



**Executive Board of the  
United Nations Development  
Programme, the United Nations  
Population Fund and the United  
Nations Office for Project Services**

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Item 1 of the provisional agenda

**Organizational matters**

**Report of the first regular session 2021  
(1 to 4 February 2021, New York)**

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## I. Organizational matters

1. The first regular session 2021 of the Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS was held virtually for the fourth time, on an exceptional basis, owing to the continued COVID-19 pandemic, from 1 to 4 February 2021. The newly elected President of the Board welcomed delegations and thanked the outgoing President and Vice-Presidents for their leadership and commitment to the work of the Board in 2020. She congratulated the new members of the Bureau on their election.

2. In accordance with rule 7 of the rules of procedure of the Executive Board, the Board elected the following members of the Bureau for 2021:

President:	H.E. Ms. Lachezata Stoeva	(Bulgaria)
Vice-President	H.E. Ms. Yoka Brandt	(The Netherlands)
Vice-President:	H.E. Mr. Lang Yabou	(The Gambia)
Vice-President:	H.E. Ms. Rabab Fatima	(Bangladesh)
Vice-President:	Undetermined at time of writing	(Latin America and the Caribbean)

3. The Executive Board approved the agenda and workplan for its first regular session 2021 (DP/2021/L.1 and Corr.1) and approved the report of the second regular session 2020 (DP/2021/1). The Board adopted the annual workplan for 2021 (DP/2021/CRP.1) and approved the tentative workplan for the annual session 2021.

4. Decisions adopted by the Executive Board in 2020 appeared in document DP/2021/2, which was available on the [Executive Board website](#).

5. The Executive Board agreed in decision 2021/3 to the following schedule for future sessions of the Executive Board in 2021:

Annual session 2021	7 to 11 June 2021 (New York)
Second regular session 2021:	30 August to 3 September 2021

### Statement by the President of the Board

6. The new President of the Board said 2020 was an extraordinary year in which the COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges of unimaginable magnitude. The pandemic showed the importance of international cooperation and multilateralism and need for the international community to work together to ensure recovery. The United Nations development system had a crucial role to play helping countries build back better and overcome socioeconomic challenges the pandemic had worsened. The Board's role was to ensure the organizations were equipped with guidance and tools to address those challenges.

7. In 2021, the Board would focus on: (a) ensuring the organizations' strategic plans, 2020-2025, were adopted; (b) achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the Decade of Action; (c) providing space for constructive, active, strategic, inclusive, transparent consultations in the Board and between the Board and the organizations across intersessional periods; (d) encouraging Board engagement with stakeholders such as civil society and private sector; (e) pursuing cooperation and coordination with the executive boards of the other funds, programmes and specialized agencies; (f) integrating outcomes of the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (A/RES/75/233) in the organizations' policies/work through Board oversight; and (g) improving Board effectiveness through pragmatic results-oriented, proactive approaches to providing guidance.

## Joint segment

### II. Recommendations of the Board of Auditors

8. The Director, Bureau for Management Services, UNDP, introduced the UNDP report on the implementation of the recommendations of the Board of Auditors, 2019 (DP/2021/3). The Deputy Executive Director (Management), UNFPA, introduced the UNFPA report on the implementation of the recommendations of the Board of Auditors, 2019 (DP/FPA/2021/1). The General Counsel and Director, New York Liaison Office, UNOPS, introduced the UNOPS report on the implementation of the recommendations of the Board of Auditors, 2019 (DP/OPS/2021/1). Also tabled was the report on the implementation of the recommendations of the Board of Auditors, 2019 for the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) (DP/2021/4).

#### *UNDP*

9. A group of delegations commended UNDP for its fifteenth consecutive clean audit and supported the Board's recommendation for swift implementation of Board of Auditors' recommendations, especially those outstanding. They commented, regarding UNDP-Global Environment Facility (GEF) projects, that timely implementation of outstanding recommendations on risk management, procurement, vendor oversight and internal controls might have mitigated challenges. They welcomed management's efforts to resolve issues of UNDP governance of GEF-funded projects through the management action plan and looked forward to steps to address Member States' concerns. Swift implementation of actions in the management action plan would address governance/oversight shortcomings. They recognized UNDP measures to address capacity issues behind policy breaks that led to lapses in oversight and accountability; and expected continued monitoring/reporting as measures were implemented and capacity challenges resolved. They said robust policies had no value without sustained, accountable compliance, backed by a conflict-of-interest-free management structure and division of labour for programming and oversight. Both required changes in culture and management accountability lines, which the Board expected in a strategy on institutional challenges. They anticipated the results of the Management Accountability Review Panel and consistent reporting from the Administrator's Office on the Strategic Controlling Unit's work.

10. Noting the generic-level findings and recommendations, a delegation encouraged the Board of Auditors to include in future a summary of key findings and recommendations from country visits and share summary findings on operational units to compensate for the lack of independent audits required in donor accountability frameworks.

#### *UNFPA and UNOPS*

11. Delegations made no specific comments regarding UNFPA and UNOPS.

12. In response, the Director, Bureau for Management Services, UNDP, said UNDP took a whole-of-organization approach to management oversight of the GEF portfolio and was putting controls in place. She assured Board members UNDP was engaging with GEF-related issues raised and would report to the Board as promised. Similarly, UNDP was in the process of setting up a new office to pursue organization-wide compliance with change-culture requirements.

13. On the generic findings, the Director of External Audit from Germany and Lead UNDP Auditor commented that when taking over the UNDP audit exercise, Germany decided to begin with generic questions before transitioning to the more specific. Field visits remained integral to audit methodology and did not exclude findings on different entities and country offices in future. The auditors used a careful approach to safeguard against erroneously concluding an issue of concern to a particular country was a broader trend affecting the entire organization.

14. The Board adopted decision 2020/1 on the reports of UNDP, UNCDF, UNFPA and UNOPS on the implementation of the recommendations of the Board of Auditors, 2019.

### **III. Follow-up to UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board meeting**

15. The Director, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, UNDP, and the UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Programme) gave a presentation on the joint UNDP and UNFPA report on the implementation of the decisions and recommendations of the Programme Coordinating Board of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) (DP-FPA/2021/1), which was followed by introductory remarks by the Deputy Executive Director, Management and Governance, ad interim, UNAIDS.

16. A group of delegations emphasized the need for continued strong response to the HIV pandemic, especially given COVID-19's effects on health services. It was important to focus on populations experiencing least progress, especially key populations, adolescent girls, and young women, and prioritize actions within the new global AIDS strategy, 2021-2026, where progress was most needed. The renewed engagement of UNAIDS co-sponsors and others was crucial, as was the right architecture to deliver. They welcomed UNAIDS co-sponsors' revised guiding principles and accountability framework. UNAIDS was urged to respond to Joint Inspection Unit recommendations in its review of the management and administration of UNAIDS (JIU/REP/2019/7) and the independent evaluation of the United Nations system response to AIDS, 2016-2019, to ensure UNAIDS was responsive to HIV response opportunities and challenges. The group acknowledged UNDP and UNFPA work and the important UNFPA contribution to realizing the rights and meeting the needs of the most vulnerable. They welcomed lessons on effective approaches for delivering services, particularly linking and integrating sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, HIV, and sexual/gender-based violence programmes and services. They welcomed UNFPA promotion of comprehensive sexuality education but stressed the need for better integration of HIV prevention/care and sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights services to prevent sexual transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancies. Increasing choice/access to family planning options remained critical. They appreciated UNFPA co-convening the Global HIV Prevention Coalition and stressed the need to improve United Nations system capacity to address underlying drivers of new infections. They acknowledged UNDP work to support countries reforming discriminatory laws/policies on HIV and health issues that perpetuated exclusion/marginalization. They welcomed acknowledgement of stigma and discrimination as major impediments to HIV responses; UNDP and UNFPA had important roles addressing those barriers and promoting rights-based policies/programmes. The group urged UNDP and UNFPA to work with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and partners in countries. They looked forward to working with Board colleagues and the Programme Coordinating Board to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 in line with achieving universal health coverage.

