

35. Another group of delegations welcomed the improvement in working methods already achieved, with more interactive sessions and increased gender parity among panellists. The group commended UNICEF for its ongoing communication with the Board, its provision of timely, relevant information and its coordination with the Boards of its sister agencies. Improving the working methods did not always require a one-size-fits-all approach and each agency and Board should make progress where they could, in line with the principles and objectives outlined by the Core Group on Working Methods. The group regretted the lengthy process of related discussions that had replaced more substantive discussions and timely action. The working methods were not an end in themselves, but a means to an end, which was to obtain better results on the ground and improve the lives of billions of people around the world, especially the most disadvantaged and marginalized.

36. A group of delegations said that the effectiveness, oversight, efficiency and coherence of the Boards must be at the forefront of any decision-making regarding the sessions. The group thanked UNICEF for its leadership in the debate. The group added that moving agenda items from one session to another would not necessarily result in more efficiency and effectiveness, and more analysis was necessary. The periodicity of the sessions enabled Member States to interact constructively on important issues and it would be difficult for the group of delegations to accept a reduction in the number of sessions. Shortening and reducing the burden of the second regular session might be feasible, but the number of draft decisions to be considered in the remaining sessions could pose difficulties. The group noted that the joint meeting of the Boards did not have decision-making authority. It also opposed the establishment of a mega-Board, a proposal that had already been rejected by Member States.

37. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/1 (see annex I).

## **II. Deliberations of the Executive Board**

### **A. UNICEF programme cooperation**

#### **(a) Country programme documents**

38. The President introduced the panellists who would discuss the CPDs for Cuba, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and Paraguay ([E/ICEF/2020/P/L.1–E/ICEF/2020/P/L.4](#)). Following an introduction by the Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, the Chief and Senior Adviser, ECD, provided an overview.

39. The United Nations Resident Coordinator in Cuba spoke of the Educate Your Child programme, a long-standing social and community-based model providing children with access to integrated ECD services. Through the new country

programme, UNICEF would lead the collaboration of the funds and programmes on supporting social services in Cuba.

40. Joining the discussion by video, Mr. Hugo Cáceres, Minister of the Delivery Unit of the Presidency of Paraguay, General Coordinator and Chief of the Social Cabinet and Spokesperson for the Presidency, underlined the Government's commitment to children, multilateralism and international cooperation and the prioritization of ECD. Paraguay was drafting an ECD public policy and in 2020, in cooperation with UNICEF, would assess the existing National Action Plan for the Holistic Development of Early Childhood.

41. In a pre-recorded video message, Ms. Bibiche Mwika, Coordinator of the Network of Journalists Friends of Children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, reported on efforts by UNICEF, the Government and partners to prioritize health care and nutrition during the first 1,000 days of life. Through the country programme, the country office would support the Government to implement ECD interventions related to health, nutrition, education and child protection.

42. The UNICEF Representative in Mali said that the Government's commitment to ECD was exemplified by increased spending for pre-primary education. The CPD would adopt a life-cycle approach focused on the integrated delivery of services and the provision of a protective, nurturing and supportive environment for children, particularly girls, in humanitarian and development settings.

43. Following the presentation, the representative of Paraguay acknowledged the key role of UNICEF in helping his Government to promote ECD services as an essential national priority for the development of human capital and potential. The representative of Mali commended the ECD work of the UNICEF regional and country offices. The country programme would support the Government's efforts, particularly the Strategic Framework for Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development. The representative of Cuba reported on the country's recent progress in providing access to preschool and kindergarten to almost all children, and on its favourable rates of infant and maternal mortality and vaccination coverage. The representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo said that the Government was committed to mobilizing domestic resources for the country programme and called on development partners and donors to fund the programme as well as to increase their regular resources contributions to UNICEF.

44. Regarding the CPDs for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali, a delegation said it expected concrete and sustainable results, community resilience-building and improved cooperation among United Nations agencies. Another delegation invited UNICEF and the other funds and programmes to strengthen the CPD process through timely consultations with stakeholders.

45. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, called a lack of financial support a constraint for joint programming. The Regional Director, West and Central Africa, acknowledging the need for more systematic efforts, reported that resident coordinators were encouraged to initiate consultations during the development of cooperation frameworks, as were UNICEF country offices during various milestones of the country programming process.

46. The representative of the United States of America shared her Government's view of the CPD process as a critical opportunity to review and comment on the technical merits of the programme documents and expressed concerns about the politicization of the CPD for Cuba. The representative of Cuba said that advocating for the rights of children around the world should remain at the core of the debates and discussions during the Executive Board sessions. Several delegations welcomed

the adoption of CPDs by consensus and cautioned against politicizing the work of the Executive Board.

47. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/2 (see annex I).

**(b) Extensions of ongoing country programmes**

48. The President stated that, in accordance with its decision 2009/11, the Executive Board had been informed of the first two-month extensions of the country programmes for Argentina and Uruguay, and of the first one-year extensions of the country programmes for Colombia, Lebanon, Tajikistan and Zimbabwe.

49. The Executive Board was requested to approve a three-month extension of the country programme for South Africa, following a previous 15-month extension and a previous one-year extension.

50. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/3 (see annex I).

**B. Oral report on UNICEF follow-up to the recommendations and decisions of the forty-third, forty-fourth and special Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS Programme Coordinating Board meetings**

51. The Associate Director, HIV/AIDS, Programme Division, presented the oral report and its background note (UNICEF/2020/EB/2).

52. Several delegations commended UNICEF for its work on HIV/AIDS. A group of delegations applauded the increase in HIV treatment coverage over the past decade, noting that behaviour change, communication and other prevention efforts had reduced new infections, including in high-prevalence African countries. The group expressed concern that young people, especially given the youth bulge, were not consistently being reached by HIV-prevention efforts. To accelerate progress in reducing new infections in children in Africa, the group urged UNICEF, with UNAIDS and the World Health Organization (WHO), to strengthen efforts towards the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and to share best practices.

53. A delegation appreciated the mention in the oral report of the integration of nutrition into HIV programming for children and adolescents. It expressed concern about the low rate of HIV treatment access in children aged 0 to 14 years and the high rate of antiretroviral drug resistance in children and infants, emphasizing the need to start children on treatment early and to keep them in care. The delegation urged training for adolescents, parents and caregivers on viral loads, and recommended the testing of all biological children, including adolescents, of adults receiving treatment. The delegation also expressed concern about the disproportionate impact of HIV on adolescents and young women and urged the inclusion of positive behaviour change efforts, including around delaying sexual debut, in prevention messaging.

54. Recognizing the slight reduction in HIV infection among adolescents, another group of delegations expressed concern about the slow development and scale-up of global guidelines and tools to prevent new infections among adolescents and young people and urged UNICEF, UNFPA and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to intensify efforts.

55. The group of delegations cited the platforms recommended by the Global HIV Prevention Coalition for scalable models and resource-constrained settings with high HIV prevalence: community outreach, comprehensive sexuality education and HIV prevention as part of integrated health services. It urged the integration of

sexual and reproductive health and rights and HIV services and expected more enhanced programming in those areas.

56. A delegation asked how human rights were integrated into HIV-prevention work. Another delegation enquired about the reasons for the reduced progress in combatting HIV/AIDS and the type of support the Member States could provide. A group of delegations asked for examples of UNICEF political advocacy and programme reviews to catalyse action on HIV prevention and the challenges encountered. It called for UNICEF to actively contribute to the implementation phase of the global action plan for healthy lives and well-being for all.

57. The Associate Director reported that, even with the youth bulge (in young people aged 15 to 24 years) and an expected doubling of that population by 2050, continued reductions in the number of new infections were expected if the current course were followed. Of concern were regions with a low prevalence and incidence of HIV, where efforts were required to engage Governments and mobilize political will. Recognizing that children might have been missed by prevention and early infant diagnosis programmes, UNICEF had adopted the testing of all children of parents accessing HIV treatment, especially in West and Central Africa. A life-cycle approach was required for work with adolescents, and UNICEF, together with partners, was engaging health services and schools to prevent children from acquiring HIV. UNICEF continued to engage with Governments to help them transition to the adoption of new guidelines and tools by sharing evidence of their success. To combat stigma and discrimination, UNICEF was working with peer-support and civil society groups and communities.

### **C. Update on UNICEF humanitarian action**

58. The Director, Office of Emergency Programmes, presented the update, which focused on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in emergencies. The Director, Programme Division, was present to provide additional support. A background paper (UNICEF/2020/EB/3) was available.

59. Several delegations welcomed efforts by UNICEF to bridge humanitarian action and development programming. A group of delegations welcomed the report, encouraging consistent efforts to improve data and analysis, for example through the WASH severity index and the incorporation of updated conflict and risk analyses in UNICEF reporting. It also encouraged further efforts to minimize the UNICEF climate impact. The group emphasized the need for effective communication between global clusters across sectors and further exploration of the role of cash and markets in addressing WASH needs. It encouraged UNICEF to report on the persistent challenges within the humanitarian WASH sector and the related results achieved. The delegation would welcome information on capacity-building to strengthen the focus on such issues as climate change and to support sustainable financing models for local water-service delivery systems.

60. A delegation expressed its commitment to leveraging its resources to respond to humanitarian crises. It encouraged all Member States to increase their support commensurate with the vast global humanitarian needs.

61. A delegation called on UNICEF to strengthen its focus on diarrhoea among children, especially in high-burden and high-risk contexts. Another delegation said it would welcome comments from UNICEF on how gender, including risk mitigation, was being addressed in WASH programmes. A delegation requested information and disaggregated data on efforts with regard to menstrual hygiene among children and adolescents, including in schools.



62. Two delegations commented on humanitarian staffing, with one urging UNICEF to enhance staff capacity for the WASH cluster and to deploy the most technically qualified staff at the onset of an emergency. Another delegation emphasized the importance of addressing weaknesses and challenges related to workforce planning and retention.

63. A delegation enquired whether UNICEF was considering changes to its grant management approaches to address the administrative divide between humanitarian and development funding. Another delegation asked how UNICEF envisioned its coordination role and cooperation with other WASH actors as well as the involvement and participation in decision-making by affected people.

64. Noting the high percentage of people in humanitarian situations reached through water trucking and other temporary measures, a delegation requested elaboration on integrated approaches for achieving durable solutions.

65. A representative of the Child Fund Alliance emphasized the importance of collaborative partnerships in fulfilling and protecting children's rights.

66. The Director, Office of Emergency Programmes, reported that capacity was being examined collectively, including to address the challenges identified and determine concrete steps. Work on accountability to affected populations was under way with partners. UNICEF was focusing on strengthening humanitarian and development linkages with investment by the development sector in resilience and the humanitarian response moving from temporary solutions to longer-term, more durable interventions.

67. The Director, Programme Division, said that UNICEF was working towards making its WASH interventions climate-resilient by 2021. UNICEF was focused on the sustainability of development and humanitarian systems, notably financial sustainability. Menstrual health and hygiene was a targeted priority in the Gender Action Plan; good-practice examples included separate toilets for girls in schools and a checklist for gender-responsive WASH interventions. He emphasized that flexible funding was required for cluster strengthening and improving response capacity.

68. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, clarified that the management of funds was often the result of donor earmarking for humanitarian versus development funding and that UNICEF continued to advocate for flexible funding.

#### **D. Extension of the Vaccine Independence Initiative and its revolving fund**

69. Following introductory remarks by the Deputy Executive Director, Field Results and Innovation, the Director, Supply Division, presented the report ([E/ICEF/2020/P/L.6](#)).

70. A delegation requested information on the cooperation and complementarity between the Vaccine Independence Initiative and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, stressing the importance of ensuring an optimal division of labour and securing close cooperation between the Initiative and the planned new finance facility. Another delegation enquired about avoiding overlaps in countries eligible for support from or mobilizing resources through both mechanisms. A delegation asked about the long-term vision for the Initiative.

71. A delegation said that the Initiative should continue to serve as a safety net and asked how UNICEF was balancing its outbreak response efforts with the

investments needed to support the development of routine immunization delivery services, and whether staffing plans reflected this need.

72. The delegation also asked how UNICEF planned to raise awareness of the Initiative; whether it would consider changing the name to reflect the financing of non-vaccine commodities; and to what extent Governments had used the Initiative to procure essential supplies, and what those supplies entailed.

73. The Director, Supply Division, highlighted the Initiative's value in facilitating the leverage and growth of domestic resources in country programmes. The Initiative primarily supported bridge financing and prevented stockouts of domestically financed supplies, including new and traditional vaccines. The Initiative worked closely with partners, including having recently complemented Gavi-funded support for a measles campaign by facilitating a domestically funded expansion of the age cohort of children to be vaccinated. Technical assistance was also provided to Initiative countries, in coordination with Gavi partners, to identify and address barriers and help Governments to better leverage and increase their domestic resource mobilization. Five years prior, the Executive Board had approved Initiative support for other commodities, including nutrition products, cold chain, medicines and other supplies, details of which had been shared in the informal briefing.

74. The Deputy Executive Director, Field Results and Innovation, stated that since 1991 there had been no defaults on the Initiative. The revolving fund had a maximum capitalization ceiling of \$100 million, but UNICEF hoped it could be increased to \$1 billion and include participation by additional countries.

75. The Comptroller clarified that the International Finance Facility for Immunization leveraged long-term commitments by donors and was used by Gavi to respond to countries' immediate vaccine needs, while the Initiative served as bridge financing for countries that were transitioning or had transitioned from donor support, ahead of the availability of their own domestic resources.

76. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/4 (see annex I).

## **E. Update on the midterm review of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021**

77. The Director, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, and the Director, Programme Division, presented the update. A group of delegations called for the midterm review to address both progress and challenges, looking towards the new QCPR and the start of the Decade of Action. Addressing the Sustainable Development Goals individually would not fully achieve the 2030 Agenda and new strategies for development were essential. The group called for the funds and programmes to: (a) use integrated evidence and common country analysis in alignment with United Nations reform commitments; (b) develop a UNSDCF with a whole-of-system approach highlighting synergies; (c) align CPDs with the UNSDCF; (d) dedicate resources to collectively defined outcomes and efforts, including the funding compact; (e) overcome silos through joint programming; and (f) consider General Assembly resolution [72/279](#) in strategic plan adjustments.

78. The group of delegations called for the incorporation of lessons from the previous two years, including regarding Sustainable Development Goal targets, while a delegation requested an assessment of the need for related adjustments. The group suggested analysis of the effects of the United Nations reform process on ways of working and programmatic priorities and encouraged the development of conclusions across the funds and programmes. The formats of the strategic plans

and results frameworks should be refined and harmonized to facilitate joint efforts and more effective, holistic and coherent engagement at the country level. The group welcomed the proposal for a joint workshop on the midterm reviews in advance of the annual session.

79. A delegation urged the Strategic Plan's continued focus on the UNICEF mission to provide a healthy, secure environment for children, enabling them to thrive and lead productive lives in adulthood. In this connection, it supported the organization's work with other agencies and the private sector around the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus. The delegation emphasized the results focus of the reform process and looked forward to the organization's data analysis against the results framework. It called for a balanced relationship between the resident coordinators, who needed the appropriate skills and responsibilities to effectively lead the country team, and the agencies, which needed the flexibility to do their work well. Those separate identities had long contributed to the agencies' success.

80. Two delegations requested information on adjustments relative to gender. The Director, Programme Division, responded that the midterm review was being informed by the evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, which would be presented at the annual session along with a management response outlining an increased focus on targeted priorities, such as child marriage and organizational gender mainstreaming and capacity-building.

81. A delegation appreciated the outreach regarding the midterm review process and looked forward to further information on the methodology, preliminary results and implications. It encouraged UNICEF to detail the ways in which the humanitarian-development-peace nexus had facilitated its work on the ground and requested more information on the effort to collect and track data in conflict-affected countries. The Director, Programme Division, highlighted the new guidance on shock-resistant social protection systems, which was focused on capacitating systems to provide a safety net for children in humanitarian or fragile contexts. An example was the planning of water services in Lebanon to cover both host and displaced communities, bringing people together and ensuring sustainable services at the same time.

82. A delegation welcomed the tracking in parallel of the Sustainable Development Goal and Strategic Plan targets but questioned why, in some areas, Plan targets were on track while Goal targets were not. The Director, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, responded that this asymmetry revealed the need to revisit the assumptions made in 2016, for example around fragile contexts, climate change and the persistence of protracted humanitarian crises, and reinforced the need for systems-building. Relevant changes would be incorporated into programmes and approaches, while taking into account the organization's capacity to raise resources and leverage partnerships and global programmes. The delegation asked whether only UNICEF thematic initiatives were assessed or if the midterm review included partnership initiatives. The Director responded that UNICEF prepared a thematic annual results report covering results achieved not only through a particular thematic pooled fund, but all types of funding.

