

**Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme**

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**Report of the eightieth meeting of the Standing
Committee (23-25 March 2021)**

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I. Introduction

1. The Second Vice-Chairperson of the Executive Committee, Her Excellency Ambassador Kadra Ahmed Hassan (Djibouti), opened the eightieth meeting of the Standing Committee. The Chairperson, Her Excellency Ambassador Maria Nazareth Farani Azevêdo (Brazil), and the first Vice-Chairperson, His Excellency Ambassador Salim Baddoura (Lebanon), chaired subsequent parts of the meeting.
2. Presentations made by UNHCR's senior managers can be found [here](#).

II. Adoption of the Standing Committee work programme for 2021

3. The Committee adopted the agenda for the meeting (EC/72/SC/CRP.1) and the 2021 work programme (EC/72/SC/CRP.2) as presented.

III. Regional activities and global programmes

4. The Deputy High Commissioner gave an overview of recent developments, including on UNHCR's response to COVID-19. Despite the challenges, the Office reached record levels of implementation in 2020 across all regions and saw the benefits of decentralization. The COVID-19 response not only tested the new decentralized design but accelerated reforms, including with regard to managing partnership arrangements. With respect to UNHCR's transformation, the realignment of Headquarters, initiated during the 2021 planning process, would continue over the next few cycles. Another critical element was UNHCR's Business Transformation Programme, led by the Director for Change. The Deputy High Commissioner briefed the Committee on key reform areas, including new policies on a victim-centred approach in response to sexual misconduct and on enterprise risk management, as well as efforts to address racism and discrimination, and to build an inclusive, respectful and safe work environment.

5. The Assistant High Commissioner (Operations) briefed the Committee on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on persons of concern. While a major outbreak of the virus in camps and settlements had been avoided largely due to preventative measures, the impact was devastating in terms of loss of income, disruption of education and growing food insecurity. He noted several positive initiatives to include persons of concern in healthcare responses, social protection mechanisms and vaccination campaigns. Of the 157 countries that had developed a vaccination strategy, 154 had included persons of concern in their plans. A supplementary appeal for UNHCR's 2021 COVID-19 response had been launched. The Assistant High Commissioner also spoke about regional developments, implementation of the regional support platforms under the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), the importance of development partnerships, UNHCR's commitment to strengthening its engagement in situations of internal displacement, and climate action.

A. Regional updates

i. Africa: West and Central Africa; East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region; Southern Africa

6. The Directors of the Regional Bureaux for West and Central Africa; East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region; and Southern Africa presented updates on operations in their respective regions. They highlighted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on what UNHCR set out to achieve and the obstacles this presented. At the same time, they noted that UNHCR was able to "stay and deliver" in these challenging times, while ensuring "duty of care" towards staff. Other issues emphasized across subregions included the importance of ensuring access to COVID-19 vaccinations (both for persons of concern and frontline humanitarian workers), innovative approaches to ensure protection and solutions, food

shortages, UNHCR's response to internal displacement, measures to address gender-based violence, the importance of education and the impact of climate change on displacement.

7. The Committee conveyed concern over the growing displacement and magnitude of needs across sub-Saharan Africa, which were exacerbated by COVID-19, natural disasters and the impact of climate change. Food insecurity was particularly worrying, with a direct impact on protection outcomes, and donors were urged to increase assistance. Humanitarian access was problematic in numerous countries, and there were calls for all parties to ensure that aid organizations were able to reach populations in need. Alarm was also voiced about violence against aid workers, including six killed in Ethiopia since the conflict in Tigray began in November.

8. With respect to COVID-19, efforts by many countries to maintain open borders and include refugees in their national response were applauded. UNHCR was commended for its numerous contributions to host countries, including training of health workers, construction of health centres, provision of testing kits and increased cash assistance for those severely affected by the situation. The impact of the pandemic on education was highlighted, while recognizing efforts to address this, such as providing distance learning and ensuring social distancing in classrooms. The need for fair and equitable access to COVID-19 diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines was also underscored.

9. The Committee was alarmed by the growing internal displacement on the continent, with calls for strong cooperation and the maximum of synergies among humanitarian agencies. Attention was drawn to the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Sahel region, causing massive displacement and driving secondary movements towards North Africa to Europe. The growing protection crisis in Mozambique and rising number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) were highlighted, and numerous delegations expressed concern about the conflict in Tigray in Ethiopia, which exacerbated the fragility of the Horn of Africa region. Attention was also drawn to protracted situations, such as South Sudan and Sudan, which deserved full attention from the international community.