17. One delegation said the next global AIDS strategy had to build on existing gains and draw on lessons to address uneven progress across countries/communities. Prevention should be a cornerstone of global, regional, and country efforts, especially for key populations. Addressing structural/social causes of stigma and discrimination against key populations and people living with HIV/AIDS was critical.

18. Seeking clarification, a delegation, expressing full support for the work of UNAIDS and its partners, questioned the use of the term 'rights' in the phrase 'sexual and reproductive health and rights', stating that the term as used in the joint report did not adhere to internationally agreed or recognized language for official United Nations documentation.

19. In response, the Director, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, UNDP, recognized delegations' call to maintain a strong response to the HIV pandemic throughout COVID-19 and focus on key populations. On use of the term 'rights', recognizing social/cultural concerns, the

Director said United Nations system work was underpinned by human rights and rights-based approaches. Those approaches, which addressed underlying issues impeding service delivery/access, helped ensure sexual and reproductive health services reached most affected populations, improved national health systems, and achieved the Goals.

20. The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Programme) assured Board members that UNFPA would continue to focus on the most vulnerable and those most at risk of being left behind by expanding access to sexual and reproductive health services through the Global HIV Prevention Coalition. Regarding the question on ‘rights’, drawing attention to the Fund’s previous written response to the delegation, she took note of the point raised and said that UNFPA was guided by its strategic plan and ready to clarify further bilaterally as needed.

21. The Director, HIV, Health and Development Group, UNDP, commented that UNAIDS strong focus on, and integrated approach to, HIV prevention was crucial to address social and structural barriers to HIV generally, particularly those affecting key populations, young women, and girls. That focus would be reflected in the new global AIDS strategy

22. The Executive Board took note of the joint UNDP and UNFPA report on the implementation of the decisions and recommendations of the Programme Coordinating Board of UNAIDS (DP-FPA/2021/1).

## **UNDP segment**

### **Statement by the Administrator and interactive dialogue**

#### **Statement by the Administrator**

23. In his opening remarks ([available on the UNDP website](#)), the UNDP Administrator stressed that humanity was living through a development emergency characterized by successive crises of which the COVID-19 pandemic was the most recent. Global human development was set to drop for the first time in 30 years and would continue to do so unless humanity addressed the dual crises of extreme poverty and inequality, and climate change. UNDP was at the heart of the United Nations COVID-19 response, leading the socioeconomic response for communities most affected by poverty, inequality, and marginalization. That included addressing the ‘shadow pandemic’ of rising gender-based violence and going beyond income in measuring vulnerability, helping UNDP with partners work across diverse development contexts in an integrated way.

24. The Administrator said a whole-of-system approach was needed to tackle the multifaceted nature of the simultaneous crises, which underlined the importance of United Nations reforms in collectively demonstrating the full potential of a coherent, effective, repositioned United Nations development system. UNDP was focused on delivering results and emphasizing the mandates of the 2020 quadrennial review and unique role UNDP could play with other United Nations system partners to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals during the Decade of Action. Leveraging its integrator role as technical lead of the system-wide socioeconomic response to COVID-19, UNDP conducted more than 120 socioeconomic impact assessments in 93 countries and five regions and contributed to United Nations efforts that tripled the number of national socioeconomic response plans between July-December 2020. The assessments and plans built on evidence provided through mechanisms such as the UNDP Data Futures Platform, the UNDP–United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) gender response tracker, and with UNCDF the inclusive digital economy scorecard.

25. In 2020, UNDP reprogrammed and mobilized over \$982 million to support the COVID-19 response while working with partners to help countries develop integrated national financing frameworks so they could build forward better from COVID-19. To mobilize additional funds, UNDP had established, as part of its Prepare, Respond and Recover offer, the Rapid Response Facility to quickly deploy finances to programme countries. Looking beyond the immediate

emergency, UNDP created its COVID-19 2.0 offer – Beyond Recovery, Towards 2030 – focused on helping countries set priorities in four integrated areas: *governance*, *social protection*, the *green economy*, and *digital disruption*, grounded in gender equality and human rights and financed through the Rapid Financing Facility.

26. UNDP continued to pursue its People for 2030 strategy to attract, retain and develop top talent and accelerate its transformational digital strategy. Central to both was the UNDP commitment to create a safe, inclusive working environment fostering personal growth and development and to prevent all forms of discrimination and harassment, including sexual misconduct. In 2020, UNDP achieved a balanced budget for the fourth consecutive year and the second-highest delivery rate in six years and was on track to meet its four-year management efficiency target. The organization reached its highest volume of regular (core) contributions since 2016 while other (non-core) resources continued to rise. It received an unqualified audit opinion for the fifteenth consecutive year. UNDP would continue to deliver on its six signature solutions across three integrated development contexts (governance and fragility, poverty and inequality, and the climate promise), helping countries survive/thrive in the next frontier for human development. The new strategic plan, 2022-2025, would respond to the need for an equitable, green transformation and focus on what UNDP does and how.

27. Across the Board, delegations welcomed the Administrator’s vision for the new strategic plan, 2022-2025, linking it to the 2030 Agenda, focused on recovery. The new plan should reflect the indivisible nature of the Goals based on the three dimensions of sustainable development. They commended UNDP leading the system-wide resilience-focused socioeconomic response to COVID-19, including mobilizing funds through the Rapid Financing Facility. Many delegations expressed support for designating vaccines a global public good and continued deployment of the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator, including the COVAX Facility. They commended UNDP for undertaking socioeconomic impact assessments with partners which had strengthened national COVID-19 response plans. They welcomed the COVID-19 2.0 offer focused on governance, social protection, the green economy, and digital disruption, as windows through which to tackle extreme poverty, inequality, and climate change, grounded in gender equality and human rights. They expressed support for the organization’s continued commitment to preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and commended it for its 2020 strong financial standing and consecutive clean audit opinions. UNDP should continue to build on its track record of transparency and accountability.

28. A group of delegations, recognizing the simultaneous crises, said that recovery demanded a green transition aligned with the Paris Agreement and 2030 Agenda. They welcomed UNDP results in 2020, stronger cooperation with the international financial institutions (IFIs), and impact of its digital transformation in combatting COVID-19 at country level. On the strategic plan, 2022-2025, they said promoting inclusive, accountable, transparent governance at country level remained a UNDP hallmark, as was its contribution to poverty reduction through a gender lens. UNDP should continue to prioritize social protection/inequality as drivers of green, fair socioeconomic recovery. Recognizing its crisis prevention/resilience-building role, they encouraged UNDP to engage with United Nations organizations at country level in addressing COVID-19’s socioeconomic impacts in crisis settings, including through a human security lens, building on its integrator role in the humanitarian-development-peace collaborative approach. They commended the People for 2030 strategy as a tool for strong ethics and delivering high-quality results. UNDP had an important role in wealth generation and distribution among societies through its work with the private sector and innovative approaches.