## **F. Evaluation of innovation in UNICEF work, and management response**

83. The Deputy Executive Director, Field Results and Innovation, introduced the item. The Director of Evaluation presented the evaluation report, which was accompanied by a summary (E/ICEF/2020/3), followed by the Chief Information

Officer and Officer-in-Charge, Innovation Division, who presented the management response ([E/ICEF/2020/4](#)).

84. A delegation welcomed the UNICEF Innovation Strategy and requested an informal dialogue in the coming months, joining a group of delegations in calling for clarification of the roles and responsibilities of the organization's innovation structures. The Chief Information Officer and Officer-in-Charge, Innovation Division, noted that UNICEF would welcome engaging with the Board on the new strategy and added that engagement and communication were planned as part of the launch.

85. A group of delegations noted that climate change, digitalization, population growth and migration were rapidly changing the world. Addressing the development challenges of the era required innovation and partnerships. The group commended UNICEF for its commitment to innovation to enhance the rights of children and for taking the lead in developing rights-based principles for that work. It urged the organization to consider the impact of digital and technological innovations on human rights, good governance, democracy and the rule of law, especially regarding the most vulnerable, and to mainstream responsible business practices into innovation. The group also called for solutions beyond technology to address multifaceted, complex and systemic problems. The Chief Information Officer and Officer-in-Charge, Innovation Division, clarified that the new strategy prioritized not only digital innovation, but also product/physical innovation, innovative finance, frugal innovation and new working methods. He emphasized that a rights-based focus was key to the organization's innovation work and noted the work of the Office of Global Insight and Policy on the impact of artificial intelligence on child rights.

86. A delegation emphasized the importance of evaluating innovations in the service of sustainable results, especially considering the increasingly complex humanitarian challenges, while the group of delegations called upon UNICEF to put more effort into developing tools and indicators to measure development progress. The Chief Information Officer noted that the humanitarian context was one of the four key focus areas of the Innovation Strategy, along with WASH, maternal and newborn health, and learning, and that relevant indicators would be integrated into the results framework of the Strategic Plan.

87. The group of delegations connected innovation culture and workplace culture and urged the involvement of the Principal Adviser, Organizational Culture, in the initiatives to improve the organization's innovation strength. UNICEF should also address the risk of failure – an integral aspect of innovation – and the nature of innovation work to enable the international community and donors to adjust their expectations.

88. The group of delegations noted the challenge of balancing strategic innovation priorities with the autonomy of country offices deeply embedded in the local context and asked how the capacity of country offices to run pilots and scale up innovations could be strengthened. It urged UNICEF to emphasize institutional knowledge management and share best practices. A delegation proposed the WFP Innovation Accelerator in Berlin as an example for how to support innovation in a United Nations agency. Another delegation commended UNICEF for its leadership in advocating for open licensing and standards for digital innovations, as the digital public goods approach could help UNICEF to address the challenges of context, relevance and scale.

89. The Chief Information Officer and Officer-in-Charge, Innovation Division, noted that UNICEF played a lead role in the United Nations Innovation Network and had been engaging with WFP to connect with the Innovation Accelerator. He

noted that the new innovation portfolio management and inventory tools would be publicly available for sharing experiences, results and learning opportunities.

90. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/5 (see annex I).

**G. Update on the implementation of the recommendations made in the independent panel review of the UNICEF response to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse; the Morgan Lewis report on sexual harassment investigations conducted by the UNICEF Office of Internal Audit and Investigations; and the report of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority**

91. Following introductory remarks by the Deputy Executive Director, Management, a.i., the item was presented by the Principal Adviser, Organizational Culture, and the Senior Coordinator, Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Workplace Abuse.

92. During the general statements, delegations commended the Executive Director's leadership on the issue. During the discussion of the item, delegations praised UNICEF for its focus on communication and engagement with staff to increase awareness and clarify processes related to the new policies and structures. A delegation requested more information on the involvement of country and regional offices and actions taken by UNICEF to avoid the perception of initiatives as headquarters-driven. Several delegations noted that the exchange of good practices with other United Nations agencies would promote stronger sexual exploitation and abuse prevention and response system-wide.

93. A delegation noted that the inclusion of the item on the agenda reflected the openness and transparency of the Executive Board and UNICEF. It stressed the importance of obligatory training and education and acknowledged the UNICEF goal of reaching more than half of its staff with compulsory prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse training by the end of 2020. Another delegation enquired about the status, content and impact of the roll-out of the related toolkit planned for the second half of 2019, and how the increased uptake of flexible work arrangements had affected sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and workplace abuse outcomes.

94. A group of delegations commended UNICEF on its follow-up to the recommendations of the three reports and for strengthening on-the-ground capacity for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, developing a management action plan and integrating the issue into systems and tools. While the implementation of the United Nations Protocol on the Provision of Assistance to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse was a positive development, the group requested information on concrete plans for 2020 to enhance mechanisms for victim/survivor support and ensuring a survivor-centred approach and on how UNICEF was ensuring that arrangements and screening tools for implementing partners were aligned with the Protocol. The group also requested, ahead of the 2020 annual session, information on the status of implementation of accepted recommendations, including the allocation of financial and human resources. It recommended that UNICEF address the issue in the midterm review of its Strategic Plan and carry out an evaluation in three years' time.

95. The Senior Coordinator reported that the toolkit had been finalized at the end of 2019 and would be rolled out in 2020 along with a new procedure on managing sexual exploitation and abuse risks in the context of implementing partnerships.

UNICEF would work with counterparts to develop practical guidance to support the operationalization of the Protocol and had begun engaging in inter-agency training initiatives to that purpose. Survivors had access to services through the existing UNICEF child protection and gender-based violence programmes in humanitarian contexts. Investment in those services remained critical.

96. The Principal Adviser cited the internal agreement to include organizational culture as one of the enablers in the Strategic Plan. Diversified communication channels and platforms were being used to engage with staff in country and regional offices. UNICEF had initiated dialogues between senior management at headquarters and colleagues in the country and regional offices.

97. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, a.i., emphasized that changes at the country level, including communication, were imperative for improving organizational culture. She highlighted the importance of transparency, both internal and external, and investment in prevention. Ninety-four per cent of staff had completed the mandatory course on the prevention of sexual harassment. The increased use of flexible working arrangements, particularly among female staff, had signalled the need to implement additional family-friendly policies and mechanisms, to strengthen the use of technology and to continue to improve the mobility exercise to foster closer links to talent management.

## **H. UNICEF financial report and audited financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2018 and report of the Board of Auditors, and management response**

98. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, a.i., introduced the item. The Director of External Audit (India) and Member, Audit Operations Committee of the United Nations Board of Auditors, presented the report and the Comptroller and Director of the Division of Financial and Administrative Management presented the audited financial statements and the management response.

99. A group of delegations commended UNICEF for its unqualified audit opinion and its comprehensive management response and noted the progress made in implementing the current and previous audit recommendations. The group of delegations also urged UNICEF to strengthen efforts to tackle areas of recurring recommendations and to address root causes, as requested by the Board in 2019, prioritizing those posing the greatest risk to results achievement, especially the follow-up of implementing partners and National Committees.

100. A delegation asked whether UNICEF had discussed the identified alternatives for travel management with the Board of Auditors. The Comptroller responded that UNICEF had been in discussions with the Board of Auditors and was setting up a simplified process for managing travel that leveraged technology with a view to enhancing efficiency and reducing the burden on staff. The Director of External Audit added that, if the new process met with the Board's satisfaction, the next report would detail that finding.

101. The group of delegations welcomed the steps taken to strengthen staff training on the Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers (HACT), but sustained efforts were needed for full compliance. Future management responses should provide evidence of improvement over time. A delegation noted that the risks identified in the assessment of implementing partners were not always considered and quality assurance was not implemented systematically or in a timely manner. The delegation called for ensuring that the HACT principles and procedures were

respected through trust, mutual responsibility and capacity-building for implementing partners and relevant country-office staff.

102. The Comptroller said that UNICEF had been flexible with government partners regarding capacity for HACT implementation, and in some cases, had worked on capacity-building. However, if weaknesses were not addressed before resource transfer, the Board of Auditors reported non-compliance. The Director of External Audit said that any gap found in a specific instance of HACT implementation needed to be flagged so a more robust system could be put in place.

103. The group of delegations also expressed concern that the low number of reported cases of fraud reflected a weakness in detection. The group welcomed the recent fraud prevention and detection measures and encouraged UNICEF to explore using proactive investigations by specialists. The Comptroller recalled that, in response to concern raised three years earlier that fraud was likely under-reported, UNICEF had implemented a new anti-fraud strategy, resulting in a dramatic increase in reports over the following two years. The organization was now concentrating on its anti-fraud strategy for implementing partners, which is where big fraud cases occurred, developed in partnership with other agencies. UNICEF did not have the jurisdiction to address fraud issues arising with government counterparts. In addition, only substantiated cases of fraud could be reported, not allegations.

104. The group of delegations highlighted the significant shortfalls in private sector fundraising, requested more analysis of why National Committees and country offices had not met their targets and called for UNICEF, through its Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division, to ensure effective follow-up, taking into account the different country contexts and fundraising markets. It recommended more realistic targets for offices with persistent underperformance and even a cessation of fundraising activities.

105. A delegation asked why UNICEF published yearly cost estimations only for country-level results, not aggregate estimations by Goal Area. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, noted that UNICEF did aggregate, but that the numbers were projections only. He explained that at the time a country programme was approved, only the allotted regular resources and possibly one or two multi-year grants were available. Since most grants were neither multi-year nor flexible, the country office projected how much funding it expected to secure in a given Goal Area. Since those projections might be overly optimistic, they were compared with the amounts the country office had received over the previous five years, to determine an estimate. The report on the midterm review of the Strategic Plan would include the expenditures against each Goal Area and show that the estimates had not been far off.

106. The group of delegations suggested that UNICEF disclose information on target and actual revenues in the financial statements in the interest of transparency, as suggested by the Board of Auditors, even though this was not required by the International Public Sector Accounting Standards.

107. A delegation encouraged UNICEF to heed the Board of Auditors' recommendation to review the availability of baseline data sets in country offices and take any necessary measures to fill gaps, as planning and accountability for results required adequate data.

108. The group of delegations acknowledged the ongoing efforts by UNICEF to reduce its negative impact on the climate and the environment and encouraged the organization to report to the Board on the main measures it was implementing in that regard.

109. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/6 (see annex I).

## **I. Private Fundraising and Partnerships: 2020 workplan and proposed budget**

110. The Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, introduced the item, followed by the Director, Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division, who presented the workplan and proposed budget (E/ICEF/2020/AB/L.1). A group of delegations said that engagement with the private sector, both financial and non-financial, was key for UNICEF in its work to influence the global agenda for children and noted that regular resources contributions from the private sector now regularly surpassed those of Governments. Those resources were crucial for the flexibility and long-term planning necessary for achieving sustainable results for children. The group commended the staff of the National Committees and the country offices for their efforts to raise those resources. The group urged UNICEF to share its expertise in private sector fundraising with other United Nations agencies and looked forward to hearing about such collaboration at the second regular session.

111. The Director noted that UNICEF provided regular briefings to its sister agencies, UNAIDS and others and participated in the International Fundraising Leadership Forum and a new informal group, together with WFP and UNHCR, to discuss capacity-building, network management, alternative investment sources and the National Committees. UNICEF also coordinated an annual peer-reviewed benchmarking analysis on behalf of the United Nations agencies and the big international non-governmental organizations.

112. The group of delegations expressed concern that the overall contribution from the private sector had fallen short of targets in 2019 and acknowledged the contraction in the global fundraising market. The group of delegations noted that country offices were expected to increase their mobilization of regular resources by 42 per cent in 2020. However, in 2019, country offices had raised only 65 per cent of the approved regular resources budget. The group of delegations asked for more analysis to explain the shortfalls in 2019 and the measures envisioned to ensure the planned growth rates over the next two years. A delegation asked for an explanation of the 14 per cent increase in the country offices' private sector fundraising contribution proposed for 2020 over the 2019 latest estimates. Another delegation asked how UNICEF planned to strengthen country offices that were missing their fundraising targets to mobilize resources, and if the organization would consider reviewing targets.

113. The Director said that UNICEF had found workable alternatives for investments in the country offices for 2020 to ensure the achievement of the expected increases and was working on more innovative ways to invest in fundraising. UNICEF considered the 14 per cent increase to be reasonable as the country offices had shown a compound annual growth rate of 15 per cent on average over the previous five years. He also noted that country office results were vulnerable to fluctuating exchange rates, as resources were measured in United States dollars.

114. The group of delegations expressed concern that the significant reduction in the investment fund budget would hamper fundraising efforts, a concern shared by the Chair of the Standing Group of National Committees for UNICEF, who noted that, despite fierce competition for donor funds, the National Committees had contributed almost \$1.2 billion in voluntary donations to UNICEF in 2019. The group highlighted the important role of the National Committees in keeping the welfare of children at the centre of the 2030 Agenda, and it trusted that the new



operational model would be developed in consultation with the Committees to take into account their diverse operating contexts.

115. The group of delegations welcomed the emphasis on engagement with business and the efforts of UNICEF towards shared-value partnerships but urged the organization to enhance its dialogue with the Executive Board on results and challenges, including with regard to building staff capacity, integrating child rights into value chains and coordinating with other United Nations agencies. It looked forward to the report on the implementation of the UNICEF Private Sector Plan 2018–2021: IMPACT for Every Child.

116. A delegation commended UNICEF for having met new challenges in mobilizing resources through innovation and for serving as a model for other agencies. Continuing to attract private investment, particularly predictable and flexible funding, would depend on its ability to continually evolve, improve service delivery and achieve greater and more measurable results.

117. A delegation asked for more information on the impact of the less-than-expected revenues and the anticipated countermeasures and how the recommendations of the report of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority would be integrated into the Division's work.

118. The Director responded that the countermeasures included two regional support centres, in Panama and Thailand, staffed with specialists in such areas as face-to-face marketing and telemarketing. The Geneva office and the regional offices also provided support. In response to the Independent Task Force report, the Division had chosen to regularize 15 temporary posts from the existing budget and would also survey general service staff to potentially review their levels.

119. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/7 (see annex I).

## **J. Joint preliminary comprehensive proposal on the cost-recovery policy**

120. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, a.i., introduced the preliminary proposal (DP/FPA-ICEF-UNW/2020/CRP.1). The final joint comprehensive proposal would be presented to the Executive Board for decision at its second regular session of 2020.

121. A group of delegations welcomed the continuation of a harmonized approach across UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women on rates, cost classifications and methodology, based largely on the existing 2013 policy. The group appreciated the improved alignment of cost classification categories, as recommended in the 2016 independent assessment, and welcomed the detailed information on the financial impact of the differentiated rates and the disaggregated information by agency and category.

122. The group requested agencies to provide further disaggregated data to better analyse the implementation of the 2013 policy with respect to the differentiated rates and include those standard figures in future annual financial reports. It encouraged the agencies to further discuss and illustrate options to close the remaining loopholes on waivers, differentiated rates and compliance.

123. The group requested more detailed information on each contribution for which the recovery rate was less than the established rate. They requested the inclusion in the next draft of a proposed waiver policy that would uphold the principles of transparency and harmonization. The agencies should present evidence-based

options for further aligning and adjusting differentiated rates to bring them in line with developments since 2013, remove any potential distorting effects and create more effective incentives for favourable funding, as called for in the funding compact.

124. The group urged increased compliance by United Nations entities, Member States and other contributors to the existing cost-recovery policy and the revised policy, once adopted. They would welcome suggestions from the agencies on how to prevent individual donors from undermining full cost recovery.

125. The group requested that the policy document comprehensively and transparently present all information related to cost-recovery classification, methodology and rates, including clear, mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive definitions of all cost categories. A joint informal consultation prior to the 2020 annual session would provide the opportunity for further discussion informed by the draft policy.

126. A delegation said that the percentages used for government cost-sharing over the previous few years should be seen as a ceiling, rather than a floor, for future reforms. On cost classifications, it would be beneficial for the agencies to amend the cost categories to increase transparency and to clarify financing related to auditing.

127. The Comptroller took note of the delegations' feedback, which would be taken into consideration in developing the final proposals and organizing joint informal briefings with the other United Nations funds and programmes.

## **K. 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**

128. The Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, made introductory remarks, followed by the Director, Public Partnerships Division, and the Regional Director for West and Central Africa.