10. UNHCR was applauded for adopting regional protection strategies, enhanced protection programming in response to gender-based violence and efforts to find durable solutions across the continent. At the same time, delegations noted with concern that the COVID-19 pandemic had reversed the gains made towards durable solutions in Africa and the momentum generated by the GCR. The international community was urged to redouble its efforts to enhance the quality, scope and size of its resettlement programmes. Delegations commended the long-standing solidarity and generosity of African countries hosting refugees and, in particular, their inclusive responses. The need for more predictable and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing was highlighted, and UNHCR was encouraged to continue to expand international partnerships to alleviate the pressure on host countries, reinforce self-sufficiency and attain durable solutions.

11. The Director of the Regional Bureau for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes addressed concerns about the situation in Tigray, noting that UNHCR was increasing its presence but that access remained key. In light of the volatile security situation, UNHCR was currently reviewing its security protocols and security risk management measures. UNHCR and partners were scaling up their humanitarian response, and UNHCR would continue to prioritize solutions. Regarding South Sudan and Sudan, the Director agreed with the need for development investments to support refugee inclusion and economic opportunities in hosting areas and areas of return. Responding to concerns about the transfer of the protection of civilians site in Darfur, she agreed that close monitoring and strong coordination among all actors were needed. Regarding Burundi, the Director noted that UNHCR had seen an increase in interest in return and was conducting interviews to verify voluntariness. UNHCR had also strengthened its protection monitoring of returns and was encouraging more partners to invest in ensuring that they were sustainable.

12. The Director of the Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa confirmed that UNHCR would continue to ensure the voluntariness of returns in the subregion, a concern voiced by many delegations. The Head of the Bureau's Protection Service responded to questions regarding the impact of COVID-19 on protection in the Sahel. Despite border closures, access for refugees and asylum-seekers had been assured, and there were no

instances of refoulement reported. He also spoke about the remote processing of resettlement interviews and asylum claims, efforts to resume voluntary repatriation with specific health protocols, and measures to reduce the impact of the pandemic on girls. The Deputy Director briefed the Committee on UNHCR's efforts to strengthen its response to gender-based violence in the Central African Republic and thanked delegations for their specific contributions to this endeavour.

13. The Director of the Regional Bureau for Southern Africa spoke about the importance of ensuring a holistic approach, with humanitarian and development actors working closely together to address both the root causes and immediate humanitarian needs. He reiterated UNHCR's commitment to supporting the operationalization of pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum and mentioned numerous positive examples in the southern Africa region. This included the provision of land for refugees to utilize for livelihood opportunities. He also praised support for UNHCR's alternative to camps policy by Malawi and Mozambique.

ii. The Americas

14. The Director of the Regional Bureau for the Americas briefed the Committee on the increasing displacement in the Americas, noting that one out of every five persons of concern globally had sought protection in the region. He praised regional cooperation mechanisms, such as the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework (MIRPS) and the Quito Process, and stressed the importance of the Brazil Plan of Action as the road map for protection and solutions in Latin American and the Caribbean.

15. The Committee noted the exacerbating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the already difficult humanitarian situation in the region. Asylum systems were overstretched by the immense protection needs and the challenges brought on by the pandemic. This could pave the way for both rising irregular movements and ill-prepared and premature returns.

16. Regarding the Venezuela situation, delegations expressed concern about the humanitarian needs of the population inside the country, as well as of those who had left. Underfunding of the humanitarian response plan and the refugee and migrant response plan was worrying. UNHCR was encouraged to raise the visibility of the regional response and to pursue financial support from additional donors. In this respect, UNHCR's outreach to development actors and international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, was welcomed, as was the upcoming international donors conference to support host countries, organized by Canada in June 2021.

17. The efforts of several countries to broaden protection avenues for Venezuelans was commended, in particular Colombia's decision to provide temporary protection status to Venezuelans in the country for a 10-year period. This gesture of solidarity and inclusion was considered a tangible example of the generosity of host countries in the region.

18. Regarding the situation inside Colombia, appreciation was expressed for UNHCR's efforts to monitor new forced displacement and to provide protection and assistance for IDPs and other victims of conflict. The increase in UNHCR's budget for Colombian IDPs was welcomed, and the Office was encouraged to consider how these funds could have the greatest impact for vulnerable groups, including community leaders, Afro-Colombians and indigenous populations. Attention was also drawn to the protracted Colombian refugee situation and the need for international support to find durable solutions for them. Several delegations highlighted the continued displacement in the north of Central America which, while caused by poverty, inequality and violence, disasters and the effects of climate change, had been exacerbated by the pandemic.