29. Another group said the 2020 quadrennial review gave the United Nations system a strategic pathway for greener, inclusive development within the COVID-19 context. A robust monitoring and reporting framework had to underpin the review, which the organizations should work collaboratively to design. The framework should be focused, with a clear set of evidence-based indicators that organizations would incorporate in their results frameworks. They expected United Nations development organizations to act in consolidating reforms, ensuring full implementation

of the management and accountability framework, increasing efficiencies through harmonized business operations, and aligning activities with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. The new strategic plans of the United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies should be anchored in the pillars of United Nations reform. They encouraged the organizations to make progress on the interlinked climate-biodiversity agendas, including system-wide commitment to mainstream climate/environment-responsive approaches in programming, helping countries achieve Paris Agreement commitments, and reduce environmental footprint. The organizations should work to create a socially inclusive world where the needs of the most vulnerable were met and no one was left behind. The United Nations development system had to strengthen its gender mainstreaming and equality expertise and accelerate girls' education and their full realization of human rights through better coordination and collaboration among humanitarian-development-peace-security entities. United Nations organizations were urged to engage in early joint risk-informed analysis and planning and ensure a conflict-sensitive approach that contributed to collective outcomes.

30. A group of delegations from the small island developing states (SIDS) supported the UNDP role within the United Nations development system in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring timely, universal access to vaccines, and addressing logistical challenges. UNDP should continue to work with partners to strengthen the health response and economic recovery, including through vaccine distribution tracking. They welcomed UNDP lead in creating a multidimensional vulnerability index that reflected environmental and socioeconomic vulnerabilities and urged UNDP to work with governments, financial institutions, and private sector to tie the index to international aid. Pooled funding and joint programming should be United Nations system priorities in addressing SIDS evolving challenges.

31. Delegations from the least developed countries (LDCs) welcomed UNDP prioritization of poverty and inequality in the strategic plan, 2022-2025, and underscored the need for a new poverty paradigm with UNDP support and leadership. Noting their weak health systems and fragile economies, delegations called on UNDP to work with partners to ensure the most vulnerable were not left behind, including through development finance, debt initiatives and special financing. They expressed support for the Administrator's prioritizing access to COVID-19 vaccines to everyone, everywhere by transferring technologies and intellectual property rights to LDCs through the United Nations Technology Bank. COVID-19 lessons would help inform Goals implementation, the Africa Continental Free Trade Area, and Agenda 2063. They commended UNDP transformative work through the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and the Tony Elumelu Foundation.

32. Delegations from middle income countries (MICs), noting the major development setbacks due to COVID-19, reiterated the need for a multidimensional approach to poverty and country classifications. They welcomed proposed steps towards a multidimensional vulnerability index and sought UNDP leadership helping countries bypass the middle-income trap, stimulate economies, mobilize funding, close the digital gap, and devise integrated national financing frameworks, focused on building national capacities. The rising violence against women during the pandemic pointed to the urgency for universal health coverage to countering future crises. Nationally determined priorities/ownership should drive all measures taken. They sought details on how UNDP would use South-South cooperation to drive results in the strategic plan, 2022-2025.

33. In response, the Administrator said access to vaccines and technology transfer would remain UNDP short-term priorities against COVID-19, including through the United Nations Technology Bank and intellectual property rights transfer. At country level, in partnership with United Nations organizations, UNDP focused on strengthening institutional capabilities, logistics and infrastructure to roll out vaccination programmes and maintain testing, tracing, and monitoring. UNDP was capitalizing on its accelerator labs network, reaching out to local entrepreneurs and innovators, and providing policy and innovation capacity to country teams. Globally, UNDP advocated for equitable access to and distribution of vaccines.

34. As part of its COVID-19 work, UNDP continued to focus on poverty and inequality, helping countries identify those most at risk. UNDP promoted incentives for greater international finance and investment in the 2030 Agenda through thought leadership and empirical analysis, helping LDCs, MICs and SIDS offset pandemic-induced shrinking fiscal space. That included work through the multidimensional poverty index to address concerns about graduation, categorization, vulnerability, and inequality. In country, UNDP worked through a bottom-up approach, including in crises, to shape the new poverty paradigm and its COVID-19-related implications, in partnership with IFIs and regional development banks, to develop common analysis and deploy international instruments. UNDP relevancy in MICs did not diminish upon countries' graduation, indicating the need to rethink development financing and business to reflect a renewed engagement with MICs based on their evolving needs.

35. The Administrator said the Funding Compact remained ideal for mobilizing multi-year commitments to core resources and fighting COVID-19. The Funding Compact had to continue creating enabling conditions for United Nations reform that drove those efforts. The Joint SDG Fund played a key part driving delivery at country level, developing integrated national financing frameworks and public-private financing, and would eventually incorporate the COVID-19 Rapid Response Fund. UNDP worked through its SDG Impact initiative to devise new norms/standards for raising equities/bonds to integrate different SDG strands in national investment and financing. UNDP was uniquely placed to offer a platform interlinking the Goals so investments in climate impacted poverty and inequality. The Administrator appealed to Member States to maintain contributions to official development assistance during the pandemic.

36. The UNDP strategic plan, 2022-2025, would focus on accelerating the impact of the *#NextGeneration* UNDP portfolio/corporate structure, with programming that reflected COVID-19, the 2020 quadrennial review, poverty, and inequality, including through South-South cooperation. The new plan would refine the UNDP role in a renewed multilateralism, recognizing national ownership, the UNDP integrator role, and normative and operational responsibilities, underpinned by strong oversight, accountability, and transparency. The 2020 quadrennial review's stamp on the new plan would feature in its crosscutting themes (gender, youth, digital, climate, integrated policy solutions). Scaling up its engagement with United Nations organizations through its integrator role to deliver on the quadrennial review, UNDP would play an increasingly significant role as bridge-builder in the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and in conceptually evolving the collective United Nations system approach in crisis settings, developing a more adaptive, agile, relevant response.

#### **IV. Human Development Report**

37. The Director, Human Development Report Office, presented an oral report on the *Human Development Report 2020: The New Frontier: Human Development in the Anthropocene*, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 57/264, in the context of the 2030 Agenda, the Goals, COVID-19 and the connected narrative of the 2019, 2020 and 2021 reports.

38. A group of delegations stressed the value of the *Human Development Report* and its groundbreaking, transformative impact over a thirty-year period. The reports changed how development policy was viewed, as gross domestic product was no longer the sole measure. Human development reflected not only the generation of wealth but its distribution among populations and human economic activity's impact on the planet. The 2020 report was ambitious, comprehensive, inspirational, and provided relevant indicators and recommendations to tackle the Anthropocene challenges. Highlighting humanity's unprecedented, profound environment impact, the report pointed to ways humanity can wield transformative change through new social norms, innovative incentives and local solutions that work with nature. Its grounding in scientific understanding of material consumption and carbon footprints constituted an important platform for highlighting challenges to sustainability and human development. They encouraged UNDP



and the United Nations system to use the pressure-adjusted human development index with other human development indicator indexes and communicate its relevance to Member States.

