

Check against delivery



Statement by
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Greetings! Before we begin, I invite you to watch a brief video highlighting just a few of the results UNFPA achieved in 2020.

Madam President,
Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,
Colleagues and friends,

I'm pleased to be with you for this annual session of the Executive Board as we continue our very fruitful dialogue and together chart the path ahead for UNFPA in our next Strategic Plan phase, 2022-2025.

The plan is a call to action, forged in the midst of a crisis that has forever altered us – as individuals and as a global community. No country has escaped unscathed.

The COVID pandemic has tested the bounds of global solidarity and countries' commitment to multilateralism, even as it is showing unequivocally that none of us is safe, until all of us are safe.

It has exposed huge fault lines in our societies, with the poorest and most vulnerable people, people of African descent, indigenous peoples, older persons, and those with disabilities, hardest hit. Once again, women and girls are bearing the brunt.

Many of the consequences UNFPA warned about early in the pandemic are now playing out— from the global surge in domestic violence, to spikes in child marriage, teenage pregnancy, female genital mutilation, and pregnancy-related complications and death.

Our fear is that pandemic-related disruptions could reduce progress towards ending gender-based violence and female genital mutilation by one third over the next decade, and we could see an additional 13 million child marriages.

And yet, the reality could have been much worse had UNFPA not sounded the alarm and rallied together with our partners and with countries to mount a timely response.

Rising to the challenge, UNFPA ensured that health workers received personal protective equipment and training to provide COVID-19-related services.

In 2020, UNFPA reached around 50 million women and young people with sexual and reproductive health services, including 2.5 million migrants, refugees and displaced persons, and we assisted 1.9 million safe deliveries in 42 humanitarian-affected countries.

To ensure that shelves were not bare at service delivery points, we strategically prepositioned and regularly monitored stocks of contraceptives and other life-saving supplies.

More than half a million women and girls subjected to violence accessed mental health and psychosocial support services.

Hotlines that depend on UNFPA support offer a lifeline to those at risk of violence.

My annual report highlights the significant results UNFPA achieved in the first three years of our current strategic plan. From 2018 to 2020, UNFPA helped avert nearly 59 million unintended pregnancies, 160,000 maternal deaths, and around 17 million unsafe abortions. More than 350,000 girls were protected from female genital mutilation, and tens of thousands of women and girls suffering from obstetric fistula received treatment.

One year into the COVID experience, UNFPA now prepares to transition into the second of our three strategic plans in the homestretch to 2030. I believe there are a number of lessons to be drawn.

First, in the words of Secretary-General António Guterres, solidarity is survival. Now is the time to step up international solidarity, not step away from it, including through official development assistance (ODA) commitments and equitable access to vaccines.

Second, functioning health systems are essential to our larger freedoms and development ambitions. And we cannot approach health, economic, social, humanitarian and peace interventions separately. We need to do a much better job of living up to the ideals of the 2030 Agenda in this regard.

Third, we need to accelerate progress. Even impressive gains can be worryingly fragile. Getting to our three transformative results—zero unmet need for family planning, zero maternal deaths, and zero gender-based violence and harmful practices—calls for stepping up, not backing down, even in the face of setbacks.

Fourth, our ability to be agile and responsive was in no small measure a result of the flexibilities that the early payment of core resources afforded us.

Most critically, the pandemic shines a harsh light on what we know to be true: gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is central to every single other development goal.

Strategic Plan

Our next Strategic Plan 2022-2025 responds to these lessons and is poised to meet this moment. It will be a global call to action to achieve our three zeros, based on data and evidence.

We want to use the next four years to contribute to a planet that is resilient, and that starts with resilient individuals, communities, countries.

This means building on our clear comparative advantages as a public health agency within the broader UN development system and maintaining a clear sense of where we can make an impact on a much bigger scale.

In March, I travelled to Sudan and saw the power of our collective investment in women and young people as drivers of development and peace. Indeed, the face of the transition in Sudan is female and it is young. A highlight of my mission was handing over the keys to a tuk-tuk ambulance to women leaders in Blue Nile State. Run by women for women and designed to manoeuvre even through rainy season floods, the tuk-tuk will enable free, rapid transport to medical facilities so that women in remote areas can give birth safely—critical for reaching zero maternal deaths.