19. The Committee reaffirmed its support for the regional cooperation mechanisms highlighted by the Director and called for more actors to join these efforts. The inclusion of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) was welcomed as an important step to broadening the support base, and further exchange between the regional support platforms to share experiences, lessons learned and best practices was encouraged. Continued discussions between UNHCR and MIRPS donor countries on how to better leverage private sector partnerships and the role of multilateral development banks were also appreciated.

20. The Director recognized the importance of continuing to address the humanitarian needs inside Venezuela (the Bolivarian Republic of), including of returnees, recalling that in 2020 UNHCR provided assistance to over 1.5 million Venezuelans in 68 communities. With respect to Colombia, he reassured the Committee that UNHCR would continue to provide support to IDPs and victims of conflict. He reaffirmed the Office's commitment to supporting asylum systems, registration, integration efforts and emergency response in the event of natural disasters. The Director stressed that funding levels for the region remained low and called for further resources to meet the needs. He also noted UNHCR's resolve to involve development actors and international financial institutions in the response, with a view to addressing the root causes of displacement.

iii. Asia and the Pacific

21. The Director of the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific presented the update on UNHCR's operations in the region. While highlighting positive developments, he noted that the pandemic had widened the inequalities faced by displaced people and briefed on the significant challenges in this regard. Adding to these were internal conflicts and escalating violence in parts of the region.

22. Delegations commended UNHCR for its continued strong engagement and lamented that forced displacement was exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19. Developing countries, which host over 85 per cent of the world's refugees, required greater international support. UNHCR was encouraged to help refugees and host countries with vaccinations and to advocate the assistance of development partners in this endeavour. Concern was also voiced about the deteriorating protection environment for women and girls, and UNHCR and partners were urged to strengthen the response to sexual- and gender-based violence. UNHCR was commended for its regional approach to reducing statelessness, and the related efforts of several countries were welcomed.

23. Many delegations expressed their condolences for the lives lost in the recent fire in the refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. The country was praised for its continued generosity in hosting Rohingya refugees, while delegations voiced their commitment to helping address the needs of refugees and host communities in the spirit of burden- and responsibility-sharing. The recent United Nations mission to Bhasan Char to assess the humanitarian and protection needs was welcomed. Delegations urged States to rescue and disembark Rohingya who undertake dangerous journeys by sea and noted UNHCR's continued advocacy in this regard; the fundamental human right to seek asylum and the prohibition of refoulement must not be derogated during pandemics. Concern was expressed about the military coup in Myanmar, the escalating use of violence and impact on the situation in Rakhine State. The need for unhindered humanitarian access for the delivery of assistance was underscored. Delegations echoed UNHCR's calls for the implementation of the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State. The importance of efforts under the tripartite memorandum of understanding between Myanmar, UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was emphasized, including supporting communities and creating conditions conducive for the safe, voluntary and dignified returns of the nearly 1 million Rohingya refugees hosted in Bangladesh and other countries of the region.

24. With regard to the Afghan situation, the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan were commended for their long-standing generosity in hosting Afghan refugees. The importance of finding durable solutions for displaced Afghans and supporting host communities was underlined, while the lack of progress in this area was lamented. In this context, the increased violence inside Afghanistan and lack of livelihood opportunities were worrying. The support platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) and establishment of the core group were seen as positive developments. Delegations further supported the priority areas for return and reintegration (PARR) approach, and the increase in the number of the PARRs was welcomed. With regard to Afghanistan's growing IDP population, delegations asked how UNHCR's 2019 IDP policy had translated into changes and how it was supporting the Government.

25. In response to interest expressed in the joint response plan for the Rohingya crisis, the Director noted that the launch would take place shortly, with an appeal for \$900 million. The Committee was informed that humanitarian access in Rakhine State remained unimpeded. UNHCR continued to work with UNDP under the tripartite memorandum of understanding, and engagement with communities remained important to facilitate voluntary return when conditions permit. He expressed hope that regional efforts to support livelihoods, education and health would be scaled up, in line with the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State. Concerning disembarkation, UNHCR supported the need for a regional collaborative framework and would continue its advocacy with partners, alongside its work with countries to address protection needs.