39. Other delegations underscored their commitment to achieving global carbon neutrality through green growth strategies in partnership with UNDP and United Nations system. They welcomed the development of the report's comprehensive indicators that gauged sustainability and resilience.

40. In response, the Director, Human Development Report Office, looked forward to continued strong engagement and dialogue with Board members.

41. The Executive Board took note of the presentation of the oral report on the *Human Development Report 2020*.

## V. Country programmes and related matters

42. The Acting Associate Administrator, UNDP, introduced the item and provided an overview of 11 country programme documents and 12 country programme extensions. In turn, the regional directors for Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, and Latin America and the Caribbean provided details from the regional perspectives.

43. Among general comments on individual country programmes, there was expression of appreciation for the proactive, productive, effective UNDP engagement in addressing Member States' concerns regarding the CPDs and the collective commitment to Board oversight and consensus-based adoption of CPDs. It was highlighted that CPDs were organization-specific and should be targeted and impartial and not advance organizations' own global programmatic and fundraising objectives.

44. The delegations of Armenia and Azerbaijan requested that their statements be reflected in the official record of the first regular session 2021, as provided in the following links: (a) [statement by Armenia](#); and (b) [statement by Azerbaijan](#).

45. The Executive Board, in accordance with its decision 2014/7, reviewed and approved the country programmes documents for Azerbaijan (DP/DCP/AZE/5), China (DP/DCP/CHN/5), Côte d'Ivoire (DP/DCP/CIV/3), Georgia (DP/DCP/GEO/4), Mexico (DP/DCP/MEX/3), North Macedonia (DP/DCP/MKD/4), Panama (DP/DCP/PAN/4), Somalia (DP/DCP/SOM/4), Tunisia (DP/DCP/TUN/3), Uruguay (DP/DCP/URY/4) and Uzbekistan (DP/DCP/UZB/4).

46. The Executive Board approved the second six-month extension of the country programme for Madagascar and the second one-year extensions of the country programmes for Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Guatemala, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and Yemen as contained in document DP/2021/5, as well as the fourth, six-month extension of the country programme for the Syrian Arab Republic, as contained in document DP/2021/5/Add.1.

47. The Executive Board took note of the first one-year extensions of the country programmes for Argentina, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and the Maldives, as contained in document DP/2021/5, and the first six-month extension of the country programme for Armenia, as contained in document DP/2021/5/Add.2.

## VI. Evaluation

48. The Director, Independent Evaluation Office, UNDP, presented the evaluation of UNDP support to climate change adaptation (DP/2021/6), evaluation of UNDP support to conflict-affected countries (DP/2021/8), and evaluation of UNDP support to the Syrian refugee crisis response and promoting an integrated resilience approach (DP/2021/10). The Director, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, UNDP, provided the management response to the evaluation of UNDP support to climate change adaptation (DP/2021/7), the Director, Crisis Bureau, UNDP, provided the management response to the evaluation of UNDP support to conflict-affected countries (DP/2021/9), and the Regional Director, ad interim, Regional Bureau for Arab States, UNDP, provided the management response to the evaluation of UNDP support to the Syrian refugee crisis response and promoting an integrated resilience approach (DP/2021/11).

### *Evaluation of UNDP support to climate change*

49. Delegations supported the findings and recommendations, and management's commitment to acting on them, and encouraged UNDP to build on them when developing its strategic plan, 2021-2025. Delegations commended UNDP achievements and positioning as a key multilateral partner for climate action. UNDP should continue to mainstream climate risk, gender equality and women's empowerment throughout its development portfolio and prioritize private sector climate-focused engagement. SIDS deserved prioritization in the UNDP adaptation portfolio, particularly through vertical funds.

50. A group of delegations said UNDP should: (a) further identify pathways to leverage policy and system changes by better organizing its adaptation portfolio, undetermined by funding streams, so adaptation objectives adhered to the same standards and methodology. UNDP should act to reduce fragmentation in its adaptation portfolio, collaborate in synergy with its adaptation partners, share lessons, and strengthen national capacities in SIDS and LDCs; (b) intensify mainstreaming of climate risks throughout its development portfolio and at national and subnational levels, including implementation of new climate-risk standards, screening procedures and better reporting. UNDP should showcase its climate risk work with partners and United Nations system; and (c) develop its adaptation portfolio's gender focus while management supports and reports on gender equality and women's empowerment in the portfolio.

51. Delegations from SIDS welcomed UNDP technical assistance and support in accessing vertical funds and climate-focused technologies. Recognizing challenges UNDP faced ensuring effective oversight and tailored solutions in SIDS, due to the multi-country office set-up and unpredictable funding, they asked more core resources be allocated to SIDS climate portfolio.

52. The co-partners of the twenty-sixth United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties 2021 encouraged UNDP to prioritize partnerships across the multilateral system and requested details on a long-term strategy for partnerships with United Nations agriculture and food security organizations. They welcomed UNDP private sector partnering and efforts to attract private investment/expertise, including through public-private climate-focused initiatives. They concurred with the evaluation's recommendation that UNDP strengthen its technical capacity and coordination for disaster-risk resilience.

53. In response, the Director, Independent Evaluation Office said the UNDP climate change mandate flowed from the 2020 quadrennial review and was based on strong cooperation, partnerships, and evidence. Stronger UNDP climate-focused partnerships in agriculture and food security, especially with United Nations Rome-based agencies, would be valuable.

54. The Director, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, said UNDP was exploring concepts such as the multidimensional vulnerability index to support increased funding and access to financing and was prepared to work with the Board to review eligibility criteria for core resources to benefit SIDS. UNDP also engaged in partnerships for climate-focused financing through bilateral donors and United Nations agriculture and food security agencies. UNDP private

sector partnerships were key in exploring innovative schemes that expanded beyond conventional financing in moving from funding to financing. Gender equality was central to UNDP climate work, notably its environment/energy portfolio, financed through vertical funds that helped countries integrate gender in national climate policies and plans. UNDP climate risk screening was essential to its social and environmental standards and procedures, updated in 2021, and integral to common country analysis and cooperation frameworks.

*Evaluation of UNDP support to conflict-affected countries*

55. A group of delegations said UNDP should build on its contributions and comparative advantages helping conflict-affected countries develop more strategic engagement with partners. UNDP should promote prevention and inclusive, accountable governance, applying a more, strategic medium-to-long-term vision. They commended its strategic emphasis on gender equality in crises, concurring UNDP should further engage women as agents of change for sustainable, transformative development. UNDP should do more to ensure policy coherence at country level, and its regional bureaux should work with the Crisis Bureau to ensure UNDP development programmes were context-appropriate and consistent with policies and good practice. UNDP had a special integrator role mobilizing partnerships around sustained collective engagement to tackle crosscutting challenges in conflict-affected countries and supporting collective analysis, outcomes, and coordination.

56. Another group said UNDP had a critical role addressing root causes of fragility in partnership with the United Nations system and endorsed a global UNDP leadership role in the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. They welcomed the new framework for development solutions for crisis and fragility and the new gender and crisis engagement facility and asked how UNDP would reflect its comparative advantages in preventing violent extremism, interlinked risks, and early warning. UNDP should empower the Crisis Bureau to mainstream its expertise organization-wide to bolster its knowledge base, learning culture, and programming. UNDP should also pursue long-term, systematic approaches to governance, stabilization, livelihoods, and conflict prevention, anchored at local level and informed by conflict/political economy analyses. They encouraged UNDP to show greater transparency through better monitoring and evaluation in conflict-affected countries.