129. The Regional Director shared the regional- and country-level experience of reform implementation. Regional directors and the Economic Commission for Africa had recently discussed proposals to create a regional collaborative platform and issue-based coalitions. She cited examples of collaboration with United Nations agencies. With WFP, UNICEF was engaging on resilience-building, focusing on education, nutrition and food security in three countries. With the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UNDP, UNICEF was collaborating on the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda 2020–2030. Headquarters updates on the reform process were regularly shared with country offices and dedicated sessions were held during regional meetings. In a 2019 survey, over 60 per cent of West and Central Africa Regional Office staff reported that they were aware of reform developments.

130. A strengthened United Nations common country analysis had led to more strategic cooperation frameworks. Because most resident coordinator offices in the region were not yet fully operational, it was premature to analyse the reform benefits. However, several country offices had reported that the resident coordinators were raising the United Nations profile through advocacy and resource mobilization.

131. A group of delegations welcomed efforts by UNICEF to strengthen the pool of resident coordinators, including through contributions to their performance appraisals. Systemic changes had been made and the focus should now turn to behavioural change. Citing reports of inconsistent messaging on reform, the group sought assurances that the reforms were being pursued by all levels of management, and that staff at all levels felt mandated and empowered to make implementation a critical part of their work.

132. The group encouraged UNICEF to track and harmonize reporting on the funding compact commitments and redouble efforts to reach targets. It encouraged an incisive midterm review process, informed by reflections on how the reforms had changed ways of working and programmatic priorities. The group remained committed to supporting UNICEF in driving forward the behavioural changes needed for sustainable results.

133. A delegation asked how the reported levy of \$3.39 million compared with the organization's expectations and about plans to review the composition of country-office employees. Another delegation emphasized that a focus on country-level implementation was key and that it would welcome reporting that reflected the views of country-level staff.

134. The Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, said that UNICEF would continue to report on progress in implementation and that leadership within the organization on reform would be reflected in the midterm review as well as in behavioural change. UNICEF would review the impact of the implementation of the levy and related costs and present information at the 2020 annual session. The Director, Public Partnerships Division, said that while the levy was still being operationalized, in 2019, UNICEF had collected the highest levy of any United Nations Sustainable Development Group member. She urged the Member States to consider absorbing the administrative costs UNICEF incurred when administering the levy on behalf of a partner, rather than deducting them from their contributions.

135. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, a.i., reported that staff profiles were being reviewed in the context of the midterm review to determine gap areas in terms of skills that might need strengthening. UNICEF was also working with the Development Coordination Office on a plan to encourage more UNICEF staff to seek to move into the resident coordinator role and other positions within that office.

## **L. Other matters**

### **Provisional list of agenda items for the annual session of 2020**

136. The provisional list was presented by the Secretary of the Executive Board.

## **M. Adoption of draft decisions**

137. The Executive Board adopted decisions 2020/1 through 2020/7 (see annex I).

## **N. Closing statements by the Executive Director of UNICEF and the President of the Executive Board**

138. The Executive Director said that the Board's guidance and oversight of the work of UNICEF were invaluable and the decisions reached at the session reflected the commitment of the Board members to children and young people.

139. The Executive Director appreciated the support for the midterm review of the Strategic Plan and noted that the organization was applying lessons learned as it planned for the next two years, for the next Strategic Plan and for the Decade of Action. She also appreciated the support for the organization's 2020 priorities. Accelerated action was necessary. One of those accelerators was supporting the rights of women and girls, including through SRHR. She emphasized the importance of coupling the launch of the Generation Equality initiative with a renewed commitment to adolescent girls across all UNICEF programming and all six catalytic action coalitions, from maternal health and nutrition to learning and skills, HIV, girls' health and well-being, menstrual health and hygiene and gender-based violence. It would not be possible to reach the Sustainable Development Goals if half of the world's population was left behind.

140. Another accelerator was finding innovative ways to serve and support children and young people, including through technology. The Executive Director appreciated the support of the Board for the UNICEF innovation programme and took note of the request for an informal briefing on the Innovation Strategy. She agreed that UNICEF must continue linking its innovation work to that of its sister agencies and reforming the ways in which it worked with them towards strengthening the United Nations system as a whole, including forming strategic partnerships with key agencies. The CPDs presented at the session were the result of such close collaboration, and the presentation's focus on ECD demonstrated the utility of examining key programming through a thematic lens.

141. The Executive Director appreciated the discussion on working methods of the Board, and on the ways that the Executive Boards were working together while remaining unique. UNICEF was committed to providing quality, timely and accurate information to the Board. Trust and transparency were paramount, and UNICEF would continue to strive for that high standard.

142. The Executive Director hoped that this trust would be reflected in increased regular resources, noting that the 4 per cent decline in 2019 undermined the organization's ability to deploy funds quickly where they were needed as well as to attract and leverage new funds. She urged Member States to strive for the funding-compact target of 30 per cent of overall donations in the form of regular resources. UNICEF staff members around the world were counting on that support to deliver and accelerate results for children.

143. The Executive Director appreciated the support for the organization's efforts to improve its organizational culture. UNICEF would continue to rely on the Board's advice as it implemented the changes necessary to make UNICEF the best place to work.

144. As the Decade of Action began, the UNICEF commitment to the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child remained strong. The world was not standing still for children, and issues such as climate change, highlighted by some Board members, challenged their future. But UNICEF was not standing still either. UNICEF and the Board must work together to bring results to life for children and young people around the world. Progress for them equalled progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. She thanked the Board members for their shared commitment to achieve progress and brighten the lives of the youngest generation.

145. The President highlighted the excellent spirit of accommodation, dialogue and partnership that had guided the discussions during the session.

146. She shared some highlights, including the update on the progress of UNICEF in implementing the recommendations of the independent reviews on sexual

exploitation and abuse, harassment, gender discrimination and abuse of power. She commended UNICEF on the progress made and the Executive Director for her commitment to bring about culture change. This was important to fully restore the organization's excellent reputation in the development community. In addition, staff members at every level should be supported. The Board wished to remain updated on progress and would continue to support the organization's efforts.

147. The update on the midterm review of the Strategic Plan had facilitated a preliminary understanding of the need for UNICEF to accelerate its programme implementation and advance on its priorities, while managing the availability of resources and responding to the implications of the United Nations reform. The Board anticipated the more detailed presentation of the midterm review scheduled for the annual session in June.

148. The Board had taken note of the unqualified audit opinion received by UNICEF on its financial reports for 2018, as well as the acknowledgement of UNICEF as one of the few United Nations system entities whose rate of implementation of Board of Auditors' recommendations had significantly increased in 2018. The Board had highlighted, however, that some areas required improvement.

149. The President noted the fluctuations in the level of regular resources received by UNICEF and emphasized their importance. She called upon the delegates to encourage their Governments to increase their contributions to such funds.

150. The Board had been pleased to hear from a diverse range of stakeholders during the interactive session on the CPDs. The President emphasized the importance of having more inclusive participation of all, including of the programme countries. With regard to the topic of the presentations, ECD, the President said that the importance of the first 1,000 days and early years of life could not be overstated. It had been useful to hear about UNICEF programme cooperation in the respective countries, with a view to improving the quality of services, increasing access and providing comprehensive care. The President stressed the need to ensure increased funding for ECD.

151. On working methods, she affirmed that the Member State-mandated and driven process should be aimed at increasing efficiency and effectiveness and promoting harmonization and alignment with the work of the Executive Boards of the other funds and programmes on joint issues. The Board anticipated considering a concrete proposal on the issue no later than the second regular session of 2020.

152. The President concluded by thanking all who had contributed to making the session engaging and productive. She looked forward to their continued support at the annual session.

**Part two**  
**Annual session of 2020**

**Held at United Nations Headquarters from**  
**29 June to 2 July 2020**

## **I. Organization of the session**

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

153. 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.

154. 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**

155. 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.

156. 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.

157. 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.

158. 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.

159. 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.

160. 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.

161. 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.

162. 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.

163. 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.

164. 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.

165. 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.

166. 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.

167. 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.

168. 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.

169. 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.

170. 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.

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

172. 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.

173. 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.

174. 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.

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

176. 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.

177. 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.

178. 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.

179. A delegation welcomed the commitment to intensify advocacy for addressing the climate crisis and efforts to make climate resilience a cornerstone of UNICEF programming.

180. 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.

181. 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**

182. 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.

183. The Director, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, presented the main results.

184. 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.

185. 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.

186. 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](http://data.unicef.org). He stressed that while data was something that everyone wanted, UNICEF was struggling to find resources to fund this work.

187. 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.

188. 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.

189. 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.

190. 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.

191. 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.

192. 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.

193. 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.

194. 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.

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

#### **UNICEF report on the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit**

196. 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**

197. 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.

198. 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.

199. 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.

200. 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.

201. 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.

202. 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.

203. 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.

204. 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.

205. 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.

206. 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**

207. 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.

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

209. 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.

210. 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.

211. 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.

212. 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.

213. 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.

214. 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.

215. 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.

216. 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.

217. 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.

218. 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.

219. 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.

220. 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.

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

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

222. 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](#)).

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

224. 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.

225. 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.

226. 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.

227. 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.

228. 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.

229. 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.

230. 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.

231. 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.

232. 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.

233. 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**

234. 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.

235. 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.

236. 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.

237. 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.

238. 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.

239. 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.

240. 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.

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

**(b) Extensions of ongoing country programmes**

242. 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.

243. 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](#).

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

**F. Evaluation reports and management responses**

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

245. 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](#)).

246. 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.

247. 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.

248. 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.

249. 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.

250. 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.

251. 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.

252. 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.

253. 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.

254. 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.

255. 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**

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

257. 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.

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

259. 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.

260. 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.

261. 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.

262. 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.

263. 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.

264. 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.

265. 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.

266. 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.

267. 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.

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

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

269. 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.

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

271. 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.

272. 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.

273. 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.

274. 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.

275. 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.

276. 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.

277. 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.

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

## **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**

279. 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.

280. 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.

281. 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.

282. 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.

283. 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.

284. 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.

285. 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.

286. 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.

287. 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.

288. 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**

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

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

291. 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.

292. 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.

293. 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.

294. 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.

295. 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**

296. 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.

297. 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.

298. 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.

299. 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.

300. 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.

301. 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**

302. 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**

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

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

304. 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.

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

306. 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.

307. 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.

308. 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.

309. 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.

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

311. 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.

312. 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.

313. 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.

314. 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.

315. 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.

316. 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.

317. 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.

318. 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.

**Part three**  
**Second regular session 2020**

**Held at United Nations Headquarters from**  
**8 to 11 September 2020**

## **I. Organization of the session**

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

319. The Executive Board adopted the agenda, timetable and organization of work (E/ICEF/2020/17/Rev.2) for the session.

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

320. The President commended the UNICEF staff for their efforts and strong commitment in responding to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and advancing the mandate of UNICEF under the leadership of Executive Director Fore. The Executive Board stood in solidarity with the people of Lebanon following the explosion in Beirut.

321. The President highlighted the severity of the pandemic. Some 80 million children were at risk of falling into extreme poverty; more than 1.6 billion children were out of school; some 36 million children were at risk of hunger; and an estimated 80 million children under the age of 1 year were at risk of missing out on vaccines. The impact on essential services and programmes for children was gravely concerning; the pandemic could not be allowed to become a children's crisis.

322. The President expressed satisfaction with the close collaboration between UNICEF and other United Nations agencies in the pandemic response and gratitude to the donor countries for their generous and timely assistance. She affirmed the Board's support for the organization's efforts as it adapted to the crisis, noting the prioritization of vaccine delivery through innovative and collaborative solutions and of efforts to provide children in over 100 countries with clean water and sanitation services.

323. She noted that it was imperative to get children back into a learning environment. Mental health problems; gender-based violence; and rising malnutrition among children who relied on school-feeding programmes were additional concerns linked to the learning crisis. The President urged the expansion of initiatives such as Giga, launched by UNICEF and the International Telecommunication Union and aimed at expanding Internet access to every community and school by 2030. She called upon private-sector partners to contribute their expertise and funding to the initiative.

324. The President highlighted the issue of menstrual health and hygiene for girls, and said that without access to adequate facilities and supplies, girls were often forced to miss out on schooling when menstruating and suffered from stigma and stress, which had a lifelong impact on girls' full development into adulthood. She urged more attention to this issue.

325. The President highlighted that drowning was a leading cause of global mortality among children aged 1 to 14 years, with more than 320,000 deaths every year. Of these preventable deaths, more than 90 per cent took place in low- and middle-income countries, mostly in Asia. She called for strengthening advocacy work on drowning prevention at the country level together with other agencies and non-governmental organizations.

326. The President expressed satisfaction with the progress made in the discussions on various agenda items throughout the year and the partnership with the Bureau

members, with whom the ambitious agenda had been taken forward, despite the disruption wrought by the pandemic. She concluded with a call to keep the promise to children to help ensure a safer and better world for them and to make a difference in their lives.

327. The Executive Director said that the pandemic had changed the work of UNICEF, but had not stopped it. She continued to be inspired by the spirit of common purpose and the commitment of the UNICEF staff. She expressed sympathy for the affected communities and families in Beirut following the explosion, which had not spared the UNICEF family. In the true UNICEF spirit, teams had rallied to support the survivors and protect vulnerable families.

328. The Executive Director thanked the Board for supporting the work of the organization and for sounding the alarm in their capitals on children's needs. Even before the pandemic, the world had been dramatically off-track for meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. The pandemic was accelerating the work of UNICEF to change how it designed and delivered its programmes, including supporting the use of online educational tools and working with United Nations partners to develop a school reopening framework; training health-care workers; delivering COVID-19 messaging to communities; supporting vaccine delivery through the COVAX Facility; helping countries to restart immunization programmes; supporting mental health; scaling up innovative health products; and working with Governments to rapidly expand social protections.

329. The Executive Director reported that, as UNICEF contributed to a unified COVID-19 response, it continued to focus on reforming the United Nations development system, which included the ongoing adaptation of its work; innovation; and partnerships with its sister agencies, and was working to shape the next strategic plan. UNICEF would continue work to build stronger local primary health systems, support Governments to provide adequate nutrition, revitalize programming around child protection and collaborate with partners to identify and deliver digital solutions to fuel a needed revolution in education, skills and training for children and young people.

330. The Executive Director said that UNICEF was assessing the impact of the pandemic on its current and future income estimates and making needed adjustments for the current strategic plan period. The organization was modernizing its data systems; seeking to strengthen and simplify its partnership model; and making efforts to find more efficiencies and to reimagine its business models. UNICEF was continuing its journey to create a more inclusive and people-focused workplace, and the organization-wide Internal Task Team focused on issues of discrimination in the UNICEF workplace had begun its work.

331. In conclusion, the Executive Director stated that the challenges posed by the pandemic provided a unique opportunity to learn and adapt for the future. Following her remarks, a video showcased UNICEF innovations that could support the pandemic response.

332. The delegations thanked the President and the Executive Director for their work and commended the UNICEF staff around the world for their dedication to continuing their vital work during the pandemic. Delegations applauded UNICEF for its swift and effective response to the crisis, which included procuring medical equipment, supplies, lifesaving vaccines and medicine; providing water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services; and enabling distance learning and providing online education tools.

333. Delegations expressed concern that the pandemic was widening existing vulnerabilities and inequalities across the globe, from access to education and

vaccines to poverty and violence against children, with long-term repercussions. They noted the disproportionate effect, especially socioeconomic, of the pandemic on children, especially girls, children on the move, children with disabilities, children deprived of liberty and unaccompanied children, as well as others already at risk, and the effect of the pandemic on child labour. A delegation specified that the pandemic threatened to reverse decades of progress in Africa. Another delegation expressed appreciation for the increased focus of UNICEF on mental health, which had been adversely impacted by the pandemic.

334. Several delegations expressed particular concern about the increased inequity in access to education resulting from the pandemic, with millions of children deprived of the technology necessary for remote learning. A delegation noted that, in the context of the pandemic, it was important to recognize the disadvantage faced by developing countries in terms of science, technology and innovation mechanisms, while a delegation welcomed the Giga initiative. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, highlighted a new UNICEF-World Bank collaboration on a large and ambitious digital learning initiative, which would soon be formally announced.

335. Several delegations emphasized the importance of continuing to accelerate work towards the Sustainable Development Goals under the Decade of Action, with one delegation recalling that the world had already been off-track before the pandemic for achieving many of the child-focused targets. A delegation welcomed the targets set by UNICEF, its embrace of innovation, technology and new approaches to accelerate results and the way it had treated the pandemic as a spur to make its action more agile and forward-looking.