26. Regarding the Afghan situation, the Director thanked the SSAR Core Group members and the Chair for their efforts. While acknowledging concerns about the precarious situation, he noted the importance of the complex peace process and in investing in conditions conducive for return. The Director conveyed gratitude for the support of the international community and to the Government of Afghanistan for their proactive efforts to increase the PARRs, particularly with regard to livelihoods, health and access to education. He noted that UNHCR's response under its IDP policy involved building the capacity of national partners, expanding assistance through cash-based interventions and disaggregating data for an evidence-based response.

iv. Europe

27. The Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe provided an update on developments in the region, noting that the COVID-19 pandemic had touched upon every aspect of UNHCR's work. She highlighted a number of positive developments, particularly the efforts of States to ensure persons of concern were included in their national response and vaccination plans, as well as the often innovative efforts to maintain access to territory and asylum, despite the public health emergency and containment measures. Many of these innovations could inform the future reform of asylum systems in Europe. The Director noted that UNHCR had scaled up its operational response, including the provision of enhanced cash-grants in 12 European States, assisting 79,000 persons of concern. She also highlighted several areas where challenges persisted, namely continuing incidences of pushbacks at land and sea, inadequacy of reception arrangements in many parts of Europe, gaps in services for unaccompanied children and survivors of gender-based violence, and the need to resume and expand refugee resettlement and complementary pathways.

28. The Committee commended UNHCR for quickly adapting its response to the COVID-19 pandemic and for advocating the inclusion of persons of concern in national health responses. Support was expressed for multilateral efforts to address the global challenges of forced displacement, and delegations voiced their commitment to international burden- and responsibility-sharing. Delegations also supported the proposed new Pact on Migration and Asylum which represented an important way forward for a comprehensive approach. While appreciating UNHCR's efforts, delegations underscored the need to ensure access to asylum, improve reception conditions and address the challenges of increased numbers of mixed migratory arrivals. A collective response remained paramount in this regard.

29. Delegations welcomed UNHCR's work with vulnerable populations in Greece and commended UNHCR and involved States on their relocation efforts. Appreciation was also conveyed for UNHCR's support to vulnerable persons in a number of operations from the beginning of pandemic and, in particular, for facilitating the opening of humanitarian corridors that facilitated access to basic services and pensions. Deaths at sea and the surge of new arrivals in the Canary Islands (Spain) were alarming, and there were calls for measures to prevent such tragedies in the future. The need for a collective response to the situation in the Central Mediterranean was highlighted.

30. Numerous delegations referred to the importance of resuming resettlement following a temporary suspension resulting from the pandemic, and the related efforts of UNHCR and States were welcomed. UNHCR was called upon to prioritize addressing the high level of statelessness in Europe, while delegations pledged their support in this endeavour.

31. The Director thanked delegations for their support. Regarding frontline States and concerns related to access to asylum, she agreed with calls for an integrated approach that would preserve the right to seek asylum, combat human trafficking, manage borders in a protection-sensitive manner and ensure non-refoulement. Should pushbacks occur, she counted on concerned States to respond and investigate. The Director underscored the need to ensure more efficient returns for rejected asylum-seekers, requiring continued partnership with countries of origin. On the Pact on Migration and Asylum, she welcomed the focus on the external dimension of policies but urged States to simultaneously act on the internal dimension. In terms of the pandemic, the Director noted that while many European States had taken restrictive measures regarding access to asylum, many had since lifted those measures. She thanked States that had preserved access to territory and asylum and that had included persons of concern in their national efforts to combat the pandemic. She acknowledged concerns on the impact of COVID-19 on sexual and gender-based violence, noting that it was a key consideration of UNHCR's response but that there was more to be done.

v. The Middle East and North Africa

32. The Director of the Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa presented the regional update, describing heightened challenges resulting from COVID-19 and UNHCR's efforts to support host governments in ensuring the continuation of protection and assistance for persons of concern. He expressed appreciation to host countries in the region for including persons of concern to UNHCR in their national COVID-19 response plans and, more recently, in vaccination campaigns.

33. Delegations commended UNHCR for mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on refugees and other displaced populations, particularly through increased cash assistance, and for swiftly adapting its operations to continue providing protection and assistance to persons of concern, despite extremely challenging circumstances. They underlined how the COVID-19 pandemic had severely impacted the national economies of host countries and strained resources, worsening living conditions and poverty for refugees and host communities alike. Nonetheless, host countries had continued to include refugees in national COVID-19 response plans, providing them with social assistance to alleviate economic hardship and ensuring their access to basic services, including health care and education. International support remained insufficient to meet the growing needs of refugees and other displaced populations, as well as host communities, and delegations emphasized that the principle of burden- and responsibility-sharing needed to be implemented in a prompt, equitable and effective manner.