I also met “Mama Iqbal”, a community leader on Tutti Island, whose tireless efforts led her community to declare zero tolerance for female genital mutilation.

She told me: “When we hear that a family intends to cut their daughters, we pack our coffee cups and go talk to them.” This is what it will take, in community after community, to end the practice everywhere.

That is why UNFPA supports women-led organizations – indeed, 40 percent of our humanitarian funding goes to these groups. They understand their communities’ needs and are the ones providing front-line support to women and girls.

With more Mama Iqbals and other allies, including men and boys, I believe that we can get to zero FGM.

This demonstrates why long-term investment in social norm change at community level is so important – a key feature of our next Strategic Plan.

The Plan will also focus on innovation, building on our experiences, for example, with telemedicine and digital technologies during the pandemic. UNFPA will invest in strengthening our innovation architecture, capabilities and culture, leveraging innovation ecosystems and financing.

In Moldova, we have teamed up with leading companies to advocate for gender-responsive family policies that allow couples to meet their desired fertility while supporting women’s career aspirations.

UNFPA is expanding our partnerships with governments, international financial institutions, the private sector, philanthropies and individual donors to help countries unlock the financing needed to achieve the three zeros.

Based on the latest evidence, the plan’s identified pathways will cover countries in humanitarian and fragile contexts – in line with the QCPR’s call for coherence between the humanitarian, development and peace pillars.

These pathways will prioritize work with adolescents and youth, the group with the greatest unmet need for contraception. Adolescents and youth are also often on the receiving end of harmful practices.

Data is the foundation of all our work. Data and analytics help us to identify those left behind, to inform advocacy and policies, and to support tracking and accountability.

Census is the preeminent source of data for development. Despite postponements due to the pandemic, nearly three-quarters of the population scheduled to be counted in the 2020 census round, was counted.

Last year, UNFPA supported the collection of real-time health and demographic data in Somalia; subnational population projections in Honduras and Eswatini; national surveys on violence against women in 10 countries in Asia-Pacific and 23 in East and Southern Africa; analysis of COVID-19 mortality in Latin America and the Caribbean; and a baseline survey on gender stereotypes in Eastern Europe.

Making good on our transformative aspirations requires that UNFPA itself transforms.

We will emphasize our normative role in all programme countries to advance development policies that address structural inequities and are human rights-based, integrating the effects of megatrends, such as climate change, demographic shifts, inequalities and digitalization.

During the next strategic plan phase, UNFPA will expand partnerships with civil society organizations, especially women- and youth-led organizations, and build local capacities to respond to risks and vulnerabilities.

We will prioritize the least developed countries and countries in humanitarian contexts. We will step up our work in Small Island Developing States, especially in the Caribbean and the Pacific.

We will strengthen our capacity to offer agile and resilient programmes that can reach the last mile, innovating using digital solutions.

We will emphasize a tailored response to local contexts, including in middle-income countries.

Delivering results together

As an agency fully committed to UN reform, UNFPA will continue to work closely with our UN partners for integrated, efficient action at country level. This includes strategic engagement with governments, ministries and parliaments, and aligning the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and our own country programme documents to respond coherently to national priorities and needs.

In keeping with our commitment to deliver as one, last year saw an increase in joint programming, operations and funding, as we worked together to respond to the pandemic. UN pooled funding – at US\$226 million – accounted for 27% of total non-core resources in 2020.

In Syria, UNFPA and the World Food Programme scaled up an electronic voucher system to help pregnant and breastfeeding women purchase food and hygiene items, and in Zimbabwe, we collaborated on joint distribution of contraceptives and food.

Together with the World Health Organization (WHO), we launched innovative online inspections of reproductive health commodities and promoted self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health.

The UNFPA-UNICEF global programme to end child marriage reached over 4.3 million girls with life-skills and sexuality interventions.

A joint partnership in East and Southern Africa between UNFPA, WHO, UNAIDS and UNICEF—'2gether 4 SRHR'—helped governments ensure service continuity and minimize the pandemic's impact on vulnerable women, children and young people.

The World Bank/UNFPA Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) project helped increase the income of nearly 27,000 girls and prevent 2.4 million unintended pregnancies.

UNFPA country offices adapted to continue to deliver for and with young people.