336. Delegations emphasized the importance of the United Nations development system reform, commending UNICEF for its collaborative work with other United Nations entities, Governments and the private sector. Such joint action had increased the effectiveness and efficiency of the United Nations pandemic response, with one delegation highlighting that the collaborative action had saved lives. Delegations called for an increase in such collaboration to address the setbacks as well as to move forward. A delegation emphasized the importance of safeguarding multilateralism, strengthening the role of multilateral institutions and pursuing shared development.

337. A group of delegations expressed concern that the pandemic was testing the limits of the reform, while noting that without the reforms implemented thus far, the system could not have responded with the agility and coherence shown over the previous six months. The coordination between humanitarian and development work had enabled a greater responsiveness to the pressing needs of populations most affected by the pandemic, even while planning for long-term recovery advanced. The group stressed the importance of continuing this momentum and keeping the reform principles at the core of the United Nations response, including strengthened coordination across the funds and programmes and the wider development system, as the world continued to face the pandemic's consequences. The group, together with other delegations, called for building back better, aiming for a green, inclusive and resilient recovery and working on a systems level across the humanitarian and development continuum to make lasting change.

338. The group of delegations highlighted five key areas for further concerted action. First was what it termed the bedrock of reform: coordination and collaboration, which included policy mainstreaming, joint activities and resident coordinator leadership. Two positive examples were the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 and the United Nations multi-partner trust fund. United Nations entities should continue to collaborate, focusing on their



comparative advantages. The Director, Programme Division, noting UNICEF participation in numerous collaborative projects at the country level, cited an example in Mali, where UNICEF had worked with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Organization for Migration to accelerate the implementation of the National Peace and Reconciliation Agreement by engaging 2,500 young people on urgently needed conflict prevention and resolution. Another example was the exercise undertaken with the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to merge the United Nations Standing Committee on Nutrition and the United Nations Network for Scaling Up Nutrition, chaired by the UNICEF Executive Director, into a single entity. The reform had also been institutionalized within UNICEF through a series of global agreements and initiatives, planned and implemented in collaboration with various United Nations agencies.

339. Second, the group of delegations urged United Nations entities to demonstrate progress in achieving efficiencies by implementing the research findings of the Business Innovations Group. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, who would soon take up the position of Co-Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group's Task Team on Business Operations, said that UNICEF was fully committed to achieving efficiencies from United Nations system initiatives. She noted that UNICEF was working hard to implement the Business Innovations Group Mutual Recognition framework, which simplified the ways in which organizations worked together and would facilitate programming at the country level. UNICEF also chaired the Task Team on Common Premises and was an active member of other cross-agency forums including the Impact Reporting Working Group. The organization was supporting the implementation of the Business Operations Strategy and had already achieved the 50 per cent target set by the Secretary-General for common premises. Acting upon lessons learned from the pandemic, UNICEF was aiming to put in place even more efficiencies and simplification measures than it had already through the Global Shared Services Centre.

340. Third, calling the funding compact the cornerstone of reform, the group of delegations urged the United Nations entities to ensure the setting of comprehensive baselines, milestones and targets for relevant indicators. It also noted the mutual responsibility of the Member States for the funding compact.

341. Fourth, the group reiterated, as Member States, that country programme documents (CPDs) must be derived from the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs), including through the agencies' close work with the Development Coordination Office and the resident coordinators. The process required meaningful in-country consultation with Member States. The Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, confirmed that the UNSDCF were the primary planning documents from which the CPDs were derived and noted that UNICEF would hold discussions with the Development Coordination Office on the necessary outreach on the UNSDCF to development partners at the country level, a process which lay with the resident coordinators.

342. Fifth, the group expected the full implementation of the Management and Accountability Framework of the United Nations Development and Resident Coordinator System and requested regular updates from the agencies and the Development Coordination Office on progress made. The Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, noted the upcoming system-wide discussions on the regional and global framework chapters, which the United Nations Sustainable Development Group would finalize before the end of the year. Those chapters would be coherent

with the country-level chapter, which would be revised on the basis of a survey the Development Coordination Office was launching among resident coordinators and United Nations country team members.

343. The group of delegations called for a holistic approach to delivering the Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting the importance of agency alignment with the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR) on the reform priorities of efficiency and effectiveness as well as the thematic priorities of gender equality; the empowerment of women and girls and persons with disabilities; the humanitarian-development continuum; and climate and the environment.

344. The group encouraged the agencies to apply this holistic approach in the development of their new strategic plans. Together with other delegations, the group called for UNICEF to engage closely with the Executive Board on its new strategic plan, with sufficient time for consultation, while another delegation called for input from countries, local governments, communities and other stakeholders.

345. A delegation commented that the pandemic had sparked a paradigm shift in the UNICEF approach to programming, delivery, follow-up and review, which should be reflected in the new strategic plan. This shift entailed an increased focus on adaptation to emerging issues and investment in resilience and systems, such as health infrastructure, institutional capacity and transparency and accountability measures. A delegation asked how UNICEF would maximize the impact, sustainability and efficiency of the COVID-19 response to encourage collective and invigorated action within the United Nations and with other aid actors in accordance with the humanitarian-development-peace continuum approach. The Executive Director agreed that there had been a paradigm shift, while noting that UNICEF had long been working at multiple levels along the continuum, from emergency to the medium and long term, in accordance with its dual mandate. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, said that UNICEF was formalizing, sustaining and expanding collaboration with other entities, for example, with WHO on mental health and preparedness for emergencies

346. The group of delegations called for ensuring sufficient humanitarian competency and resources, noting that the pandemic, by increasing the importance of the humanitarian role of the resident coordinator, had highlighted the criticality of competencies in such areas as international humanitarian law and humanitarian access negotiation. It had also revealed the need to strengthen the coherence of humanitarian-development programming and humanitarian capacities in the field, particularly for agencies with double mandates, such as UNICEF.

347. Delegations expressed concern about a possible decrease in funding, with a delegation noting the need for an unprecedented international mobilization of financial and human resources to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development over the next decade. Several delegations urged the Member States to continue to provide the necessary resources to UNICEF, especially regular resources, while noting the importance of new forms of financing and strengthened and innovative partnerships with the private sector.

348. A delegation asked for more information about the UNICEF involvement with the preparatory process for the Food Systems Summit, to be held in 2021. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, responded that UNICEF had been asked to lead on engaging children and young people in the Summit and might co-lead some of the tracks together with FAO and WFP.

349. The representative of the ChildFund Alliance stressed the importance of keeping children safe from the increased risks of violence during the pandemic. It

was also vital to actively engage young people, respect their concerns, seek their recommendations and work with them to identify and adopt solutions.

### **C. Proposed programme of work for the Executive Board sessions in 2021**

350. The Secretary of the Executive Board presented the proposed programme of work, noting that it was a living document that could be adjusted throughout the year.

### **D. Working methods**

351. The Secretary of the Executive Board provided an overview of the proposed rearranged programme of work, which responded to the request of the Executive Board in its decision 2020/1. She highlighted three items that had been shifted: two from the second regular session to the first regular session (one thematic evaluation, the report of the joint field visit and the report of the field visit of the UNICEF Executive Board) and one from the second regular session to the annual session (Private Fundraising and Partnerships: annual financial report). The presentation of common items had been harmonized with the sessions of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNFPA and the United Nations Office for Project Services; and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). She pointed out that the objective of lightening the workload of the second regular session had been met, while noting that the second regular session of 2021 would be a little different because of documents related to the new strategic plan, presented every four years. Starting in 2022, that session would have fewer agenda items.

352. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/14 (see annex I).

## **II. Deliberations of the Executive Board**

### **A. UNICEF programme cooperation**

#### **(a) Country programme documents**

353. The President introduced the panellists for the discussion on CPDs for Belarus; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Colombia; Indonesia; Kazakhstan; Serbia and Kosovo (under Security Council resolution [1244 \(1999\)](#)); Timor-Leste; Turkey; Turkmenistan; and Uganda ([E/ICEF/2020/P/L.11–E/ICEF/2020/P/L.20](#) and [E/ICEF/2020/P/L.18/Add.1](#)).

354. In introductory remarks, the Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, affirmed the organization's commitment to working with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank and other partners in supporting countries to recover from the pandemic and to advance education towards ensuring that every child, everywhere, could learn. The Associate Director of Education reported that, at the onset of the pandemic, UNICEF had rapidly mobilized support to encourage a sector-wide education response. The organization had worked closely with Governments and a range of global and national partners. A focus on reaching the most vulnerable children, transforming the ways of providing learning and furnishing children with more-comprehensive services as they returned to school had fuelled a sense of optimism that countries were seizing a unique opportunity to strengthen education systems.

355. The United Nations Resident Coordinator in Uganda reported that, following the disruptions to education caused by COVID-19, UNICEF and its non-governmental partners had established community safe spaces where children could learn and the Government had disseminated learning materials via traditional and social media. Children and parents whom she had met recently at a refugee settlement had asked for more access to learning materials; expressed their appreciation to UNICEF for the safe spaces; and strongly requested early school reopening. She referred to the strong and collaborative leadership of UNICEF, remarking that the country programme was at the heart of the UNSDCF.

356. In a pre-recorded video message, the Minister of Education and Culture of Indonesia, Mr. Nadiem Makarim, shared the milestones and challenges in improving the country's education system, the fourth largest in the world. He expressed appreciation to UNICEF for its support on important initiatives, including in the most disadvantaged regions, and its partnership with the Government to realize the concept of "freedom to learn". Since the onset of the pandemic, UNICEF had supported the development of national guidelines on safe-school protocols, home-based learning and school reopening and the strengthening of distance-learning platforms and materials.

357. A 16-year-old UNICEF Youth Advocate from Kosovo (under Security Council resolution [1244 \(1999\)](#)), Rijad Mehmeti, addressed the Board in a pre-recorded video. Explaining that he had been born with cerebral palsy and used a wheelchair, he likened his situation to the isolation experienced by many during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Rijad called upon the Executive Board to reimagine a world in which all children with disabilities had equal opportunities and a better, more inclusive life.

358. The leader for education practice with McKinsey & Company, Colombia, Mr. Felipe Child, described the company's partnership with UNICEF to address poor educational outcomes in intermediate education and the project's impact on youth employment. The joint initiative had identified proven global solutions of local relevance. The Ministry of Education had incorporated some of the initiative's findings as strategies for an intermediate education policy, recently launched, and was working with the UNICEF country office to create innovation ecosystems for intermediate education.

359. The representatives of the countries for which CPDs were being presented expressed their appreciation to UNICEF for the strong and solid collaboration with their Governments in support of their national plans and priorities. Several representatives cited the strengthened collaboration with the UNICEF country teams in their respective countries as they worked to respond to the pandemic and their anticipation of continued partnership.

360. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/15 (see annex I).

**(b) Extensions of ongoing country programmes**

361. The President stated that, in accordance with Executive Board decision 2009/11, the Board had been informed of the first two-month extensions of the country programmes for Armenia, Azerbaijan, China, Eswatini, Georgia, Malaysia, North Macedonia, Panama, Somalia and Uzbekistan; the five-month extension of the country programme for Argentina, following a previous two-month extension; and the first one-year extensions of the country programmes for Bangladesh, Cameroon, El Salvador, Guinea-Bissau, Libya, Maldives, Mozambique and Oman, all of which had been approved by the Executive Director.

362. The Executive Board was requested to approve a two-month extension of the country programme for Tunisia, following a one-year extension; a two-month

extension of the country programme for the Syrian Arab Republic, following two consecutive one-year extensions, a nine-month extension and a three-month extension; a six-month extension of the country programme for Madagascar, following a one-year extension; one-year extensions of the country programmes for Guatemala and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, both following previous one-year extensions; a two-year extension of the country programme for Burkina Faso; and a two-year extension of the country programme for Yemen, following two consecutive one-year extensions, a two-year extension and a one-year extension, as presented in document [E/ICEF/2020/P/L.21/Rev.1](#).

363. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/16 (see annex I).

## **B. Structured dialogue on financing the results of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021**

364. The Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, introduced the report ([E/ICEF/2020/21](#)) and its annex (UNICEF/2020/EB/10), followed by a joint presentation by the Director, Public Partnerships Division, and the Director, Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division. The UNICEF Representative for Zambia shared the field perspective.

365. A group of delegations welcomed UNICEF efforts to improve the visibility and recognition of donors providing core funding during the COVID-19 response. It requested regular updates on how UNICEF was mitigating the pandemic's effects on the implementation of the Strategic Plan. The group commended UNICEF for its comprehensive reporting on the implementation of the funding compact and on the progress made towards meeting the targets.

366. The group expressed concern about the decline in regular resources and asked about efforts to increase the number of regular resources donors and the challenges encountered. The group was also concerned about the increase in cost-recovery waivers granted. It looked forward to the presentation of the strategy on innovative financing in 2021.

367. The group encouraged UNICEF to increase its share of development-related expenditures through joint activities and to engage in dialogue with other United Nations entities, particularly the Development Coordination Office, requesting an update on plans to harmonize the funding-compact implementation indicators among those entities. It enquired about plans by UNICEF to raise more core and thematic funding for programmes, while ensuring sufficient resources to uphold its normative mandate and functions. The group reiterated the importance of ensuring that CPDs were derived from the UNSDCF, including through close work with the Development Coordination Office.

368. A delegation requested an analysis of funding gaps that could influence donor decisions on regular resources and/or project-based funding for specific areas. The delegation asked how the resilience fund, which UNICEF had reported exploring with partners, would align with existing United Nations COVID-19 resilience and recovery funding.

369. The Director, Public Partnerships Division, cited the regular resources acceleration strategy and reported recent success in diversifying the funding base. She expressed appreciation that the Humanitarian Action for Children appeal for COVID-19 had already been 68 per cent funded. She emphasized that cost-recovery waivers were granted only on an exceptional basis and approved only when UNICEF would stand to lose significant amounts of funding if not approved. She affirmed that joint programming and activities and pooled funding were important

areas of work for UNICEF. She clarified that UNICEF, similarly to UNDP, had a four-year expenditure plan for the Strategic Plan period; the difference between the four-year planned expenditure and the two-year expenditure to date was what UNICEF called the resource (funding) gap, and that was calculated by Goal Area.

370. The Executive Director clarified that UNICEF typically received insufficient funding in several areas of work and thus allocated regular resources to ensure their continuity or to get them off the ground. These areas included gender, climate change and the environment, child protection, mental health and innovation. There were also funding gaps for internal initiatives that contributed to an improved workplace.

371. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/17 (see annex I).

### **C. Oral update on UNICEF humanitarian action**

372. The Chair expressed sympathy for those affected by the fire in Lesbos, Greece, and asserted that the Executive Board stood ready to support the urgent needs of affected children. The Executive Director seconded her comments and detailed the response of UNICEF and partners.

373. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees introduced the Blueprint for Joint Action, a partnership between the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and UNICEF. The Director of the UNICEF Office of Emergency Programmes presented the oral update.

374. Delegations welcomed the partnership, with a delegation expressing support for the selection of the focus countries and a delegation voicing appreciation for the inclusion of host communities, which would engender mutual trust.

375. A delegation commended the prioritization of WASH, education and protection, including mental health and psychosocial support, and noted the importance of health-care interventions for mothers, newborns and children in refugee settings. The delegation appreciated the clear, ambitious targets and encouraged UNICEF to provide the data sources underlying the baselines to facilitate a transparent assessment of the sustainability of the expected results. The delegation also encouraged UNICEF to include a result in its strategic plan on measurable learning outcomes for refugee and host-community children.

376. Delegations expressed concern that the pandemic was intensifying the needs and vulnerabilities of the millions of refugee, migrant and displaced children around the world already experiencing limited access to their basic rights, with several delegations voicing support for the adaptation of the Blueprint to the realities of the pandemic.

377. Delegations expressed particular concern about the pandemic's impact on education in humanitarian situations. A delegation highlighted that the prolonged period out of school meant that some might never return, and said that protecting the right to education for refugee children required access to birth registration and child-protection systems. The pandemic had triggered a steep increase in violence against children, and low birth-registration rates for children at risk of statelessness could limit their access to basic services and increase their exposure to violence, exploitation and abuse.

378. A delegation emphasized the importance of the gender perspective that UNICEF was incorporating into its work. The Director, Office of Emergency Programmes, agreed, noting that, in a gender-based response, data was key for

revealing how services affected girls and boys differently. Protection, particularly from sexual exploitation and abuse and gender-based violence, was also central.

379. Delegations expressed support for the focus on the humanitarian-development continuum, notably the move away from short-term emergency interventions towards investment in sustainable solutions.

380. A delegation asked about internally displaced persons in the context of UNICEF humanitarian-development work. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, responded that the humanitarian-development connection had always been important in refugee situations, especially because host countries advocated for the extension of humanitarian services for refugees to those in the host communities to ensure both social cohesion and the post-crisis continuation of services. In response to concern that the quality of services for refugees and nationals be comparable, the Blueprint was focused strongly on the humanitarian-development linkage.