34. Concerns were voiced over the impact of camp closures on IDPs in Iraq and that the requisite conditions needed to be in place, in line with the principled returns framework, to ensure safe, dignified and sustainable returns. UNHCR was urged to continue working with the Iraqi Government and development actors to assist IDPs and IDP returnees, and to achieve durable solutions for them. Alarmed at the worsening humanitarian situation inside the Syrian Arab Republic, delegations highlighted the need to ensure safe and unhindered access for humanitarian workers to people in need and to maintain cross-border humanitarian interventions. UNHCR was urged to advocate the extension and expansion of the Security Council authorization for cross-border humanitarian operations. The need to focus on resilience-building and to strengthen the nexus between humanitarian assistance and longer-term solutions, while maintaining the centrality of protection, was also emphasized. A number of delegations underlined that conditions in the Syrian Arab Republic were not yet conducive to safe, voluntary and dignified returns, and urged UNHCR to provide Syrian refugees and IDPs with information about conditions in return areas to enable informed decision-making.

35. Concerns were raised over the escalation of hostilities in Marib Governorate in northern Yemen, which triggered further displacement and exacerbated the humanitarian situation. Delegations condemned the obstruction of the delivery of humanitarian aid and called on the parties to the conflict to ensure the safety of humanitarian workers and to remove all obstacles to the delivery of life-saving assistance, in line with international

humanitarian and human rights laws and principles. UNHCR was urged to continue close coordination with United Nations partners and to remain engaged, security permitting.

36. Delegations emphasized the need for increased efforts towards identifying and achieving durable solutions, including through expanding resettlement places and pursuing cross-sectoral initiatives to address root causes of displacement in countries of origin. Environmental degradation, water scarcity and the effects of climate change were noted as playing an increasingly important role in triggering displacement. It was, therefore, imperative that the international community undertake concerted efforts to tackle these issues to reduce further risk of displacement.

37. The protracted situation in the Sahrawi refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria and the need to achieve durable solutions were highlighted. One delegation called on UNHCR to redouble its efforts to meet the real needs of the Sahrawi refugees, noting the increase in this population. While reiterating the integrity of this operation, it recalled that registration was an integral part of the United Nations peace plan for Western Sahara. Another delegation expressed concern about aid diversion and renewed its call for UNHCR to proceed with the registration of this population, in line with its mandate and relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions. It noted that registration, which is a key protection tool, improves the integrity of the operation by preventing and combating fraud and crime, including trafficking in persons.

38. The Director thanked host countries and donors for their ongoing generosity and support for refugees and UNHCR's operations across the region. On humanitarian access in Yemen, he appealed to States to support UNHCR in advocating respect for international humanitarian law. UNHCR had opened an office in Marib in the hope that access to populations in need would improve with a stronger presence in the area. Regarding the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, he assured the Committee that UNHCR would continue advocating renewed authorization for cross-border humanitarian operations through different channels. Furthermore, he noted that UNHCR's position on returns remained unchanged as conditions in the Syrian Arab Republic had not improved. He also spoke about the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), which included a component on the needs of vulnerable host community members so as not to discriminate in the provision of assistance. Responding to concerns related to the registration backlog in Egypt, the Director noted that COVID-19 related public health measures had impacted the process, but that UNHCR would resume its registration activities as a priority as soon as the conditions permitted.

B. Global programmes, inclusion and resilience

39. The Director of the Division of Resilience and Solutions presented the update on global programmes, inclusion and resilience (EC/72/SC/CRP.3). He briefed the Committee on how UNHCR had adapted its global programmes to address the challenges presented by COVID-19. He highlighted UNHCR's efforts to ensure that refugees were not left behind in a country's progress towards the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and its work to expand partnerships with development actors and multilateral development banks to include forcibly displaced populations in their responses.

40. The Committee commended UNHCR for the continued delivery of vital and life-saving programmes during the COVID-19 pandemic. By prioritizing activities in 2020, the Office had been able to successfully mitigate some of the initial socioeconomic and social effects of COVID-19. However, the long-term secondary impacts on refugees and host countries were yet to become apparent. UNHCR's advocacy to ensure the inclusion of refugees in national health systems and vaccination programmes was applauded, as was the emphasis on integrating mental health and psychosocial support in its programming. Delegations expressed an interest in receiving an analysis on the lessons learned from the pandemic, including insights on how to build on some of the innovations that may offer greater efficiencies and proposals to develop additional tools. An example was the quick implementation of cash transfers to support IDPs and refugees, while taking into consideration age, gender and diversity factors. Some delegations expressed concern about

the negative impact of sanctions on refugee access to food, education, essential health supplies, and COVID-19 medical support as well as the capacity of the affected host countries to duly attend to their needs.