57. Other delegations welcomed the Global Policy Network supporting organization-wide policy coherence for conflict-affected countries backed by technical expertise to strengthen the regional bureaux. They sought details on how UNDP would strengthen its cooperation with humanitarian agencies and connect emergency assistance and reconstruction to build back better; how the new UNDP conflict prevention offer differed from that in the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021; and if the evaluation reflected the UNDP conflict prevention scope in Board decision 2017/30.

58. In response, the Director, Independent Evaluation Office, UNDP, said the evaluation report recognized the UNDP contribution to conflict prevention lay within its national capacity strengthening work to reduce risk of conflict in accordance with national policies and priorities.

59. The Director, Crisis Bureau, UNDP, said UNDP would engage with partners in developing its new framework for crisis and fragility development solutions. Discussions would focus on devising innovative approaches to prevention, early warning, social cohesion, inequality, basic services, and climate. The UNDP prevention offer included a medium-to-long-term vision in the strategic plan, 2022-2025, focused on development funding and financing for prevention. The offer would embody a cohesive, conflict-sensitive approach and joint analysis backed by evidence. UNDP would continue to be a knowledge hub for crisis and fragility, working with country and regional offices, through the Global Policy Network, engagement between the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support and Crisis Bureau, and its integrator role in the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

*Evaluation of UNDP support to the Syrian refugee crisis response and promoting an integrated resilience approach*

60. Delegations appreciated UNDP support to the Syrian refugee crisis response, addressing challenges faced both by host communities and refugees, and humanitarian and resilience needs, in an integrated manner through the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan at country level. The importance of the UNDP–United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) partnership in the successful coordination of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan was noted. One delegation stressed the need to address crisis and development challenges within the Syrian Arab Republic as crucial to enabling the safe return of refugees and ensuring their legitimate right of repatriation. The delegation suggested that, to achieve safe and voluntary repatriation, UNDP and the international community should focus first on rebuilding affected regions through integrated early recovery projects for basic infrastructure.

61. Another delegation commended UNDP for its support to Syrian refugees in host countries. The delegation reaffirmed its position that reconstruction and development activities should not take place within the Syrian Arab Republic until there was significant progress on the political process. The delegation sought clarification on UNDP support to local host governments to promote refugee protection at community level and mitigate discrimination against disadvantaged groups among refugees and hosts communities, and on UNDP advocacy for an inclusive refugee approach.

62. In response, the Director, Independent Evaluation Office, UNDP, noted that the evaluation report covered UNDP work at the municipal level in host countries which presented scope for further strengthening, as part of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan, through support for critical service provisions that would benefit both refugees and host communities.

63. The Director, ad interim, Regional Bureau for Arab States, UNDP, emphasized that while UNDP supported the principle of voluntary, safe, dignified refugee return, the evaluation focused on UNDP support to the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan and host countries' capacity in the region. At local level, UNDP worked with UNHCR, monitoring discrimination and tensions, and with host communities on social inclusion, in line with the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan and related programming.

64. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/2 on UNDP evaluation.

## **UNFPA segment**

### **Statement by the Executive Director**

65. In her address (available on the [UNFPA website](#)), the Executive Director said UNFPA was tackling COVID-19 head on, learning, adapting and pursuing opportunities to work better against it. The pandemic underscored the relevancy of the Fund's mandate and impacts of undermining access to essential sexual and reproductive health services. COVID-19 was hitting the health and rights of women and girls hardest. The UNFPA COVID-19 response reaffirmed the centrality of the three transformative results – zero unmet need for family planning, zero preventable maternal death, and zero gender-based violence – and underscored the need for a human rights-based approach, adaptive programming, and universal health coverage that left no one behind. The Executive Director reaffirmed that the rights and needs of women and girls were not negotiable.

66. Sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights were the driving force behind the strategic plan, 2022-2025, which UNFPA would use to accelerate and scale up progress and drive a global call to action. It was important to use pandemic response lessons to build forward better. Partnerships were essential, as was greater United Nations cohesion.

67. Innovation in digital health and population data were helping UNFPA identify and reach those furthest behind. The Fund was scaling up investments to improve population data quality,

usability and accessibility and was building country capacities to use geospatial information to map vulnerability, using the COVID-19 Population Vulnerability Dashboard and the Intimate Partner Violence Dashboard. Locally, digital technologies, such as telemedicine, were enabling health-care professionals to reach those furthest behind. In 2020, such adaptive programming helped UNFPA and partners reach nearly 50 million women and young people with sexual and reproductive health services and offered a roadmap to expand access to services post-pandemic and in the new strategic plan.

68. Throughout the pandemic, UNFPA continued to deliver sexual and reproductive health services in complex crises. UNFPA launched the 2021 Humanitarian Action Overview, appealing for \$818 million to help the world's most vulnerable women and girls. The proportion of UNFPA humanitarian funding continued to grow, increasing to around 38 per cent of co-financing in 2020. Of approximately \$270 million received for humanitarian action, about \$94 million was for COVID-19. On the ground, championing protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, UNFPA advanced its work on localization, case management, community-awareness, and safe reporting mechanisms. The new humanitarian supplies strategy would strengthen the Fund's capacity to deliver lifesaving supplies. UNFPA was working with United Nations organizations to fully implement the principles of the 2020 quadrennial review.

69. UNFPA had a zero-tolerance policy towards misconduct or abusive behaviour, all forms of harassment and discrimination, including based on race, gender, sexual orientation, disability. UNFPA worked to address the widening inequalities COVID-19 had laid bare and continued to address structural inequalities to counter racism and foster a culture of civility and respect for diversity and inclusion. In January 2021, the Executive Director assumed the Championship on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee for Humanitarian Affairs in which she would focus on bolstering country mechanisms, improving access to quality assistance and information, and strengthening coordination and coherence.

70. In 2020, UNFPA exceeded its funding targets. Resource contributions were expected to reach over \$1.2 billion, fully 21 per cent above the \$1 billion target. Core funding was expected to reach around \$416 million and co-financing \$793 million. The Fund sought new, diverse partnerships to help take results to scale. Through its 2021 core donor campaign, UNFPA aimed to reach 150 core contributors. UNFPA needed to expand and diversify its donor base, including from programme countries. Given the estimated \$26.4 billion needed to achieve the three zeros by 2030 far exceeded current investment, UNFPA was shifting from funding to financing. The UNFPA Supplies Partnership was helping reinvigorate its engagement with a wide range of partners. In 2020, UNFPA signed 114 new partnership agreements, attracted 70 first-time partners, and mobilized over \$41 million from the private sector, \$8 million of which benefitted the COVID-19 response.

71. Across the Board, delegations commended UNFPA for its agile, impactful response to the COVID-19 pandemic. They welcomed its coordinating role in the United Nations system COVID-19 response as lead agency for maternal health, youth, gender and distribution of sanitation and hygiene kits for women. UNFPA should continue to lead in protecting hard-won gains in sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights and accelerating progress toward the Goals. They expected the new strategic plan to reaffirm the Fund's mandate to implement the ICPD Programme of Action and Nairobi Summit outcomes, grounded in a human rights-based approach that tackled deeply rooted structural/intersectional issues. UNFPA should build on COVID-19 lessons in designing its new plan, including measures to strengthen and accelerate efforts to end preventable maternal deaths and gender-based violence through the Spotlight Initiative and Supplies Partnership. The plan's results and resources framework should indicate common United Nations development system objectives, targets, outcomes and each organization's role and comparative advantages. Delegations encouraged UNFPA to play its part to accelerate United Nations reform and foster effective joint programmes. They called on Member States, in a position to do so, to increase contributions to the Fund's core funding base,

including through the Funding Compact, to give UNFPA the agility to support countries, especially in crises. They encouraged UNFPA to pursue public-private partnerships as part of its larger innovation and resource mobilization efforts.