381. A delegation questioned why the Blueprint mentioned education and child protection in relation to national systems-strengthening, but not WASH, and noted that the plans for WASH did not mention sustainability or scarcity. The Director, Office of Emergency Programmes, affirmed the importance of sustainability and long-term solutions for WASH, giving the example of a long-term piped-water project for host communities and refugees in Ethiopia. He added that humanitarian funding was often short term, making it challenging to fund longer-term actions.

382. Voicing concern about the underfunding of humanitarian responses, including the Rohingya response in Bangladesh, a delegation enquired about funding for the Blueprint. The Executive Director noted a budget gap for the Blueprint of about \$206 million.

383. A delegation said that it expected UNICEF to systematically assess lessons learned from its partnerships and joint programmes; to improve internal processes accordingly; and to ensure that the next strategic plan represented a major step forward for more integrated and collaborative work.

#### **D. Oral update on UNICEF research activities and priorities in this regard**

384. The Deputy Executive Director, Field Results and Innovation, introduced the oral update. Following a video, the Director of the UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti (UNICEF Innocenti) presented the item.

385. Several delegations expressed their strong support for UNICEF Innocenti and for the necessity of evidence-based research for the work of UNICEF and other United Nations entities.

386. A delegation invited UNICEF to adequately disseminate the Office's research to support its meaningful integration into UNICEF activities and programming, in line with the change strategies of the Strategic Plan. Several delegations requested UNICEF to incorporate research and evidence creation into the next strategic plan.

387. A delegation encouraged UNICEF to leverage the strength of higher education institutions in multiple countries in the development of new partnerships and research and called for strengthening the linkage between programmatic needs and research. UNICEF Innocenti agreed on the need to diversify its research partnerships, including in UNICEF programme and operations countries, and highlighted a partnership with On Think Tanks and Southern Voice, two networks of think tanks in Africa, Asia and Latin America, to carry out a global mapping of

almost 2,000 research entities based in low- and middle-income countries. The Office would work closely with a subset of these to strengthen the research culture and capacity in the regions in which UNICEF worked.

388. The delegation asked how UNICEF could collaborate with other development partners at the global and country levels to support real-time learning and efforts to monitor, sustain and scale effective interventions in health systems-strengthening, an important area for UNICEF. The delegation said that research should be tied to clear, necessary programmatic shifts based on evidence in health, social protection and other sectoral areas that impacted children in adolescence. The pandemic had demonstrated that the evidence-to-action enterprise needed to be nimble and responsive to urgent and emergent programmatic challenges and needs. The delegation encouraged capacity-building to enable country counterparts to conduct real-time implementation of research to guide programmatic and strategic pivots.

389. UNICEF Innocenti highlighted the Office's collaboration with headquarters to develop research in health systems-strengthening, noting the Office's research on cash transfers in Ghana and Ethiopia, which included their connection to health insurance access. Regarding feeding real-time information quickly back into programmes, UNICEF Innocenti described the monitoring and research element embedded in the Akelius Project, a remote learning programme for migrant children to learn the language of their host countries. The Office consistently engaged country and regional offices and Governments from the outset to ensure early buy-in and a short bridge to programming and policy.

390. A delegation asked how research could best reach those who implemented the programmes. The Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia highlighted collaborative research between the Office and regional and country offices to make an evidence-based investment case for social protection during the pandemic. The resulting data showed that the initial fiscal-policy response prioritized support to businesses over support for children, families, the poorest populations and the informal sector, and supported the call to Governments to maintain and expand spending for child-focused social services and protection. The work of the Office had been critical to helping UNICEF to complete the cycle from rigorous policy analysis to guidance and engagement with Governments and citizens through to government actions to protect investments in children.

391. In response to a delegation's question about the COVID-19 rapid-research programme, UNICEF Innocenti said that it had rapidly synthesized existing literature and gathered together the emerging literature that was evolving daily. The Office had also researched the pandemic's impact on Internet use in the lives of children and worked organization-wide to produce resources on child protection and socioeconomic impacts, including on mental health.

392. A delegation noted the importance of the UNICEF Innocenti for the normative mandate of UNICEF, for which regular resources were crucial. Another delegation invited the Member States to ensure adequate financial resources to the Office and to engage with it to benefit from mutual partnership.

## **E. Evaluation of the UNICEF contribution to education in humanitarian situations, and management response**

393. The Director of Evaluation presented the evaluation report and its summary ([E/ICEF/2020/19](#)), followed by the Associate Director of Education, who presented the management response ([E/ICEF/2020/20](#)).



394. Delegations commended UNICEF for its leadership in promoting education in emergencies and protracted crises and raising its importance as a core component of humanitarian response globally. They appreciated the rapid support that UNICEF had provided to countries affected by COVID-19 through its largest educational response to date. They expected UNICEF to continue to strengthen its work along the humanitarian-development continuum towards preparedness, resilience and recovery for education systems, integrating gains in emergency education into countries' long-term education plans and policies. Several delegations emphasized the need to amplify the voices of children and young people, especially those who were marginalized, in the development of policies and programmes and to focus on context-specific education, including with respect to modalities.

395. The group of delegations welcomed the management response and the increased focus on girls and children with disabilities and emphasized the importance of promoting gender equality and disability inclusion in and through education. At the same time, delegations highlighted gaps in the targeting and prioritizing of the most vulnerable children, especially girls, children with disabilities and refugee children.

396. Delegations emphasized the need, as the pandemic had made clear, for integrated, multisectoral programming, including in nutrition, health and WASH, in any education response in emergencies. They called for a more systematic, internally coherent approach to such programming in the new strategic plan and in the implementation of programmes on the ground. The Associate Director said that a key message of UNICEF for school reopening was that, for children to learn, their needs must be met holistically; this included social, emotional and physical health and nutrition, protection and safety. Engagement with Governments and stakeholders in countries was also central.

397. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, added that thematic funding for education was critical for holistic responses. Such funding also enabled UNICEF to reach the most marginalized children, regardless of where they lived, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

398. A delegation noted that the evaluation and management response had highlighted the importance of local partnerships and asked what proportion of UNICEF emergency education activities had been implemented through such partnerships. The Associate Director responded that in 2019, 34 per cent of education funding in emergencies went to local partners and that the proportion in 2020 would be higher.

399. Delegations stressed the importance of capacity-building for UNICEF staff, partners and management and of strengthening coordination and clarity across all levels of the organization. Delegations also encouraged UNICEF to continue its inter-agency cooperation, including with UNESCO, UNHCR, the Global Partnership for Education and Education Cannot Wait, which UNICEF hosted.

400. A delegation highlighted the evaluation's finding that weak data collection, disaggregation, reporting and information management limited the appropriate targeting of interventions and undermined service delivery. The delegation asked what systems and financial resources would be mobilized to address these challenges. The Associate Director delineated three key strategies: First, providing tools and guidance to country offices on school reopening and supporting Governments to collect data to identify the most vulnerable children. Second, leveraging technology to collect real-time information and set up monitoring systems. Third, providing funding to collect and monitor information.

401. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/18 (see annex I).

## **F. Report of the Ethics Office of UNICEF for 2019, and management response**

402. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, introduced the item, followed by the Ethics Specialist, who presented the report ([E/ICEF/2020/22](#)), and the Director, Division of Human Resources, who presented the management response ([E/ICEF/2020/23](#)).

403. A group of delegations expressed thanks to the former Principal Adviser, Ethics, for her innovative efforts to buttress ethics culture in UNICEF by increasing the outreach of the Ethics Office and strengthening its status as a recognized oversight and advisory unit.

404. The group commended the Ethics Office for its work in 2019 and noted that the continued increase in requests reflected its important position within UNICEF. It was also encouraged by the high response rate to the Global Staff Survey and the marked improvements in a range of categories.

405. The group commended UNICEF management for its cooperation with the Office, noting the uptake of requests for standard-setting and policy input and the rapid implementation of recommendations with regard to the Financial Disclosure Programme, as well as the 100 per cent compliance rate.

406. The group confirmed the importance of close collaboration between the Ethics Office and the newly established roles of Senior Coordinator, Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, and Principal Adviser, Organizational Culture, as well as the new Child Safeguarding Unit. However, the group expressed concern about the potential duplication of roles as well as confusion among staff and a risk of weakened confidentiality standards. It emphasized that it should not be the responsibility of staff members to understand the distinctions and encouraged UNICEF to ensure a single point of contact for staff concerns and provide guidance on alternative routes for exceptional circumstances.

407. The group commended UNICEF and the Ethics Office for their collaborative efforts to further strengthen the independence of the Office, while noting that higher staff confidence in protection from retaliation was crucial for ensuring a workforce empowered to uphold UNICEF values in the face of misconduct. It requested information on concrete plans to address the concerns.

408. Regarding the three roles cited, the Ethics Specialist responded that the respective incumbents had worked together in a spirit of great professional respect, with synergies in senior-level meetings and outreach. At the same time, there were areas of intersection between the new roles and certain roles performed by the Ethics Office, some of which stemmed from UNICEF staff approaching those incumbents with individual issues outside their initially defined roles. The Ethics Office understood the importance of clarifying for staff that confidentiality standards applied only under the independent offices' mandates. To address some of these risks, the Office, together with the incumbents, performed outreach for country and regional offices to clearly define the roles. The Ethics Office also issued the document *Addressing workplace issues in UNICEF: a roadmap on where to go and when*.

409. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, who concurred regarding confusion among staff, clarified that the advisory positions on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and organizational culture had been set up to respond quickly to the new corporate priority issues, with the understanding that the work would gradually be institutionalized within various divisions. More streamlining

was anticipated and therefore more clarity would be provided to staff. She added that UNICEF was also taking lessons learned from other agencies.

410. The group of delegations requested information on the results of the resource assessment, which the Executive Board had requested in its decision 2019/15. The Ethics Specialist said that, at the request of the Executive Director, the Ethics Office had proposed an increase in human resource capacity and institutional independence. The assessment had considered the structure and staffing of ethics functions in other United Nations agencies in relation to the size of the organization and of other independent offices within UNICEF.

411. A delegation asked about reported plans to share UNICEF Ethics Office capacities with other agencies to better economize resources. The Ethics Specialist confirmed that the idea of sharing ethics resources at the regional level was under discussion. It was anticipated that the new Director of Ethics would assess any additional needs.

412. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/19 (see annex I).

## **G. Office of Internal Audit and Investigations 2019 annual report to the Executive Board, and management response**

### **UNICEF Audit Advisory Committee 2019 annual report to the Executive Board**

413. The Director, Office of Internal Audit and Investigations (OIAI), presented the Office's 2019 annual report to the Executive Board ([E/ICEF/2020/AB/L.3](#) and [E/ICEF/2020/AB/L.3/Add.1](#)), followed by the Deputy Director, Division of Financial and Administrative Management, who presented the management response ([E/ICEF/2020/AB/L.4](#)). The Chair of the UNICEF Audit Advisory Committee provided an overview of the Committee's 2019 annual report.

414. A group of delegations congratulated UNICEF on the overall internal assurance opinion for 2019 and for having no unimplemented audit recommendations older than 18 months. The group thanked UNICEF for its management response and follow-up on the recommendations and encouraged continued efforts.

415. The group recommended that future management responses be more strategic and include the most-prioritized actions for UNICEF as well as the changes from previous years. Noting the significant increase in investigation cases, particularly those related to harassment and abuse of authority, followed by inappropriate staff conduct, the group asked if the increase had resulted from raised awareness and improved reporting channels. The Director, OIAI, responded that while there was no certainty, those reasons were possible, along with increased levels of trust among staff. He noted that the timing of the steady increase in cases had roughly corresponded with the issuance of the report of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority, calling this a positive factor.

416. The group strongly encouraged UNICEF to allocate adequate resources for investigations and requested an update on the recruitment of the additional staff members noted in the report. The Director, OIAI, reported that nine new positions had been added to the investigative team in 2020; the office in Budapest had been newly staffed; and the remaining vacancies would be filled in the coming months.

417. The group requested information on the recovery of previous years' fraud losses and the cumulative rates of recovery and urged UNICEF to prioritize addressing the most recurrent audit issues at the country level. In follow-up to a

recommendation of the Audit Advisory Committee the previous year, the group requested UNICEF to aim for a simplified and risk-informed policy. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, reported that preventive measures were key to success in the area and that the organization was investing in strengthening such measures, including increased mediation capacity in the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes.

418. A delegation referred to the recommendation related to the harmonized approach to cash transfers (HACT) and requested UNICEF to further strengthen HACT to include qualitative measures.

419. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/20 (see annex I).

## **H. Update on the implementation of the recommendations made in the independent panel review of the UNICEF response to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse; the Morgan Lewis report on sexual harassment investigations conducted by the UNICEF Office of Internal Audit and Investigations; and the report of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority**

420. Following an introduction by the Deputy Executive Director, Management, the report (E/ICEF/2020/24) was jointly presented by the Principal Adviser, Organizational Culture, and the Senior Coordinator, Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

421. A group of delegations expressed appreciation for the organization's efforts towards a safe working environment. It welcomed the reflection of staff views as gleaned from the Global Staff Survey data, some of which had been presented at the session, and sought additional information on the ways in which UNICEF was addressing workplace racism and discrimination and incorporating the survey findings into gender-equality approaches.

422. The group asked how information and on-the-ground experiences were being shared by the focal points for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and informing the overall response. It also asked how UNICEF would extend the country-level response beyond emergency settings to ensure consistent safeguarding standards throughout its operations and enquired about its work with the resident coordinators in this regard. It requested an update on the roll-out of the assessment and tool kit on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse for implementing partners and on the work to strengthen the online reporting system with the Office of the Special Coordinator on improving the United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse. The group also requested more information on actions being taken to ensure a victim-centred approach; on the implementation of the Uniform Protocol on the Provision of Assistance to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse; and on collaboration with the Victims' Rights Advocate.

423. A delegation asked how UNICEF would ensure that efforts to change organizational culture remained a priority amid the challenges of COVID-19 and how sufficient funding would be assured. The Principal Adviser said that the pandemic had presented an opportunity for UNICEF to re-emphasize its core values. Efforts to address racism and discrimination included the new Internal Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination, which would propose actions. The Task Team had so far convened regional focus-group discussions; reached out to other United Nations agencies and other organizations; held consultations with experts; and identified various actions relating to human resources.

424. The Senior Coordinator reported that several global webinars on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse had been organized and online technical tools and resources provided to relevant focal points. At the inter-agency level, joint training initiatives had been undertaken and a global dashboard developed to track country-level progress. The assessment procedure for implementing partners continued to be rolled out; it focused on six areas aligned with the United Nations protocol on allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving implementing partners.

425. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, said that efforts to combat discrimination, which included strengthening data and widening the criteria used in recruitment, were part of the broader organizational culture work. As an important element of gender equality, UNICEF would examine new ways of working aimed at ensuring work/life balance as well as the more efficient delivery of results. To institutionalize the work on organizational culture, UNICEF had included relevant indicators to measure progress in the midterm review of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, which would also be included in the next strategic plan. UNICEF would explore how to further streamline work on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and had allocated funds, including core resources, towards that area. However, additional resources were critically needed. UNICEF continued to explore the sharing and pooling of resources with other partners.

426. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/21 (see annex I).

## **I. UNICEF Strategic Plan: updated financial estimates, 2020–2023**

427. Following an introduction by the Deputy Executive Director, Management, the Comptroller and Director of the Division of Financial and Administrative Management presented the updated financial estimates ([E/ICEF/2020/AB/L.7](#)).

428. A delegation expressed concern with regard to the organization's deficits over 2019 and 2020, the liquidity of regular resources and the overly optimistic financial projections tied to spending plans. The delegation encouraged a conservative approach for such projections, including for income from the private sector. The delegation asked how UNICEF planned to address the deficits to avoid falling below the United Nations liquidity guidelines.

429. Another delegation also called for caution regarding funding reserves and projections and sought clarification on plans to address the projected sharp decline in programme expenditures in 2022 and the anticipated reduction in the institutional budget between 2021 and 2022.

430. The Comptroller clarified that, over the previous decade, other resources had made up most of the increase in the budget and that the projections considered both regular resources and other resources. Regular resources income had been declining since before the pandemic. He took note of the concerns regarding revenue projections and the regular resources reserve, reporting that UNICEF remained in compliance with the United Nations liquidity guidelines and continued to regularly monitor the situation. UNICEF had demonstrated savings in its institutional budget over several years by continually examining its operations and budget priorities.