41. The COVAX vaccine facility and humanitarian buffer, initiated by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Gavi (the Vaccine Alliance), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization, received strong support. The Committee highlighted the need to ensure equitable access for persons of concern, while underscoring that attention and resources should not be detracted from other health programmes.

42. The Committee welcomed efforts to include forcibly displaced persons in government economic relief plans and social services and encouraged UNHCR to continue to work with development entities to promote inclusion. Several delegations highlighted the importance of work already undertaken with development actors, including the International Labour Organization's (ILO) partnership for improving prospects for forcibly displaced persons and host communities (PROSPECTS). Appreciation was expressed for the relationship UNHCR had leveraged with the World Bank, particularly on data collection. Efforts to implement creative programmes to utilize refugee skills and talent were welcomed. Delegations encouraged UNHCR to continue promoting livelihood activities, taking into account the economic impact on host communities and countries, in line with the principles of the GCR. Furthermore, the development of a blueprint for joint action for refugee children together with UNICEF was highlighted as a positive step.

43. UNHCR was congratulated for its commitment to climate action, including its memorandum of understanding with the Platform on Disaster Displacement. Delegations looked forward to receiving the report on strategic climate action.

44. The Director confirmed that decentralization had allowed UNHCR to rapidly field an operational response to the challenges brought on by the pandemic. Nonetheless, UNHCR had struggled with constraints in acquiring supplies, overcrowding of camps and not being able to get enough data on the spread of the virus. He confirmed that the organization had now stockpiled supplies for additional needs. The Director concurred with the view of many delegations that the socioeconomic impact would affect inclusion efforts and underscored the importance of working with development actors. He assured the Committee that UNHCR remained engaged with the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies, which was the result of a pledge made at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum to make a difference in the education of crisis-affected and displaced children and youth.

IV. Management, financial control, administrative oversight and human resources

45. The Inspector General presented the update on the work of his office, which continued to be guided by UNHCR's policy on independent oversight. He briefed the Committee on the three focus areas: coordination of UNHCR's independent oversight system (comprising internal and external entities); the direct delivery of oversight; and investigations in response to misconduct. The Inspector General also set out his strategic vision for the next five years, including ongoing reform efforts.

46. The work of the Inspector General's Office (IGO) over the past year was commended, particularly its ability to adapt and ensure that vital oversight work could continue despite the challenges presented by the pandemic. UNHCR was commended for having quickly identified and addressed the new risks brought on by the situation.

47. Support was conveyed for the strategic oversight function and, in particular, the meta-analysis of oversight findings and sharing of that information with management. A strong management response was essential for the overall health and effectiveness of the organization. With respect to investigations, appreciation was expressed for the victim-centred approach that was being applied in the context of sexual misconduct and for the training package for partners on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, which would

soon be rolled out. As some 80 per cent of allegations with identified or identifiable victims implicated partner personnel, this was an area in need of more attention.

48. The importance of the IGO being sufficiently resourced, particularly in light of the continued level of complaints predicted for 2021, was highlighted by numerous delegations. This would ensure appropriate follow-up and thorough assessment. It was critical that weaknesses and gaps be addressed, and the increase in management implication reports was welcome. Accountability was pivotal. Regarding reform, delegations looked forward to learning more about the development of the oversight role in the regional bureaux. UNHCR's efforts to reinforce its presence in the field were welcomed, as was its focus on the digitization of tools which helped strengthen the overall oversight system of UNHCR.

49. The Inspector General expressed appreciation for the support and engagement of the Committee. On COVID-19 related risks, he noted that there were a range of risks related to supply and delivery, but these had been handled well by management. With respect to the management implication reports, the increase could be seen as positive. There were many lessons to be learned, with a focus on prevention in the long run. Responding to a question regarding the coordination of investigation work, the Inspector General replied that UNHCR continued to work across the wider United Nations system and was currently looking at shared challenges with UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP). The IGO was working closely with the regional bureaux on how the oversight function worked in a decentralized context and how all the oversight pieces fit together. On resources, he noted that despite budget cuts his office was focused on being as efficient and effective as possible, working to reduce demand through the prevention of recurring problems.

50. The Deputy High Commissioner affirmed management's continued commitment to working in partnership with the IGO. On the budget question, she noted that the IGO function was entirely covered by unearmarked funding and stressed the importance of this type of support. She commended the IGO's focus on efficiencies and indicated management's readiness to look at additional requirements as needed. Responding to a call for the Office to remain vigorous in addressing and prevention sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment, she assured the Committee that the High Commissioner continued to be a champion on this issue and that UNHCR's commitment remained strong.