In Iran, we supported a mobile health prevention package to reach young women and men at risk of HIV.

Digital platforms helped us reach students with disabilities in Mongolia and young people on the autism spectrum in North Macedonia with accurate, age-appropriate sexuality education.

In Kenya, UNFPA is working to implement the first-ever development impact bond for adolescent sexual and reproductive health.

In Venezuela, UNFPA helped strengthen the health system and increase attention to adolescents through door-to-door distribution of modern contraceptives.

With UNFPA support, seven countries in Latin America and the Caribbean developed strategies to promote the participation and rights of young people of African descent.

We also implemented dedicated initiatives on ageing in more than 10 countries and worked with WHO to operationalize the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing.

Funding

These achievements are impressive in the face of a pandemic and were only possible thanks to the strong political and financial support we rely on from our many friends—support for which we are ever grateful and upon which we depend to keep moving forward.

Yet storm clouds are gathering. Coupled with the blow of COVID-19, there are prospects of economic downturn in many countries. Of concern, reductions in official development assistance are bound to hamper collective efforts to create a better future for all.

Now, UNFPA Supplies, the flagship of UNFPA's contraceptive commodities provision, faces deep cuts. UNFPA is desperately trying to figure out how to close the financial gap, and we call on this Executive Board for its full support.

The drastic loss of funding means the Supplies Partnership will be unable to prevent around a quarter of a million maternal and child deaths, over 14.5 million unintended pregnancies and more than 4 million unsafe abortions.

While ODA remains vital, increasing flows of public and private domestic and international finance is essential to bridge the US\$222 billion investment gap UNFPA and our partners estimate the entire reproductive health sector will need to achieve the three zeros by 2030. Getting funding to financing right will be critical to deliver on our ambitions.

Integrated Budget

The integrated budget reflects these elevated ambitions. It is based on prudent income projections, not needs, which as we know are much higher.

UNFPA is building its country programmes as investment cases to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. We need your support, both political and financial, to achieve the Strategic Plan's ambition, and to make its accompanying Integrated Budget a reality.

With a more difficult funding landscape as countries emerge from the pandemic, the need for core resources and increased multi-year funding, in keeping with the Secretary-General's funding compact, cannot be overstated.

For our part, UNFPA continues to enhance organizational effectiveness and efficiency, fully achieving all four outputs in this area and realizing operational efficiency gains of US\$8.3 million in 2020.

We remain committed to investing in our staff—UNFPA's greatest asset—and equipping them with the skills UNFPA needs to be fit for purpose.

Humanitarian

Madam President,

Today, UNFPA is providing lifesaving humanitarian assistance in more than 60 countries.

I saw first-hand the critical need for these essential services during my recent humanitarian missions, where I heard harrowing stories of desperation, sexual violence and exploitation.

In Yemen, families are marrying off their young daughters. At a locally run UNFPA shelter, I spoke to many girls who were promised a brighter future through marriage, but whose lives only got worse.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, I met Larise. She was raped by five men on her way home from a food distribution site and was so severely beaten that she spent five months in the hospital. "The men broke my body and shattered my soul," she told me. I listened as woman after woman recounted similar stories of the horrible, heavy price they pay with their rights, their bodies and their lives.

Yet these women are not passive victims. They were emboldened to call for change and for a greater voice in decision-making related to their safety and protection.

I shared their demands for action with the network of colleagues devoted to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. Such feedback mechanisms are essential to protect women's rights and deliver justice.

At the global level of humanitarian action, we have a strategy to improve the quality, availability, and delivery of humanitarian supplies; a new approach to gender-based violence; and we are strengthening humanitarian data capacity and human resources, including our surge response. The humanitarian annex to the Annual Report details this progress, including in response to the humanitarian capacity evaluation.

Oversight

When policies and programmes are informed by credible evaluative evidence there is a powerful multiplier effect on sustainable development.

The 2020 Annual Report on the Evaluation function highlights the Office's nimbleness in adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic, which generated evidence for an informed recovery and Strategic Plan 2022-2025.

The first-ever evaluation of UNFPA support to gender equality and women's empowerment provides evidence and lessons that have been reflected in the new Strategic Plan.

With UNFPA co-leading action in the Generation Equality Forum, we know that there is a great deal to be proud of, although clearly there is still work to do.