431. The Deputy Executive Director reiterated that UNICEF was closely monitoring the situation and would continue to update the Executive Board. She clarified that the anticipated decline in programme expenditure would primarily be in other resources-emergency. The organization would continue to work towards maintaining best practices for the regular resources reserve and explore ways to improve its fundraising, including through the private sector.

432. The Executive Director affirmed that the organization's finances were stable and strong, but that it was a difficult time to make projections. UNICEF would meet with the two delegations concerned to discuss its plans regarding liquidity, revenues and expenditures.

433. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/22 (see annex I).

## **J. Private Fundraising and Partnerships: financial report for the year ended 31 December 2019**

434. A group of delegations commended the efforts of the National Committees and the Private Fundraising and Partnerships team. It expressed concern about the reliance on individual donors for private-sector regular resources and the contraction of overall private-sector resources for the second consecutive year. The group cautioned that private fundraising and partnerships revenue projections should be more conservative. While welcoming the organization's proposed strategic priorities for 2020 and beyond, the group sought more information, including the identification of alternative financing solutions, such as a revolving fund.

435. The group asked about results achieved and planned interventions for the business-for-results initiative and its contribution to the next strategic plan. Citing the Connecting Business initiative, the group requested that the following year's reporting include additional examples of collaboration among United Nations agencies on private-sector engagement. Noting that actual expenses for private-sector engagement remained below the approved budget, the group sought more information.

436. A delegation asked how UNICEF would broaden the regular resources base beyond individual pledge and legacy donors and how it would avoid jeopardizing the growth of regular resources as a result of reducing investment funds. The delegation was encouraged by the positive results on business engagement, the increase in child-rights policies adopted by Governments and the income targets for regular resources. A delegation asked how the organization planned to accelerate its work with the business community, remarking that resources were required to impact the well-being of children and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

437. The Director, Private Fundraising and Partnerships, said that UNICEF consistently attempted to obtain the highest-quality funding from its public- and private-sector partners. The organization continued to implement its regular-resources acceleration strategy, which included the pursuit of a revolving fund for investment. UNICEF had revised its targets for 2019 to 2021 and presented the information to the Executive Board at its first regular session of 2020; more-recent projections would be presented at the current session under another agenda item. The proposed revolving fund would function in the emerging markets in which UNICEF country offices were based and in which there was high potential for individual-donor fundraising. More information on achievements in business for results had been provided in a background paper and the area would be considered in the design of the new strategic plan. The Director explained that what might appear to be unspent budget for private-sector engagement was actually an approved ceiling.

438. The Chair of the Standing Group of National Committees announced that his term would end the following month and said that he had been honoured to represent the National Committees over the previous five years. He asserted that the partnership was unique and must be safeguarded.

439. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/23 (see annex I).

## **K. Joint comprehensive proposal on the cost-recovery policy**

440. The Comptroller and Director of the Division of Financial and Administrative Management presented the proposal ([DP/FPA-ICEF-UNW/2020/1](#)), which had been developed jointly with UNDP, UNFPA and UN-Women.

441. In general statements delivered at the start of the session, a delegation expressed appreciation for the modification of UNICEF cost categories to increase transparency and reflect the financing of audit-related activities.

442. A group of delegations recognized the strong progress made by the four agencies on harmonizing cost classifications and the more rigid and transparent handling of waivers; the policy was a big step forward on transparency.

443. The group suggested a future focus on expanding the policy harmonization throughout the United Nations development system, establishing a review mechanism and, over the following five years, improving the evidence base regarding the application, effects and impact of the policy. The group suggested a regular review of the policy for continued relevance and usefulness and requested that the agencies provide harmonized, transparent annual reporting to the Executive Boards. The group emphasized the need for the careful monitoring of compliance with the revised policy and would welcome reporting on waivers and the resulting financial losses to the Boards.

444. The Comptroller cited the challenge of policy harmonization beyond the four New York-based agencies. He appealed to the members of the Executive Board for their support in facilitating harmonization throughout the United Nations system by advocating through their representation on the governance bodies of the agencies headquartered outside New York.

445. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, reported that the financial framework would be updated on the basis of feedback received during the session. The updated framework would be part of the development of the Strategic Plan and integrated budget, 2022–2025.

446. The Executive Board adopted decision 2020/24 (see annex I).

## **L. Other matters**

### **Provisional list of agenda items for the first regular session of 2021**

447. The provisional list was presented by the Secretary of the Executive Board.

## **M. Adoption of draft decisions**

448. The Executive Board adopted the draft decisions ([E/ICEF/2020/L.14–E/ICEF/2020/L.24](#)). The President and several delegations made statements in reference to the decision on item 12 ([E/ICEF/2020/L.21](#)).

449. The President thanked the delegations for flexibly facilitating consensus adoption, demonstrating the importance they attached to the Executive Board's mandate. The Board rejected all forms of discrimination, including racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. She trusted that a constructive approach and spirit of accommodation would continue to prevail.

450. On behalf of a regional group, a delegation thanked the facilitators, especially the facilitator of the decision on item 12, for professionally managing the informal consultations, bridging divides and finding compromise, and thanked the regional

groups for their efforts to find consensus. The regional group affirmed the importance of the organizational culture of UNICEF for delivering on its mandate in an inclusive, accountable and effective manner. The work of the Internal Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination was paramount to ensuring that the organizational culture of UNICEF reflected its values and its mission to realize the potential of every child, everywhere.

451. On behalf of another regional group, a delegation thanked the President for her leadership and the facilitators and Member States for their joint efforts in adopting important decisions. The regional group was committed to every child and every right and to collective action towards that goal. It appreciated the Executive Director's firm, proactive commitment to bold actions to ensure a safe, respectful and enabling workplace for all UNICEF staff to help them to fulfil the mandate of protecting children's rights. The regional group appreciated the launch of the Internal Task Team to prevent and respond to all forms of discrimination, including racism and racial discrimination against Africans and people of African descent, in policies, procedures and programmes of UNICEF, and looked forward to the Internal Task Team's report at the annual session of 2021. The regional group highlighted the General Assembly's proclamation of 2015 to 2024 as the International Decade for People of African Descent (resolution [68/237](#)), reflecting the international recognition that people of African descent represented a distinct group whose human rights must be promoted and protected. The regional group would continue to engage constructively on measures conducive to the promotion and protection of those rights both inside and outside the organization.

452. Aligning itself with the statement of this regional group, a delegation expressed appreciation to the Executive Director for her commitment to making UNICEF a better place to work for all staff, without discrimination on any grounds. The decision adopted under item 12 succeeded in that regard, but failed to strongly reiterate the commitment to leave no one behind. In the fight against racism, the worst form of discrimination, Africans and people of African descent were the furthest left behind and deserved special attention. The delegation welcomed the Executive Director's timely initiative to establish the Internal Task Team and recalled the Executive Director's June 2020 statement that the worldwide protests against racism and intolerance were being echoed by UNICEF staff, highlighting that Africans and people of African descent were particularly discriminated against on the basis of skin colour. The delegation looked forward to the report on UNICEF actions to prevent and respond to racism, with a particular emphasis on the most vulnerable, who, in this instance, were Africans and people of African descent. The delegation expressed support to the Executive Director for her action in tackling these issues as well as appreciation to the facilitator of the decision on item 12 for her patience and hard work.

453. Another delegation expressed strong admiration and gratitude for the articulation by the delegation and the two regional groups of the basic premises upon which all the good work of the Executive Board was based.

## **N. Closing statements by the Executive Director of UNICEF and the President of the Executive Board**

454. The Executive Director thanked the President for her leadership throughout an extraordinary year, as well as the Bureau and the Executive Board for their stewardship. Staff members around the world were counting on their oversight and guidance, including on CPDs. The pandemic had changed the work of UNICEF, but had not stopped it. UNICEF would use the moment to reimagine every aspect of the



organization, from programming to partnerships, to how and where it worked, to how it supported staff members. From immunization, to distance learning, to stronger social-protection systems, to more-effective primary healthcare, including SRHR, innovations would deliver services more effectively and more data and evidence would underpin it all. A constant focus on achieving results for children in the most cost-effective, innovative and efficient manner was paramount, as was improving and simplifying work processes. UNICEF would continue to strive to make its workplace welcoming and inclusive for all employees. She expressed appreciation for the generosity and trust of donors for the \$1 billion in support so far for the COVID-19 response and she called on Member States to strive for the funding compact target of 30 per cent of donations for regular resources.

455. The Executive Director thanked several departing colleagues for their service: Eva Mennel, Director of Human Resources; Bernt Aasen, Regional Director, Latin America and Caribbean Region (LACRO); and Hai Kyung Jun, Secretary of the Executive Board; as well as David Morley, Chair of the Standing Group of UNICEF National Committees. She noted the transfer of Gary Stahl, Director, Private Fundraising and Partnerships, to LACRO and welcomed Gilles Fagninou, the new Secretary of the Executive Board. She also thanked the technical staff who had enabled the virtual session.

456. The President noted that, despite constraining circumstances, the session had been productive. She expressed appreciation to the Board members for their constructive contributions and the lively debates and to the experts for their work on the decisions.

457. Education had been a constant theme throughout the session, with agreement that children must return to school soon. The CPD discussions had reflected the thorough in-country consultation process, and the President noted the appreciation expressed by the concerned Governments for the work of UNICEF and the United Nations country teams. She reiterated the importance of flexible and predictable funding for UNICEF to deliver and the worrisome downward trend in regular resources.

458. The year had been challenging, but over three sessions, the Board had adopted 24 decisions. The participation of guest speakers had provided a different perspective, showing the value of partnerships, including with the private sector. As country teams worked more closely together, the support of the United Nations system to Governments would be more efficient and relevant.

459. The President expressed appreciation to the Secretary of the Executive Board for her support throughout a difficult year and welcomed the new Secretary. She thanked the Executive Director for her inspiring leadership; the Board members for their flexibility in adapting to the virtual format; and the secretariat for ensuring seamless continuity in the Board's work, in spite of the pandemic.

460. Despite the devastation of COVID-19, efforts to protect and save children continued, with many promising UNICEF initiatives to mitigate the impact and help Governments and communities to build back better. The pandemic must not be allowed to become a children's crisis, threaten the achievements made thus far towards the 2030 Agenda or push the vulnerable into further disadvantage. In closing, the President wished all continued health and safety.

## Annex I

### Decisions adopted by the Executive Board in 2020

#### First regular session, 11–13 February 2020

2020/1

##### Working methods

###### *The Executive Board*

1. *Recalls* decision 2019/20 of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on the working methods of the Executive Board and reiterates its requests therein;

2. *Takes note* of the joint response of the Executive Board secretariats on the working methods of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), UNICEF, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the World Food Programme (WFP);

3. *Takes note with appreciation* of the revised guidelines for the field visits of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF and UN-Women, and for the joint field visits of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP;

4. *Requests* the secretariat of the Executive Board of UNICEF, in collaboration with the secretariats of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS and UN-Women, to submit to Member States, ahead of the annual session of 2020, with a view to conclude discussions on the working methods no later than the second regular session, a concrete proposal for a rearranged annual workplan of the Executive Board for 2021, which includes daily schedules of the three sessions and informal consultations, supported by a detailed comparative analysis of potential implications on items for decisions, overall costs, efficiency and oversight, with a view to reducing the workload of the second regular session by shifting agenda items among formal sessions, as appropriate;

5. *Recalls* decision 2018/14 and stresses the need to continue to harmonize the consideration of common agenda items across the respective Executive Board agendas and requests the secretariat of the Executive Board of UNICEF, in collaboration with the secretariats of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS and UN-Women, to reflect it in the proposal of a rearranged workplan for 2021;

6. *Also recalls* decision 2018/14 and requests UNICEF management to circulate timely written responses to those questions raised at formal sessions of the Executive Board that could not be answered;

7. *Takes note with appreciation* of the current tracking system of the decisions of the Executive Board and requests the secretariat to put the full text of decisions into the system so that Member States have full oversight on follow-up and fulfilment of decisions, starting in 2019.

*First regular session  
13 February 2020*

**2020/2**

**Country programme documents**

*The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* that the country programme documents, including aggregate indicative budgets, for Cuba, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and Paraguay ([E/ICEF/2020/P/L.1–E/ICEF/2020/P/L.4](#)) were made available to Member States for their comments and input from 19 November to 9 December 2019, 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 Cuba, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and Paraguay ([E/ICEF/2020/P/L.1–E/ICEF/2020/P/L.4](#)).

*First regular session  
12 February 2020*

**2020/3**

**Extensions of ongoing country programmes**

*The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the first two-month extensions of the country programmes for Argentina and Uruguay; and the first one-year extensions of the country programmes for Colombia, Lebanon, Tajikistan and Zimbabwe, all of which were approved by the Executive Director and are presented in table 1 of document [E/ICEF/2020/P/L.5](#);

2. *Approves* the three-month extension of the country programme for South Africa, following a previous 15-month extension and a previous one-year extension, as presented in table 2 of document [E/ICEF/2020/P/L.5](#).

*First regular session  
13 February 2020*

**2020/4**

**Extension of the Vaccine Independence Initiative and its revolving fund**

*The Executive Board*

*Approves* a five-year extension of the Vaccine Independence Initiative for the period 2021 to 2025, in accordance with the terms of the original document approved by the Executive Board in 1991 ([E/ICEF/1991/P/L.41](#)) and as amended by the Board in its decision 2015/5.

*First regular session  
13 February 2020*

**2020/5**

**Evaluation of innovation in UNICEF work, and management response**

*The Executive Board*

1. *Welcomes* the evaluation of innovation in UNICEF work and its summary ([E/ICEF/2020/3](#)) and takes note of the recommendations and the UNICEF management response ([E/ICEF/2020/4](#));

2. *Emphasizes* the continued importance of cooperation by UNICEF with other United Nations agencies with regard to the development and implementation of innovations, and encourages UNICEF to include information on such cooperation in future reporting;

3. *Encourages* UNICEF to work in close cooperation with the Principal Adviser, Organizational Culture, to succeed in achieving an open and innovative work culture within UNICEF.

*First regular session  
13 February 2020*

## **2020/6**

### **UNICEF financial report and audited financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2018 and report of the Board of Auditors, and management response**

#### *The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the report of the Board of Auditors for the financial period that ended on 31 December 2018 ([A/74/5/Add.3](#)) as well as the management response ([E/ICEF/2020/AB/L.2](#));

2. *Notes* the unqualified audit opinion for 2018 issued by the Board of Auditors for UNICEF;

3. *Calls* for UNICEF management to systematically continue to improve the maturity of risk management at all levels, particularly strengthening accountability and implementation of the internal control frameworks;

4. *Requests* UNICEF to prioritize the follow-up of those identified organizational weaknesses that pose the greatest risks to results achievement;

5. *Also requests* UNICEF to take all necessary measures, including the capacity-building of implementing partners, to ensure the full implementation of the principles and processes stipulated in the Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers (HACT) in all its country offices and regional offices.

*First regular session  
13 February 2020*

## **2020/7**

### **Private Fundraising and Partnerships: 2020 workplan and proposed budget**

#### *The Executive Board*

1. *Notes* the high, medium and low revenue scenarios for 2020, as shown in table 3 of document [E/ICEF/2020/AB/L.1](#);

2. *Approves* a budget for special purpose activities of \$151.4 million from regular resources, comprising \$85 million for investment funds and \$66.4 million for other private sector fundraising costs, and the establishment of an other resources ceiling of \$59.9 million based on the medium scenario in table 3;

3. *Authorizes* UNICEF

(a) To redeploy resources between the various regular resources budget lines (as detailed in paragraph 1, above), up to a maximum of 10 per cent of the amounts approved;

(b) To increase or decrease expenditures up to the levels indicated in columns I and III of table 3 of document [E/ICEF/2020/AB/L.1](#) should the apparent

revenue from fundraising increase or decrease to the levels indicated in columns I and III;

(c) To spend an additional amount between Executive Board sessions, when necessary, up to the amount caused by currency fluctuations, to implement the 2020 approved workplan;

4. *Encourages* the Executive Director to identify and respond to new market opportunities, should they arise, between Executive Board sessions and to notify the Board accordingly;

5. *Approves* an interim one-month allocation for January 2021 of \$15.1 million (or 10 per cent of the special purpose regular resources allocation of \$151.4 million), to be absorbed in the annual Private Fundraising and Partnerships budget for 2021;

6. *Notes with appreciation* that UNICEF will present a full report on the implementation of the Private Sector Plan 2018–2021: IMPACT for Every Child at the second regular session of 2020.