V. Programme/protection policy

51. The Director of the Division of Strategic Planning and Results (DSPR) presented UNHCR's programme in the Secretary-General's proposed programme budget for 2022 (EC/72/SC/CRP.4). This was linked to the small portion of the overall General Assembly appropriation to the United Nations regular budget which was intended to fund a proportion of UNHCR's management and administrative costs. She noted that the content would be further reviewed by the United Nations Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), and that the programmatic aspects would be further elaborated on in UNHCR's annual budget for 2022.

52. The Committee welcomed UNHCR's programme in the Secretary-General's proposed programme budget for 2022, particularly efforts to include activities related to the implementation of the GCR. As the programme was broad, more information on prioritization would be welcome.

53. The impact of displacement on developing countries, exacerbated by the pandemic, was emphasized. Yet, persistent funding gaps remained, and none of the joint response plans had achieved their funding targets. A lack of attention to durable solutions, particularly voluntary repatriation, was highlighted, and UNHCR was urged to ensure that such mandated activities were well reflected in the programme of work. More equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing in the spirit of international solidarity and cooperation until durable solutions were achieved should also be underscored.

54. Responding to a question about the share of the United Nations regular budget that was allocated to UNHCR, the Director indicated that this stood at approximately 1.3 per cent.

This represented less than 1 per cent of the total funding UNHCR received from all sources. She took note of the comments made on the impact of displacement on developing countries and on durable solutions. On prioritization, the Director indicated that UNHCR's detailed budget for 2022 was being developed and that more information would be forthcoming.

55. The decision contained in annex I was adopted.

VI. International protection

A. International protection and durable solutions in the context of a public health emergency

56. The Chief of the Protection Policy and Legal Advice Section of the Division of International Protection (DIP) presented the update on international protection and durable solutions in the context of a public health emergency (EC/72/SC/CRP.5), highlighting key challenges and ways to address them. It was hoped that the conference room paper would aid member States in the upcoming discussions on an Executive Committee conclusion on this topic.

57. Delegations commended UNHCR's commitment to "stay and deliver" during the COVID-19 pandemic, and innovative approaches taken to carry out its mandate, including in relation to refugee status determination. UNHCR's call for the inclusion of persons of concern in national responses, including vaccination programmes, was widely echoed. Delegations called for support for COVAX and equitable access to vaccines. The role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in mass vaccination campaigns – including assisting with cold-chain management, the deployment of vaccinations, facilitating access to communities and marginalized groups, community mobilization and tackling misinformation – was highlighted. UNHCR was also encouraged to increase its work with States to include IDPs in COVID-19-related national action plans.

58. Delegations highlighted the intensification of existing challenges for persons of concern during the pandemic, including sexual exploitation and abuse, and gender-based violence, the increased challenges for people with disabilities and the profound impact of school closures on the right to education. UNHCR was urged to continue prioritizing these areas, including implementation of the United Nations disability inclusion strategy across its operations. Delegations called for comprehensive partnerships with countries of origin and transit in tackling the socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic and underscored the need for long-term development and humanitarian aid in host countries. UNHCR was encouraged to give greater attention to the impact of COVID-19 on mental health and psychosocial support and to invest in programmes to support communities. Both UNHCR and States were urged to support cash assistance and livelihood programmes to enable families to recover from lost income. The urgent need for international cooperation to tackle the pandemic's effects, including on persons of concern and host communities was reiterated.

59. Several delegations commented that the conference room paper provided a good basis for the discussions on the Executive Committee conclusion for 2021. They indicated their willingness to engage in negotiations, expressing hope that the conclusion would provide necessary guidance in many of the areas mentioned above. The conclusion was timely and could help UNHCR and States in strengthening ongoing responses and preparing for future pandemics.

60. The Director of DIP encouraged all delegations to participate in the upcoming consultations on the Executive Committee conclusion. She affirmed the direct link between international protection and durable solutions, stating that the former was designed to achieve the latter. She acknowledged concerns regarding the slowing down of resettlement and voluntary repatriation in the face of COVID-19 due to mobility restrictions, while noting that other factors affecting progress in these areas predated the pandemic. The increase in gender-based violence as a result of the pandemic was also of key concern to UNHCR, and the Director mentioned a number of initiatives to examine this issue more closely. Regarding the protection of children and people with disabilities, the Director noted a wide range of

responses, including the involvement of persons of concern themselves. On the subject of addressing mental health and psychosocial support, she hoped this message could carry into the Executive Committee conclusion with the support of States.