72. Board members said the strategic plan, 2022-2025, should continue to prioritize countries in special development situations, such as landlocked developing countries, least developed countries (LDCs), middle-income countries (MICs) and small island developing States (SIDS). The group welcomed the Fund's focus on multi-country offices, allocation of funds and programmatic work in SIDS, and detailed approach to indigenous and Afro-descendent communities in rural and urban contexts. They appreciated UNFPA inclusion of persons living with disabilities and those living with HIV and highlighted its role supporting countries dealing with low birth rates and ageing societies. They welcomed UNFPA efforts to strengthen institutional capacity to deliver social behavioural change communication for adolescents and young people. The Fund should use the new strategic plan to identify innovative ways to promote South-South and triangular cooperation. They encouraged UNFPA to continue to leverage digital transformation (telemedicine) to reach those furthest behind and underscored the continued importance of UNFPA disaggregated data/evidence and national capacity-building in identifying vulnerable populations.

73. A group of delegations stressed that the new strategic plan, 2022-2025, must be grounded in a human rights-based approach, results-focused and aligned with the Goals, prioritizing the most vulnerable and those who experience multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination and violence. While continuing to strengthen comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, UNFPA should safeguard its global normative role. They encouraged UNFPA to build on the pandemic's lessons when developing its new strategic plan, including helping countries strengthen health-care systems toward achieving universal health coverage and last-mile delivery of health supplies. Its continued focus on leaving no one behind was critical to reaching the most vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, built on quality, disaggregated data. They expected UNFPA to bolster its humanitarian action in the new strategic plan, including its gender advisory role in acute crises, supporting preparedness and crisis response in protracted settings, and coordination on gender-based violence in crises.

74. Another group said the 2020 quadrennial review gave the United Nations development system the strategic direction to support achievement of the Goals when progress was at risk due to the pandemic. That included on climate, biodiversity, digital technologies, persons with disabilities, violence against women and girls, sexual exploitation and abuse, sexual harassment, and youth. United Nations organizations were urged to collaborate in developing a strong monitoring framework, including evidence-based indicators individual organizations would incorporate in their results frameworks. The organizations had to act in consolidating United Nations reform, ensuring full implementation of the management and accountability framework, increasing efficiencies through harmonized business operations, and aligning activities with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. They expected the organizations to mainstream climate/environment-responsive approaches, support countries in their Paris Agreement commitments, and reduce their environmental footprint. The organizations should work to create a socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable were met and no one was left behind. Building back better meant ensuring sustainable, inclusive, resilient recovery, including mainstreaming the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy. They highlighted the importance of accelerating gender mainstreaming and gender equality expertise throughout the United Nations system, promoting girls' education and full realization of their human rights, through better coordination with humanitarian/peace/security entities and a reinforced sustainable development-peace nexus. The organizations should engage in early joint risk-informed analysis and planning and ensure a conflict-sensitive approach. That included strengthening resident/humanitarian coordinator leadership, key for United Nations impact in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

75. In response, the Executive Director said the UNFPA mandate to leave no one behind was at the heart of its strategic plan, 2022-2025. The plan would continue the Fund's work on the three transformative results using disaggregated data/evidence, in which UNFPA was investing and would share across regions, with civil society and governments. Such data fed into programme policy, planning, implementation, monitoring/reporting and helped strengthen national early warning systems. UNFPA analysed megatrends and interplay between demography, urbanization, population dynamics, gender, and climate, including scenario planning and forecasting, to make UNFPA more agile and flexible. The new plan would integrate UNFPA humanitarian-development-peace work in the monitoring and accountability framework and specific performance indicators so that in humanitarian settings no one was left behind. Programming innovations were creating ways to accelerate impactful progress at local level, through progressive thinking with private-sector partners and digital, data-based solutions.

76. UNFPA was ideally placed to minimize the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women and girls through its partnerships to build resilience, especially through health-care systems. UNFPA would build on COVID-19 lessons to transform mindsets and make women and girls agents of change in decision-making. Localizing women's leadership was crucial, an effort in which UNFPA was an active partner in the Generation Equality Action Coalitions, including addressing the needs of countries in special development situations. The Fund prioritized systems-resilience and building adaptability, especially for countries facing disaster/climate-related crises, stepping up its services, presence, and funding in multi-country offices, especially for SIDS and, through its leadership in the United Nations system, defining a common narrative and approach. UNFPA was arranging consultations with national, regional, and subregional stakeholders to define and streamline system-wide policies and technical support to multi-country offices. The Fund was upgrading its capacity to support multi-country offices and foster greater South-South cooperation, upping its support to LDCs to spearhead delivery of essential services for COVID-19, and tackling gender-based violence through the Spotlight Initiative.

77. UNFPA welcomed the 2020 quadrennial review's strategic guidance and focus on better system-wide integration of policy, planning, programming, and implementation. UNFPA was at the forefront of United Nations reform, leading collective efforts to address efficiency gains and better business operations. The Fund remained committed to the resident coordinator system and cooperation frameworks and was working with United Nations organizations devising the new system-wide monitoring and reporting framework.

78. Unrestricted resources allowed UNFPA to be agile and flexible in its pandemic response, including equitable distribution of essential services and medicines. UNFPA was working to garner resources to deliver on its ICPD mandate and the 2030 Agenda in full accountability and transparency. The Executive Director appealed to Member States to help UNFPA reach its goal of 150 core contributors and strengthen its ability to achieve the three transformative results. UNFPA was building its donor base, raising awareness, engaging partners, and enhancing visibility through better communication. It was crucial partners and individuals understood how UNFPA helped address their concerns and aspirations, knowing that investing in girls guaranteed a return on investment. The Fund was stepping up its engagement with the international financial institutions and regional banks to explore innovative financing for its mandate.

79. The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Programme) said UNFPA was addressing the rise of gender-based violence during the pandemic, including through its gender-based violence dashboard to ensure informed programming. At national level, the Fund continued to provide technical advice to authorities to mainstream gender-based violence in national COVID-19 response plans, both in development and humanitarian settings.

80. The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Management) said the 2020 quadrennial review was guiding the development of the new strategic plan and integrated budget, 2022-2025. Both were grounded in the principles of results-based management, pursuing collective results through expanded/new partnerships, prioritizing climate and environment, delivering better human

resources management, exploring innovative resource mobilization approaches, and ensuring transparency and accountability, all through a human rights, gender, disability, and youth lens aimed at leaving no one behind.

## VII. Evaluation

81. The Director, Evaluation Office, presented the formative evaluation of UNFPA support to South-South and triangular cooperation. The Deputy Executive Director (Programme) provided the management response to the report.