*First regular session  
13 February 2020*

## **Annual session, 29 June–2 July 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

## **Second regular session, 8–11 September 2020**

### **2020/14**

#### **Working methods**

##### *The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note with appreciation* of the joint paper with concrete proposals for rearranged annual workplans of the Executive Boards for 2021, prepared by the secretariats of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Office for Project Services, the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women);

2. *Approves* the proposed shift in items among formal sessions, which seeks to reduce the workload of the second regular session;

3. *Requests* the secretariat to ensure that sufficient time is allotted to each session of the Executive Board and each of their items as well as to the respective informal consultations to enable the Executive Board to exercise its oversight function.

*Second regular session*  
11 September 2020

### **2020/15**

#### **Country programme documents**

##### *The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* that the country programme documents, including aggregate indicative budgets, for Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Serbia and Kosovo (under Security Council resolution [1244 \(1999\)](#)), Timor-Leste, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uganda ([E/ICEF/2020/P/L.11–E/ICEF/2020/P/L.20](#) and [E/ICEF/2020/P/L.18/Add.1](#)) were made available to Member States for their comments and input from 16 June to 8 July 2020;

2. *Approves* on a no-objection basis, and in accordance with decision 2014/1, the country programme documents, including aggregate indicative budgets, for Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Serbia and Kosovo (under Security Council resolution [1244 \(1999\)](#)), Timor-Leste, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uganda ([E/ICEF/2020/P/L.11–E/ICEF/2020/P/L.20](#) and [E/ICEF/2020/P/L.18/Add.1](#)).

*Second regular session  
10 September 2020*

## **2020/16**

### **Extensions of ongoing country programmes**

#### *The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the first two-month extensions of the country programmes for Armenia, Azerbaijan, China, Eswatini, Georgia, Malaysia, North Macedonia, Panama, Somalia and Uzbekistan; the five-month extension of the country programme for Argentina, following a previous two-month extension; and the first one-year extensions of the country programmes for Bangladesh, Cameroon, El Salvador, Guinea-Bissau, Libya, Maldives, Mozambique and Oman, all of which were approved by the Executive Director and are presented in table 1 of document [E/ICEF/2020/P/L.21/Rev.1](#);

2. *Approves* the two-month extension of the country programme for Tunisia, following a one-year extension; the two-month extension of the country programme for the Syrian Arab Republic, following two consecutive one-year extensions, a nine-month extension and a three-month extension; the six-month extension of the country programme for Madagascar, following a one-year extension; the one-year extensions of the country programmes for Guatemala and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, both following previous one-year extensions; the two-year extension of the country programme for Burkina Faso; and the two-year extension of the country programme for Yemen, following two consecutive one-year extensions, a two-year extension and a one-year extension, as presented in table 2 of document [E/ICEF/2020/P/L.21/Rev.1](#).

*Second regular session  
11 September 2020*

## **2020/17**

### **Structured dialogue on financing the results of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021**

#### *The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the structured dialogue on financing the results of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 ([E/ICEF/2020/21](#));

2. *Welcomes* the efforts made by UNICEF jointly with 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) to improve the structured funding dialogues;

3. *Notes* the importance of sufficient and predictable regular resources, which are critical for UNICEF to be able to accelerate programming to meet the child-related Sustainable Development Goals and to equitably reach all children, everywhere, so that they can fulfil their rights;

4. *Stresses* the importance of funding predictability and urges the Member States to prioritize regular resources and multi-year pledges for 2020 and future

years, given that reductions in regular resources jeopardize the ability of UNICEF to achieve the results of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021;

5. *Requests* UNICEF to update the Executive Board ahead of the annual session of 2021 and report at the second regular session of 2021, as part of the structured funding dialogue, on how UNICEF will mitigate the effects of potential decreases in regular and other resources, including the impact on the implementation of the Strategic Plan;

6. *Recognizes* the progress made by UNICEF on entity-specific commitments of the funding compact and requests UNICEF to engage with United Nations development system entities and the United Nations Development Coordination Office in the Office's coordination of a further harmonization of these indicators across the United Nations development system while maintaining their entity-specific relevance;

7. *Notes* the lack of a commonly agreed definition for “joint activities” and requests UNICEF to engage with United Nations development system entities and the United Nations Development Coordination Office in the Office's coordination of the formulation of a system-wide definition of joint-activity expenditures undertaken by the United Nations development system entities that accurately reflects the cooperation taking place among United Nations development system entities on joint development activities;

8. *Requests* UNICEF to continue to support the full implementation of the Business Operations Strategy across all United Nations country teams by 2021;

9. *Also requests* UNICEF to present information on its strategies for and approaches to increasing the level of thematic contributions, as well as the challenges, at the second regular session of 2021.

*Second regular session  
11 September 2020*

## **2020/18**

### **Evaluation of the UNICEF contribution to education in humanitarian situations, and management response**

#### *The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note with appreciation* of the evaluation of the UNICEF contribution to education in humanitarian situations, its summary ([E/ICEF/2020/19](#)) and conclusions and welcomes its management response ([E/ICEF/2020/20](#));

2. *Supports* UNICEF management in its follow-up and implementation of all recommendations made in the evaluation, in particular with regard to promoting equal education opportunities;

3. *Requests* UNICEF to continue to provide global leadership on education in emergencies, services and supplies and to deepen integrated approaches to promoting girls' and adolescent mothers' education in emergencies and protracted crises and to promoting equitable learning opportunities, gender equality and disability inclusion in and through education efforts;

4. *Welcomes* the advocacy role of UNICEF in prioritizing and increasing funding to education in emergencies, with particular attention to flexible financing to enable the allocation of resources according to the needs of affected regions.

*Second regular session  
11 September 2020*

**2020/19**

**Report of the Ethics Office of UNICEF for 2019, and management response**

*The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the report of the Ethics Office of UNICEF for 2019 (E/ICEF/2020/22) and its management response (E/ICEF/2020/23);

2. *Also takes note* of the comprehensive implementation of recommendations with regard to the Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure Programme and welcomes the achievement of a 100 per cent compliance rate;

3. *Requests* UNICEF to provide sufficient resources to the Ethics Office based on the assessment of the level of resources and requests UNICEF and the Ethics Office to continue to report on the adequacy of resources made available to the Ethics Office;

4. *Takes note* of observations made in the report of the Ethics Office for 2019 (E/ICEF/2020/22) as well as the report of the Audit Advisory Committee with regard to potential overlaps and duplications within the UNICEF accountability framework and requests UNICEF to present to the Executive Board at the annual session of 2021 a reviewed accountability framework structure clarifying the distinct responsibilities of pertinent UNICEF units and roles.

*Second regular session  
11 September 2020*

**2020/20**

**Office of Internal Audit and Investigations 2019 annual report to the Executive Board, and management response**

*The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the UNICEF Office of Internal Audit and Investigations 2019 annual report to the Executive Board (E/ICEF/2020/AB/L.3), its addendum (E/ICEF/2020/AB/L.3/Add.1) and its management response (E/ICEF/2020/AB/L.4) as well as the UNICEF Audit Advisory Committee 2019 annual report to the Executive Board;

2. *Welcomes* the overall opinion of the adequacy and effectiveness of the organization's framework of governance, risk management and control;

3. *Also welcomes* the conclusion of the external quality assessment of the internal audit function by the Institute of Internal Auditors, which issued its report in November 2019 in which UNICEF received the top rating of general conformance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing and with the Institute of Internal Auditors' Code of Ethics;

4. *Takes note* of the assessment of the Office of Internal Audit and Investigations that its resources are inadequate for the fulfilment of its mandate and requests UNICEF to ensure adequate resources and staffing capacities for the Office;

5. *Encourages* UNICEF to work with the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Office for Project Services, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the World Food Programme and agree on harmonized definitions and reporting for audit and investigation matters and, where applicable, to provide the Executive Board with a more coherent overview of findings and results.

*Second regular session  
11 September 2020*

2020/21

**Update on the implementation of the recommendations made in the independent panel review of the UNICEF response to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse; the Morgan Lewis report on sexual harassment investigations conducted by the UNICEF Office of Internal Audit and Investigations; and the report of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority**

*The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the report on the update on the implementation of the recommendations made in the independent panel review of the UNICEF response to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse; the Morgan Lewis report on sexual harassment investigations conducted by the UNICEF Office of Internal Audit and Investigations; and the report of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority (E/ICEF/2020/24);

2. *Takes note with appreciation* of the update provided by UNICEF on the implementation of the recommendations made in the independent panel review of the UNICEF response to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse; the Morgan Lewis report on sexual harassment investigations conducted by the UNICEF Office of Internal Audit and Investigations; and the report of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority, and notes with appreciation the increasing inter-agency cooperation;

3. *Notes* progress made and the need for continued effort and focus on preventing and taking immediate action on tackling sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment, including ensuring that policies and procedures deliver impact and are resourced sufficiently, and that proposed actions are implemented at the country, regional and global levels;

4. *Requests* UNICEF to continue to take action to ensure a victim-centred, system-wide and coherent approach at all levels to prevent and tackle sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, while leveraging its mandate, and to address the increased risk of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment during the COVID-19 response and recovery;

5. *Also requests* UNICEF to continue to provide updates to the Executive Board on how UNICEF is preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in its policies, procedures and operations at all levels, taking into account the recommendations from the independent review;

6. *Encourages* UNICEF to give the same level of consideration to all the issues raised in the 2019 report of the Independent Task Force and requests UNICEF to highlight in particular its actions taken in implementing the Independent Task Force's recommendations related to abuse of authority in its next update on this matter at the annual session of 2021;

7. *Takes note with appreciation* of the establishment of an Internal Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination and requests UNICEF to report to the Executive Board at the annual session of 2021 on the work of this task team and on UNICEF actions to prevent and respond to all forms of discrimination, including racism and racial discrimination, in its policies, procedures and programmes.

*Second regular session  
11 September 2020*

**2020/22**

**UNICEF Strategic Plan: updated financial estimates, 2020–2023**

*The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the planned financial estimates for the period 2020–2023 as contained in document [E/ICEF/2020/AB/L.7](#) as a flexible framework for supporting UNICEF programmes;
2. *Approves* the integrated resources framework of planned financial estimates for the period 2020–2023, and approves the preparation of country programme expenditure submissions to the Executive Board of up to \$0.88 billion from regular resources in 2021, subject to the availability of resources and the continued validity of these planned financial estimates;
3. *Requests* UNICEF to provide annual updates to the Executive Board on the progress of funding its reserves for staff liabilities;
4. *Takes note* of the proposed and projected income-expenditure ratio of UNICEF for the period 2021–2023 and the corresponding reduction in the available balance of regular resources and other resources and requests UNICEF to closely monitor financial risks in light of the reduced cash reserves, and furthermore encourages UNICEF to maintain the level of liquidity in regular resources over the period of the next Strategic Plan at a minimum threshold of the equivalent of expenditure for three months.

*Second regular session  
11 September 2020*

**2020/23**

**Private Fundraising and Partnerships: financial report for the year ended 31 December 2019**

*The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the Private Fundraising and Partnerships: financial report for the year ended 31 December 2019 ([E/ICEF/2020/AB/L.8](#));
2. *Recognizes* the funding model of UNICEF, which relies on significant contributions from the private sector;
3. *Takes note with concern* of the significant shortfalls in private-sector revenue compared with the original 2019 target and the decrease of regular resource revenue compared with the previous year and encourages UNICEF to review private-sector revenue growth targets ahead of the elaboration of the Private Fundraising and Partnerships: 2021 workplan and proposed budget, to be presented at the first regular session of 2021;
4. *Encourages* UNICEF to continue digital investments, the identification of alternative financing solutions and the business for results initiative, and requests UNICEF to present in the Private Fundraising and Partnerships: 2021 workplan and proposed budget, to be presented at the first regular session of 2021, its strategic approach thereof, including more information on the envisaged revolving fund;
5. *Also encourages* UNICEF to increase its efforts in the fundraising of regular resources from private-sector sources beyond individual donors, including from philanthropists, foundations and businesses, and to report on successes and challenges at the second regular session of 2021.

*Second regular session  
11 September 2020*



2020/24

**Joint comprehensive proposal on the cost-recovery policy**

*The Executive Board*

1. *Approves* the joint comprehensive cost-recovery policy (DP/FPA-ICEF-UNW/2020/1), including cost-classification categories, methodology and rates, effective 1 January 2022;

2. *Requests* UNICEF, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), to adapt the presentation of the National Committees' rates in table 4 of the policy, clarifying that in the case of UNICEF, the 5 per cent rate is applicable only to thematic contributions raised by National Committees;

3. *Resolves* that the comprehensive cost-recovery policy as outlined in document DP/FPA-ICEF-UNW/2020/1 supersedes the previous cost-recovery policy, including cost-classification categories, methodology and rates;

4. *Decides* that agreements signed prior to 1 January 2022 will be honoured using the existing cost-recovery rates (per Executive Board decision 2013/5) and that new agreements as well as revisions of existing agreements that result in additional/new contributions signed after 1 January 2022, will comply with the rates in the cost-recovery policy as approved in this decision;

5. *Requests* UNICEF, in collaboration with UNDP, UNFPA and UN-Women, to provide harmonized annual reporting on the progress of implementation of the cost-recovery policy as an annex to their respective existing reporting, including the presentation of the financial impact of the harmonized differentiated rates and waivers granted, and to continue including, in line with the policy, inter alia, an itemization of each waiver/discount listing the donor name, total contribution, programme name, cost-recovery rate and United States dollar value of the waiver/discount, as well as the resulting effective cost-recovery rates and cost-recovery amounts realized;

6. *Also requests* UNICEF, in collaboration with UNDP, UNFPA and UN-Women, to present, in a harmonized way in their existing reporting the calculations of the notional cost-recovery rates in their respective integrated budget documents;

7. *Further requests* UNICEF, in collaboration with UNDP, UNFPA and UN-Women, to present a comprehensive review of the cost-recovery policy and its implementation for decision at the second regular session of 2024, and requests UNICEF to work with UNDP, UNFPA and UN-Women to organize a briefing in 2023 to present a joint timeline for the review and preliminary observations and findings from the implementation of the cost-recovery policy.

*Second regular session  
11 September 2020*

## Annex II

### **Report of the joint meeting of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP held on 29 May 2020<sup>1</sup>**

#### **United Nations Development System Reform in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

1. The President of the Executive Board of UN-Women opened the virtual joint meeting of the Executive Boards (JMB) on 29 May 2020, welcoming fellow Board Presidents; guest speaker, the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations; members and observers of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP; and the principals/representative of the six participating United Nations (UN) entities. He noted that this was a defining moment for the UN development system. Given the global COVID-19 pandemic, the UN would be expected to be functioning at its best – with effective and efficient coordination, void of overlap among entities. Underscoring the need to focus on already marginalized groups, the President of the UN-Women Executive Board cautioned that the pandemic was likely to also have an impact on public finances around the world, and thus the entire direction of the UN reforms would be all the more important.

2. In her opening address, the Deputy Secretary-General thanked the Executive Boards for their leadership and colleagues particularly at the country level, for their commitment in transforming the UN system. She alluded to the recently concluded ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment, stating that this JMB was an opportunity to ensure that the system-wide guidance of Member States would be effectively taken on board by each governing body. She spoke of the leadership and ownership across governing bodies collectively as being one of the significant features of the UN reform process, that would remain key for success, not only in moving ahead globally on the road to recovery from COVID-19, but also upon progressing through the Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

3. Expressing appreciation to all the Principals for their hard work, the Deputy Secretary-General mentioned that the entire UN Sustainable Development Group stepped up to assist in co-creating new mechanisms, guiding and supporting for a new generation of UN country teams. This was implemented, for example, through its leadership in the realignment of internal policies and tools to reflect the new structures and levels of accountability, as well as its financial contributions to the Resident Coordinator system.

4. While acknowledging that the COVID-19 pandemic presented additional challenges, she emphasized that the UN system was obliged to continue to run at full capacity. She called on participants to use this joint meeting as an accelerator for reforms, channeling attention to five specific areas where the leadership of agencies together with their respective governing bodies, would be critical: 1) Consolidating the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework – effort was still required to ensure this was established as the main planning instrument for UN country teams; 2) Aligning results reporting and harmonizing reporting indicators across entities -- it was critical to build on work already done, without necessarily need for the creation of new/additional indicators; 3) Anchoring the new Resident Coordinator system on a strong and sustainable foundation -- including through a sustainable funding base for the very critical coordination function. The Deputy Secretary-General took the

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<sup>1</sup> This report has not been edited by UNICEF.

opportunity to thank Member States for their contributions and for enabling cost-sharing contributions by all entities in the Executive Boards. She urged all Member States that had not yet done so, to consider a contribution to the Special Purpose Trust Fund for the Resident Coordinator system; 4) Implementing the Management Accountability Framework -- while progress was made to date, some provisions were still needed, notably the agreement for stronger coordination of fundraising efforts on the ground; and 5) Realizing mutual commitments of the Funding Compact -- although off to a good start with the majority of indicators on track, the Deputy Secretary-General expressed concern about the steady decrease in the share of core budgets of entities of the UN development system -- a trend that could seriously affect the quality of support to the 2030 Agenda. The Deputy Secretary-General assured participants of the commitment and readiness of the UN system to work with the governing bodies on seeking and creating solutions.