UNFPA continues to invest in all the independent functions. I commend the work of the Ethics Office and the Office of Audit and Investigation Services (OAIS), which is so important to our work and our commitment to accountability, transparency, and zero tolerance for wrongdoing of any kind. UNFPA has prioritized strengthening its independent oversight activities for many years now, with investments growing at a higher rate than overall income projections. Mindful of the ever-increasing and evolving complexities of the internal audit and investigation functions, the new Integrated Budget includes US\$40.7 million for OAIS for 2022-2025 – a 138%

increase over the 2010-2013 cycle, including a substantial increased investment in the investigation function.

I am very pleased to report that UNFPA obtained an unqualified external audit opinion in 2020 on our 2019 financial statements. We achieved a 96 percent implementation rate for internal audit recommendations, and we continue to invest in fraud prevention, detection and 'second line of defence' controls.

We have also introduced mitigation measures in response to the risks stemming from the additional flexibilities necessitated by the pandemic.

Members of the Oversight Advisory Committee, chaired by Ms. Enery Quinones, will soon end their term. UNFPA Senior Leadership have greatly appreciated their highly valuable advice.

Speaking of senior management, recently Mr. Benoit Kalasa retired after 25 years of dedicated service to UNFPA, most recently as the Director of the Technical Division. We thank him for his sound technical leadership and valuable contributions to UNFPA.

I am pleased to announce that in the coming months Dr. Julitta Onabanjo, currently Regional Director for East and Southern Africa, will take up the reins as Director of the Technical Division in Headquarters. In the interim, Ms. Anneka Knutsson, who leads UNFPA's Sexual and Reproductive Health Branch, will serve as Acting Director.

We welcome Mr. Mabingue Ngom as the new Senior Adviser to the Executive Director and Director of the UNFPA Representation Office to the African Union. He will play a pivotal role in strengthening UNFPA's partnerships on the African continent, including with the World Bank and the African Development Bank, building on his leadership in this area, most recently as UNFPA Regional Director for West and Central Africa.

Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment

Madam President,

UNFPA continues to strengthen our in-house capacities on protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment – a key priority. And we are determined to advance PSEA across the humanitarian sector in our role as Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Champion.

Already, UNFPA is building a roster of PSEA experts for rapid deployment to humanitarian and development settings, who will be available as of next month.

As Champion, I am spearheading an independent external review of the IASC approach to PSEAH, a training package for practitioners, and an advocacy campaign to inform at-risk individuals about their rights. UNFPA also leads efforts to harmonize the UN-systemwide approach to preventing implementing partner sexual exploitation and abuse.

UNFPA will continue to look into every allegation and respond in a prompt, structured and effective manner to every situation, but prevention remains at the centre of our efforts. Ending sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment is a matter of dignity, but it's also a matter of power. We will do everything in our power to make sure zero tolerance sticks, for any form of discrimination or abusive behaviour.

Madam President, Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,

UNFPA continues to stand up for the sexual and reproductive health and rights of the most vulnerable women and girls, for bodily autonomy, and for 'peace in the home', whether that 'home' is a house or a tent in a refugee camp.

Our most recent State of World Population report – *My Body is My Own* – highlights why this work is so important.

Nearly half of women lack the power to make their own decisions about whether to have sexual relations with their partner, use contraception or seek medical care. And this lack of autonomy can undermine their ability to exercise power and agency in other areas of their lives.

Conversely, a woman who has control over her body and lives free from violence is more likely to thrive. And as she thrives, so too will her family, her community and her society.

Bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights are at the heart of all UNFPA does – essential for full gender equality and a pre-condition for virtually all of the SDGs.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, it was my honour to confer with a key ally in global efforts to protect and defend women, none other than Nobel laureate Dr. Denis Mukwege, whose Panzi Hospital provides survivors of sexual and gender-based violence medical and psychological treatment, job skills and other support.

He said: “[Women] are the future of this country. It is our responsibility to support them so that they can realize their aspirations, be empowered to defend their rights, and do so in complete freedom. Those who tried to destroy these women didn’t succeed because they maintained their strength and kept moving forward.”

I am confident that, with Member States’ continued support and partnership and with the creativity and ingenuity UNFPA has in abundance, so too shall we all maintain our strength and keep moving forward.

Thank you.