82. In the sole intervention, a delegation welcomed the recommendation that UNFPA establish centres of excellence on South-South and triangular cooperation and management's acceptance of that recommendation; such centres would be critically important to transfer knowledge, technologies, and expertise from North to South. The delegation asked how UNFPA planned to enhance cooperation between North and South for effective technology transfer; how existing mechanisms, such as the United Nations Technology Bank, could be used; how UNFPA encouraged the private sector to join; how UNFPA planned to share good practices and lessons during the pandemic to enhance crisis preparedness/response capacities among countries in the South; and how those lessons would be integrated in the next strategic plan.

83. In response, the Director, Policy and Strategy Division, assured delegations that UNFPA was working on South-South cooperation in line with the second High-level Conference on South-South Cooperation (BABA+40) framework and General-Assembly resolution 73/291. UNFPA centres of excellence were drivers of South-South cooperation that provided unique expertise and experience and central to UNFPA country programming. The centres engaged with private-sector partners. The Fund's recently established South-South cooperation unit was identifying knowledge, experiences, and good practices, including on COVID-19, making them available to countries to ensure no one was left behind.

84. The Executive Board took note of the formative evaluation of UNFPA support to South-South and triangular cooperation ([DP/FPA/2021/CRP.1](#)) and the management response to the evaluation ([DP/FPA/2021/CRP.2](#)).

## VIII. Country programmes and related matters

85. The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Programme) provided an overview of 12 country programme documents and eight country programme extensions. In turn, the UNFPA regional directors for the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, East and Southern Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and West and Central Africa elaborated on their respective regional perspectives.

86. Several Member States provided supportive statements to the country programmes.

87. The delegations of Armenia and Azerbaijan requested that their statements be reflected in the official record of the first regular session 2021, as provided in the following links: (a) [statement](#) by Armenia; and (b) [statement](#) by Azerbaijan.

88. The Executive Board approved, in accordance with decision 2014/7, the country programme documents for Azerbaijan ([DP/FPA/CPD/AZE/5](#) and [Corr.1](#)), China ([DP/FPA/CPD/CHN/9](#)), Côte d'Ivoire ([DP/FPA/CPD/CIV/8](#)), Eswatini ([DP/FPA/CPD/SWZ/7](#)), Georgia ([DP/FPA/CPD/GEO/4](#)), North Macedonia ([DP/FPA/CPD/MKD/2](#) and [Corr.1](#)), Panama ([DP/FPA/CPD/PAN/4](#)), Somalia ([DP/FPA/CPD/SOM/4](#)), Tunisia ([DP/FPA/CPD/TUN/10](#)), Uganda ([DP/FPA/CPD/UGA/9](#)), Uruguay ([DP/FPA/CPD/URY/4](#)) and Uzbekistan ([DP/FPA/CPD/UZB/5](#)).



89. The Executive Board took note of the first one-year extensions of the country programmes for Bangladesh, Guinea Bissau, Maldives and Tanzania, as contained in document [DP/FPA/2021/2](#), and the first, six-month extension for Armenia, as contained in document [DP/FPA/2021/2.Add.1](#) (see also [DP/FPA/CPD/ARM/4/Corr.1](#)).

90. The Executive Board approved the second one-year extensions for Guatemala and Venezuela, and the fourth six-month extension for the country programme for the Syrian Arab Republic, as contained in document [DP/FPA/2021/2](#).

## UNOPS segment

### IX. United Nations Office for Project Services

#### *Statement by the Executive Director*

92. Delivering the statement on behalf of the Executive Director, the Director of Regional Portfolios said UNOPS had adapted quickly and at scale to the COVID-19 pandemic, mobilizing nearly \$900 million for its COVID-19 response and recovery projects. That included procuring and delivering medical supplies/equipment, expanding testing capacity, managing medical waste, and helping mitigate socioeconomic impacts. In 2021, UNOPS was developing its strategic plan, 2022-2025, building on lessons and successes of the previous plan, experiences addressing COVID-19, and the 2020 quadrennial review, together with partners. Throughout 2020 UNOPS experienced rising demand for services in emergency response, prevention, and logistics and in reaching vulnerable communities in fragile settings – demonstrating the continued relevance of its unique demand-driven mandate.

93. UNOPS continued to strengthen its ability to champion quality infrastructure to address and adapt to climate change, protect societies with zero tolerance in health and safety, and deliver infrastructure that served everyone equally. In SIDS, UNOPS worked with governments and pursued partnerships that helped build national sustainable, resilient, inclusive infrastructure, aligned with the 2030 Agenda and Paris Agreement. Given the size of global procurement expenditure, its percentage of global domestic product, and risk of corruption, public procurement offered an opportunity for development cooperation that UNOPS was championing. UNOPS was helping governments unlock that potential to tackle corruption, ensure fair competition, and build sustainable, resilient supply chains as part of national post-pandemic recovery. Those efforts helped countries achieve value for money and ensure public funding was available so countries could shift to low-carbon economies, implement national development priorities, and accelerate progress towards the Goals.

94. Gender equality remained a top corporate priority. In 2021, UNOPS was set to reach full workforce parity and aimed to achieve parity at all senior leadership levels during the strategic plan, 2022-2025, going beyond United Nations system-wide targets, irrespective of personnel categories and contract modalities. Equally important was UNOPS focus on managing assets responsibly. UNOPS was working with independent experts to align its minimum operational reserves to its existing organizational profile. Its shift to an automated, centralized treasury and cash management system enhanced financial planning and ensured transparency of operations and better management of financial risks. UNOPS remained committed to gender mainstreaming, ensuring infrastructure responded to women's needs, involving women in infrastructure projects, making sure procurement projects continued to benefit women and other underrepresented groups. UNOPS continued to maintain low average fees for partners, and its COVID-19 response showed that stronger partnerships led to more effective responses.

95. Across the Board, delegations reiterated their support for UNOPS unique self-financing, demand-driven business model; mandate in climate-resilient infrastructure, sustainable procurement, and project management; and ability to address unexpected challenges such as

COVID-19 through innovation. They commended UNOPS agile, quick response to COVID-19, procuring and delivering medical supplies, expanding testing capacity, rolling out vaccination campaigns, together with United Nations organizations. Its COVID-19 response underscored UNOPS ideal position in reaching the unreachable in remote areas and fragile settings. They supported UNOPS private sector collaboration and public-private partnerships as drivers for Goals implementation. They encouraged UNOPS to continue to share its sustainable practices through the Global Reporting Initiative and work with governments to make them more transparent. They welcomed the continued rise in demand for UNOPS services and sought details on UNOPS efforts to meet that rise, including leveraging digital infrastructure and building national capacity, especially in LDCs. They expected the strategic plan, 2022-2025, to reflect and integrate lessons of the existing strategic plan and COVID-19 pandemic.

96. Board members welcomed UNOPS successes in gender mainstreaming and equality, integration of gender equality and women's empowerment in crisis response, and gender lens in financing projects. They appreciated UNOPS capacity to quickly respond in crises and scale up interventions. They welcomed UNOPS projects digitalizing educational programmes to ensure children remained engaged in public school systems throughout the pandemic and supported UNOPS efforts to ensure equal opportunity for women and women-owned businesses. They sought details on UNOPS engagement with MICs and potential benefits for global service delivery through South-South cooperation. They welcomed UNOPS use of procurement to deliver HIV test kits to health services and work to construct a midwifery training centre. Noting UNOPS business volume with United Nations organizations was stagnant while demand for its services increased with partners, they encouraged UNOPS to identify untapped potential for efficiency gains, notably in United Nations procurement.