5. Highlighting the central role of gender equality within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the UN-Women Executive Director cited examples of coordinated response at global, regional and country levels that facilitated the identification of best practices. This included for instance, UN-Women's partnership with UNDP and the UN country teams in conducting rapid assessments of COVID-19's socio-economic impact in over 30 countries, encompassing all regions. Together with sister entities, UN-Women joined the Assistant Secretary-General (ASG)-level task force to develop the COVID-19 socio-economic response framework, which profiled pervasive gender inequality, with gender equality in all contexts. Noting the significant spike in gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, she mentioned that the EU-UN Spotlight initiative, with UNFPA, UNDP and UN-Women as lead entities, had identified important ways of using existing resources to address this surge. She underscored the importance of supporting frontline gender-based violence service providers and developing innovative technological solutions that have helped urgent response to the needs of survivors seeking safety and support. She urged countries that had not yet begun to treat domestic violence services as essential services, to do so.

6. The UN-Women Executive Director looked forward to continuing to collaborate on "building better" – a term she opined meant to "hardwire women's economic empowerment, climate-smart agriculture, ending racism and homophobia, and addressing infrastructure deprivation ... with gender equality at the heart of our collective response."

7. The UNICEF Executive Director mentioned that agencies came together from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic to support children and families, building on some joint initiatives undertaken over the last year to save costs and staff time, while achieving efficiencies. One such example was UNICEF's work with WFP to simplify and co-ordinate the procurement, delivery and distribution of food to prevent and treat malnutrition. Joint work that could save up to 30 per cent in health care training costs and up to \$12.5 million (or 10 per cent), in procurement costs in the medium-term. While joint efforts were being made to scale up for immediate response, focus was being maintained on the long-term needs of communities. She emphasized the significance of flexible funding and prioritizing investment for the future, highlighting areas such as digital connectivity for every school and community, mental health, ending violence, girls' education and water for all. The UNICEF Executive Director cited her organization's work with agency partners on the Joint SDG Fund and the Secretary General's Multi-Partner Trust Fund for COVID-19. For the future, this represented an important opportunity to strengthen systems, including social protection systems.

8. The UNOPS Executive Director noted the unique nature of the UNOPS business model which allowed for rapid and effective response to requests from governments, international financial institutions, private partners, and UN sister agencies. She spoke of close coordination with UN agencies at country level and existing and expanding partnerships with international financial institutions to jointly support governments in the context of the COVID-19 response, which centered around three main areas: helping countries prepare; respond; and recover. For example, in partnership with international financial institutions, UNOPS worked to assist governments in establishing and strengthening their national social protection systems, to protect the most vulnerable. The UNOPS Sustainable Infrastructure Impact Investments (S3I) initiative helped mobilize private investments in countries where UNOPS operated, while ensuring contributions were making a positive social, environmental, and economic impact. Building capacity of the small and mid-sized enterprises to facilitate access to global markets was another area of work highlighted, since strengthening the private sector was key for economic recovery, social stability, and community resilience.

9. The UNFPA Executive Director reiterated that vulnerable and marginalized populations were struck the hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic and therefore put to the test the organization's commitment to 'leave no one behind'. UNFPA estimated that the pandemic could result in millions more cases of gender-based violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation, and unintended pregnancies. She emphasized that ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights was therefore lifesaving. She assured that the UNFPA global response to COVID-19 fully aligned with the three pillars of the UN, framed by Agenda 2030. Citing specific country examples of collaboration, she mentioned that along with WHO, UNFPA co-led the drafting of the health pillar of the UN socio-economic response framework. Together with partners and the UN Secretary-General's office, UNFPA was working on reporting the impact of COVID-19 on issues such as gender, human rights, children, and older persons. As alluded to by the other agency Heads, under the leadership of Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators, UN country teams were repurposing activities to quickly respond to requests for assistance related to the pandemic. UNFPA was engaged in rapid socio-economic impact assessments, working jointly with partners to ensure that surveillance and response systems included disaggregated health data; along with UNICEF and WHO, UNFPA were jointly mobilizing resources to strengthen health system resilience to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic; and continuing to coordinate joint action on prevention and treatment of gender-based violence in humanitarian settings all over the world.

10. The UNDP Administrator mentioned in his remarks that flexibility, speed, agility and a networked approach have redefined how principals lead their respective entities in assisting countries' response to the COVID-19 pandemic, that started as a health crisis and quickly simultaneously became a social, economic and political crisis. With respect to UN system reform, he opined that it was encouraging to witness the UN converge and respond particularly at the country level with a high degree of flexibility. He noted that countries with good quality common country assessments already reflected the ability of the UN system to operate more readily and rapidly, which were critical indicators. These were clear signals of leadership and accountability. As the UN Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General underscored, the responsibility and accountability for a coordinated system-wide response to the COVID-19 pandemic at the country level resided with the Resident Coordinators. With respect to UNDP's role specifically, (with focus on both resident and non-resident UN country teams), since the end of January 2020, the organization took important steps to refocus its own capacity to

respond. Immediate priorities and needs were considered, embedded within the overall UN system approach, for a health, humanitarian and socio-economic response that guided all the entities in their collaborative work. He alluded to the sobering revelation in the latest assessment undertaken by the Human Development Report Office of UNDP on the likely impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on human development in countries across the globe. It found that for the first time in thirty years there would be a reversal in the human development index. Underscoring specific risk to the sustainability of societies, the UNDP Administrator opined that it was the responsibility of the UN system as a whole to work together towards not only helping countries manage the crisis, but also using the opportunity to leverage investment in the kind of economies and societies for which countries were striving, while ensuring a path towards sustainable development.

11. The Assistant Executive Director of WFP, on behalf of the Executive Director, expressed concern that the implications of the socio-economic fallout could be even more devastating. Estimates indicated that the number of acutely hungry people was likely to double this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic to 260 million. She highlighted the commonalities across the health, human and development systems while speaking of the organization's focus on key areas such as the logistics and supply chain. Alluding to the restrictions on global movement as a result of the pandemic, she outlined WFP's role in this case, to provide logistics services with respect to related response efforts, such as moving equipment, cargo and workers to the frontlines. She opined that the UN's collective role was key in addressing hunger and its socio-economic impact.

12. WFP worked alongside UNICEF in crafting contributions to the UN Secretary-General's socio-economic framework on social protection and basic services in order to address growing and emerging needs in the areas of nutrition as well as building resilience to the COVID-19 virus. The WFP Assistant Executive Director, called attention to the more than 300 million children missing out on school meals as a result of pandemic; and the need to ensure that cash-based safety nets continued to be facilitated. She emphasized the significance of food systems to prevent the pandemic from translating into a hunger catastrophe. This was an opportunity to engage and support small farmers in restoring and maintaining their operations – all areas of work which required very strong partnerships across the UN system. The WFP Assistant Executive Director concluded that national response is essential to COVID-19 response and recovery and that the role of the UN was to support national response and to incorporate real-time learning in the process.

13. The President of the UNICEF Executive Board noted that the emergency had shown that much could be achieved through closer inter-agency collaboration, building on collective strengths of the system. The response to the pandemic could further drive efforts towards further UN system reform and innovative partnerships, evidence of which was highlighted by the Principals. She underlined the impact of the pandemic on children, their families and caregivers, that often made them more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, such as trafficking, cybercrimes, particularly among girls, migrants and disadvantaged children. She concurred with the UNICEF Executive Director and called for prioritization in investment in all the critical sectors to ensure strong societies, to avoid a generational crisis and noted that this was a testing time for the efficacy of the ongoing reform process, particularly in supporting the most vulnerable countries and populations. She underscored the need for the UN system's efforts to complement those of national governments, in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and to support their socio-economic recovery. The UNICEF Executive Board President welcomed that the agencies' response to the pandemic at the mid-point of their strategic plans, would shape programming for the remainder of the planned periods while preserving the gains made towards the SDGs. She reiterated

the call for flexible funding to ensure the UN system's rapid and innovative action, with respect to ongoing needs in response to the pandemic, while being mindful that essential ongoing programmes are not jeopardized.

14. The President of the WFP Executive Board commended the redoubling of efforts of the UN system to work jointly considering the pandemic. Sharing his perspective under the theme of the UN system's continued integrated support, he highlighted three main points, firstly on analysis, referring to the UN framework for immediate socio-economic response to the pandemic. He viewed this as a welcome comprehensive approach and commended the strong focus on food security, the food systemic risks of COVID-19, as well as the right to food -- noting that it would be an important guidance tool among others also in the discussions of the "Rome-based Membership informal Group of Friends for the Food Systems Summit 2021" in preparation for the Summit. He noted however, that the framework lacked clear conceptual connection/complementarity with the other components of the UN system response to COVID-19, particularly with respect to the humanitarian crisis response. Secondly, regarding interagency coordination mechanisms, he proposed further streamlining of the existing interagency coordination mechanisms at headquarters and regional levels, along with eliminating silos, with an even more integrated approach --through stronger linkage with the Development Coordination Office (DCO) and OCHA. Thirdly, on partnerships, the President of the WFP Executive Board further suggested the need to look beyond the UN and the UN development system as a whole, towards for example, including systematically, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in a closer interlinked UN inter-agency coordination of DCO and OCHA.

15. The President of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board stated that the challenges of COVID-19 presented an opportunity to test how the reform was working and in a very practical way, to assess the progress and success of some of that work, including the new Resident Coordinator system. The Latin American and Caribbean region witnessed the usefulness of the reform, as well as areas that could be improved and where there was need to strengthen collaboration. He aligned with the WFP Executive Board President on the advantages of widening the scope of collaboration, which he stated should not cease once the pandemic was over, but rather be strengthened to the point where the UN system and its partners were equipped to respond to crises of any kind. Referring to the need to revisit structural arrangements, he expressed this was the moment to assess whether the UN system was currently equipped to respond quickly. In this regard, he noted that there remained room for improvement in response to health crises with respect to how UN aid was moved to affected populations, such as in certain parts of the Latin American and Caribbean region that were still awaiting much needed medical supplies. This was an opportunity to revamp, rethink and rebuild new appropriate systems, he stated --a time to revisit current practice, analyze accordingly and to evaluate the operations of agencies.

16. Member States thanked the UN Deputy Secretary-General, the Principals, Executive Board Members, and the entire UN workforce for coming together and providing updates on their respective work, that continued uninterrupted through the current unprecedented crisis. They acknowledged particularly those working on the frontlines of the pandemic.

17. Delegations generally agreed that focus should be placed on long-term investment and recovery. All joint efforts were now more important than ever in addressing the multi-dimensional and complex challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic posed. A speaker noted that while the crisis put the spotlight on structural inadequacies and gaps, it was an opportunity to capture and make use of lessons learned and for Executive Board members to use their role in a more strategic manner.

18. Some speakers took the opportunity to pledge their continued support to the UN Funds and Programmes and for their efforts to respond to the pandemic. They opined that agency Heads had clearly demonstrated that implementation of the joint reform agenda had paved the way for enhanced positioning of the UN to assist Member States in their response to the complex impacts of the pandemic, with greater coherence, collaboration, coordination and efficiency. These efforts were undoubtedly saving millions of lives, especially in countries that already faced other humanitarian crises and development challenges and evidently threatening their achievement of the SDGs.

19. It was noted that in operationalizing the UN framework for immediate socioeconomic response to the pandemic, partnership should be considered as a standard operating principle, in terms of analysis and planning, as well as in how the UN Development System delivered its response. Member States appreciated that work was anchored on comparative advantage of the agencies/funds/programmes/entity, as well as with civil society, host governments, south-south cooperation, the private sector and international financial institutions. One speaker felt there was room to enhance collaboration between international financial institutions and Agencies, Funds and Programmes, stating that a global consensus needed to be reached with international financial institutions to increase resources to alleviate the payment of debt of emerging countries and contribute to their development.

20. Another speaker recalled the sobering assessment of the impact of the pandemic on human development, including the significant level of resources needed and advised on tapping into private finances and capacities of all actors at the global and local levels, in order to reach scale. Feedback was sought from the Principals on how Member States could further support integrated programming, policy advice and coordinated resource mobilization at the Executive Boards, and at the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of UN system operational activities (QCPR) in the Fall of 2020 — maintaining focus on partnership; the most vulnerable; the next generation; and collective effort in building back better for more inclusive, resilient sustainable and healthy communities. A delegation reiterated the central role of gender equality in building resilience within societies, commending the active engagement of UN-Women in alleviating the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, including its efforts in addressing gender-based violence and collection of gender disaggregated data among other areas. It was highlighted that the Commission on the Status of Women was the first intergovernmental body to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, that necessitated the scaling down of its activities. It was therefore important to reiterate the urgent need for accelerating the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, including the recent commitment in the form of the Political Declaration adopted on 9 March 2020 on the anniversary of the 25th anniversary of the 4th World Conference on Women.

21. The African Group members of the Executive Board of UNICEFS in a joint statement, emphasized the pandemic's disproportionate and concrete impact on children, as for example not only were hundreds of millions of children out of school facing a number of threats to their safety and well-being, but also family incomes were under severe threat or loss – situations whereby children often bear the consequences. Member States cautioned that if the impact of COVID-19 on children was not immediately addressed, global efforts and positive results so far since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, could be severely impacted. They called for redoubling of collective efforts for children not only for them to survive but also to reach their full potential. It was stated that more financial and human resources should be mobilized bearing in mind that this was the last Decade of Action of the SDGs.

22. Speaking as a donor, the European Union (EU) outlined the various impacts of the pandemic on societies around the world that threatened the hard-won progress towards the achievement of the SDGs and commended the UN Secretary-General's leadership throughout the pandemic. It was stated that the EU's efforts resonated well with the UN Secretary General's call to "Recover better" by building more sustainable, inclusive, and equitable societies. Their overall impression based on presentations to date was that COVID-19 for all the threat that it represented to the international community's common goals, served as an accelerator in bringing the agencies and the UN country teams closer together, fostering enhanced cooperation. The need to maintain this momentum was underscored so that the reformed UN Development System emerge stronger from the current crisis. The delegation expressed willingness to strengthen cooperation with the UN at all levels, notably with the UN Resident Coordinators and its country teams in the field. Highlighting major interventions, the delegation spoke of the "Team Europe" Global Response to COVID-19 to the tune of currently EUR 23 billion, that supported partner countries in addressing urgent needs. It was emphasized that there was need to ensure that women were actively involved in the COVID-19 response, as well as long-term recovery, in order to prevent progress made on gender equality from being reversed by the crisis. Increasing the cross-pillar coherence of the UN's work, as well as advancing on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, would therefore be of critical importance to address the multiple situations of fragility and significant humanitarian situations that were further exacerbated by the pandemic.

23. Acknowledging the value of the active support of the UN at the national level, delegations spoke of their own efforts to prevent and mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus. A delegation spoke of the implementation of immigration policies and other related experiences, in addition to data gathered during the outbreak assuring that they would be continuously shared with the international community. Another speaker mentioned its efforts to simultaneously take all possible measures to stimulate economic growth by investing a portion of its GDP to this cause. National authorities recognized the importance of acting with a sense of urgency, considering the best practices around the world. Participants were reminded that every effort should be made to ensure that even during this urgent time of crisis, other areas of cooperation, such as education, income generation, inequalities, and more importantly climate change, should not be neglected.

24. Reiterating the pivotal role of the Resident Coordinator in delivering robust and coherent UN support at a national level, it was also emphasized that this role included ensuring that agencies did not compete for limited resources. It was also important to ensure complementarity within the various funding channels responding to COVID-19, while maintaining efforts to incentivize private sector partnerships, as well as inter-agency collaboration and coherence. The heads of agencies also encouraged delegations to embrace the challenge posed by the pandemic to make the new normal better and focus on support for young people.

25. The UN-Women Executive Board President in his closing remarks, emphasized the unprecedented nature of the current global crisis and significance of the reaching global scale in the UN's collective response, working 'as one' but not alone. Solidarity was truly needed, especially in relation to the successful implementation of the UN development system reform. He thanked the Deputy Secretary-General, UN entities and Member States for their interactive discussion and invaluable inputs, as well as the Board Secretariat for organizing and ensuring smooth running of this virtual joint session.