97. A group of delegations from the Pacific SIDS welcomed early positive signs of increasing cooperation between SIDS and UNOPS, especially in resilient infrastructure development and sustainability and capacity-building of national procurement systems and the health sector. They welcomed UNOPS response to COVID-19 and procuring medical supplies and appreciated its emergency tuberculosis project to support early diagnosis and treatment, helping accelerate progress towards Goal 3. They welcomed UNOPS efforts to incorporate national capacity-building and community engagement during infrastructure development to strengthen institutions and local expertise. They commended UNOPS increased presence in SIDS, including work on climate-resilient housing.

98. Another group, recognizing the pandemic's impact on development gains, stressed the need for fresh thinking, better innovation, and new partnerships, particularly with the private sector. They encouraged UNOPS to be innovative in its strategic plan, 2022-2025, and continue to focus on implementation for impact. They commended UNOPS efforts to form new and build on long-standing partnerships and enhance public-private partnerships to foster recovery, renewal, and resilience through the sustainable infrastructure impact investment initiative (S3I). The group expected the pandemic's lessons and the Global Innovation Centre to figure in the new strategic plan. They welcomed the improved gender balance among personnel, strengthened integration of gender equality in projects, and efforts to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment, and encouraged a speak-up culture. They expected the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy to be applied across UNOPS operations.

99. In response, the Director, Regional Portfolios said to meet rising demand UNOPS focused on strengthening in-house capacities, including continued tailored learning, a stronger portfolio of rosters/retainers, and larger talent benches. In parallel, UNOPS prioritized building national capacities in LDCs through technical assistance and advisory services to ensure national programme implementation through the use of national/local small and medium enterprises, exposing them to international standards and best practices. Despite price increases and extraction of staff, UNOPS delivered uninterrupted services in LDCs throughout the pandemic. Structurally, UNOPS digital transformation acted as a critical enabler driving greater effectiveness and efficiency in supporting partners and national capacity-building. In 2020 UNOPS delivered more

than 50 per cent of its projects in MICs. That included UNOPS South-South cooperation work to build, promote and share social security best practices throughout the Latin America and Caribbean region. Internally, UNOPS was making steady progress achieving gender parity, growing from a 39 to 46 per cent women's workforce in two years.

100. The Director, Implementation Practices and Standards said an example of UNOPS capacity-building at country level was its evidence-based infrastructure initiative. The approach underpinned UNOPS thought leadership and operational engagement with governments, helping them make informed decisions and ensure implementation and maximum impact throughout infrastructure lifecycle. It included ensuring lifecycle investments were adequate and had maximum impact while making better use of existing national resources. Additionally, UNOPS sustainable infrastructure financing tool helped countries identify financing options. UNOPS worked hand-in-hand with governments, transferring knowledge and expertise and helping restructure and set up national infrastructure planning and delivery teams. UNOPS sustainable procurement expertise was likewise important in helping governments diversify and strengthen food system and supply chain resilience. Such efforts complemented UNOPS work helping governments fight corruption, promote transparency, and open up effective competition, freeing up public funds for development. On gender mainstreaming, UNOPS followed a five-track approach: leadership, policy and process, resources and capacity building, knowledge sharing, and monitoring/reporting. UNOPS used a set of tools in each track to integrate gender in its sustainability and resilience portfolio. UNOPS worked downstream to ensure safeguarding in procurement through its Delivering Responsibility in Vendor Engagement, a vendor assessment, inspection, and corrective action-planning programme. It ensured UNOPS vendors operated responsibly, aligned with highest integrity standards, focused on human rights, labour standards, equal opportunity, code of conduct, health, safety, quality management and environmental management.

101. The Chief Financial Officer and Director of Administration said digitalization would feature prominently in the strategic plan, 2022-2025, and inform UNOPS engagement with United Nations organizations. In 2020, UNOPS automated its treasury management system, enabling most payments to be performed through its Shared Service Centre in Bangkok. UNOPS leveraged its participation in the World Bank Reserve Advisory and Management Partnership to obtain advice and best practices on selecting a treasury management system. Digitization allowed UNOPS to conduct online training for the treasury management system roll-out to 700 personnel globally in 2020. UNOPS digital transformation was an important way to channel the pandemic's lessons into the strategic plan, 2022-2025, including analysis of long-term impacts on delivery of a remote workforce and how UNOPS should maintain and scale up delivery.

102. The Executive Board took note of the statement by the UNOPS Executive Director.

## **X. Other matters**

*Address by the Chairperson of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS/UN-Women Staff Council*

103. The Chairperson of the Staff Council updated the Board on challenges staff faced navigating the stress of working during the COVID-19 pandemic, including difficulties working remotely and its psychosocial effects, both at headquarters and country level.

104. A group of delegations, recognizing the pandemic's impact on staff, stressed it was the organizations' responsibility to ensure a healthy work environment that considered individuals' personal circumstances, responded to domestic violence, and prevented sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment. They appreciated management's steps to meet staff needs and strengthen commitments and encouraged UNDP and UNFPA to maintain dialogue with staff and the Staff Council. They urged the organizations throughout the pandemic to pursue United Nations reform, ensuring staff were involved in a transparent, inclusive manner. Staff issues would remain a

priority for Member States; the reform's goal was to make the organizations efficient and effective in delivering the 2030 Agenda – only possible if staff worked in a fulfilling, safe environment.

105. A delegation said the Staff Council's work showed the need for robust structures and lines of communications between staff and management. It stressed the need to promote inclusivity and a human rights-based approach to remote work, address discrimination, and foster decent work.

106. In response, the Director of Human Resources, UNFPA, commended the Staff Council for its commitment to staff during the pandemic. Demands on staff had increased in part due to COVID-19's impact on the Fund's mandate and women and girls globally. UNFPA had set up interdivisional working groups to guide staff and trained managers to manage working remotely. UNFPA worked with United Nations organizations through human resources networks, interagency groups, and the Staff Council to support staff and personnel. In 2019-2020, the Staff Council engaged with national-level staff associations, boosting the Fund's global staff networks and connections across the United Nations system. Especially notable was the Fund's commitment to duty-of-care, which it strengthened in 2020 through the employee assistance programme and introduction of duty-of-care and regional counselling resources. The Fund created open safe spaces for staff to share experiences, collectively helping establish procedures and frameworks that supported a diverse, inclusive workplace.

107. The Chief Financial Officer and Director of Administration, UNOPS, welcomed the Staff Council's constructive engagement and commended UNOPS staff's commitment, resilience, and adaptability. UNOPS had worked to ensure regular communication, clear guidance, and resources for staff, including through mental health and well-being counselling and stress management. UNOPS made robust efforts to support management and staff and foster a productive, inclusive work environment.

108. The Director, Office of Human Resources, UNDP, said UNDP provided staff counselling and access to telehealth, regardless of contractual status, and applied rules/procedures enabling staff to deliver. The Administrator commissioned a task force that presented several recommendations being considered by senior leadership to address diversity-related issues. Central to those efforts was the UNDP People for 2030 strategy, ensuring UNDP maximized its capacity to deliver by attracting and retaining top-notch diverse talent.

109. In response, the Chairperson said the council sought to reflect lessons and determine how to improve conditions. That included reconciling narratives across organizations, so they better reflected staff concerns and expectations, especially at country level, through management, the Staff Council, and local staff associations. The council was keen to use lessons to improve dialogue to prevent and foster greater joint responsibility and accountability.

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