B. Oral update on the HC’s dialogue on protection challenges

61. The Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) presented the key outcomes and recommendations of the 2020 High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges, which focused on the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for the protection and resilience of displaced and stateless people and host communities. She noted that the GCR had demonstrated its value and relevance in the context of COVID-19 and that burden- and responsibility-sharing constituted one of the core principles that would continue to guide responses to global emergencies in the future. UNHCR hoped that the outcomes and recommendations that had emerged from the Dialogue would help inform considerations for the Executive Committee conclusion on this theme and discussions at the High-Level Officials Meeting in December 2021.

62. Delegations expressed appreciation for UNHCR’s efforts to hold the Dialogue despite challenging circumstances due to COVID-19 and welcomed the unprecedented level of participation. UNHCR was commended for including the voices of refugees in the different sessions and was encouraged to ensure their continued participation in global discussions. They underlined that the international refugee protection landscape had changed as a result of COVID-19 and emphasized that the international community should draw from the good practices and lessons learned that had emerged with a view to improving the response. With this in mind, outcomes of the Dialogue should inform the Executive Committee conclusion, particularly on the use of technology and remote modalities in the issuance of documentation and processing of asylum applications during a public health emergency. Furthermore, the High-Level Officials Meeting was viewed as an important opportunity to take stock of the progress made towards achieving the objectives of the GCR and UNHCR was encouraged to publish its assessment of progress toward the GCR by September 2021. This would help inform the engagement of the different stakeholders in this process.

63. The Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) affirmed that the COVID-19 pandemic had brought the importance of international solidarity further to the forefront. She explained that UNHCR was looking at the lessons learned from the pandemic and ways to advance burden- and responsibility-sharing in the changing protection environment. She assured the Committee that UNHCR would continue to engage with and include refugees in discussions and processes. She concluded by highlighting the importance of an Executive Committee conclusion, noting that it would help strengthen the international refugee protection regime in the face of global health emergencies in the future.

VII. Coordination

64. The Director of the Division of External Relations (DER) presented the update on strategic partnerships and coordination (EC/72/SC/CRP.6), including an overview of how UNHCR’s response to COVID-19 had resulted in new and strengthened partnerships. She also touched upon UNHCR’s engagement in the United Nations development system reform.

65. Delegations welcomed UNHCR’s progress on establishing new strategic partnerships and strengthening existing ones, in line with the multi-stakeholder approach highlighted in the Global Compact on Refugees. Partnerships in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the importance of vaccine equality were emphasized. A collective response was crucial in responding to the additional challenges, and UNHCR was encouraged to maintain close cooperation with States. UNHCR’s collaboration with development and peace actors was commended, as was its work on diversifying partnerships with more local and regional actors in line with its “grand bargain” commitments. UNHCR was encouraged to enhance the quality of partnerships and to strengthen the capacity of local and national responders. UNHCR’s collaboration with international financial institutions, including the World Bank, was widely welcomed to address the development needs of refugees, and interest was

expressed in UNHCR's partnerships with regional development banks. Delegations appreciated UNHCR's work on streamlining reporting requirements with NGO partners. The UNHCR and WFP Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub was applauded for its aim of more sustainably addressing basic needs, while building the self-reliance of persons of concern. The commitment to a common cash system was seen as critical, and UNHCR was urged to accelerate this work with partners.

66. On coordination, UNHCR's role as a key member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and the substantial part it played in the activation of IASC system-wide scale-up protocols in response to the pandemic, as well as the development of the global humanitarian response plan, were commended. On internal displacement, delegations supported UNHCR's efforts to strengthen its leadership of the protection, shelter, and camp coordination and camp management clusters and encouraged further efforts with development actors to address the needs. It was hoped that the high-level panel on IDPs would make concrete recommendations in advancing these efforts. UNHCR's work with refugee-led organizations was also welcomed.

67. While appreciating UNHCR's commitment to a new action plan on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and adopting a victim-centred approach, it was noted that more work needed to be done across the humanitarian system, including supporting survivors. Delegations stressed the importance of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as a non-negotiable element of needs assessments and planning processes from the onset of a humanitarian emergency.

68. The Director thanked the Committee for its support. She affirmed that statelessness was high on UNHCR's agenda and highlighted the partnerships focused on addressing birth registration, legal identity and discrimination. In response to a query on the triple nexus of humanitarian, development and peace in fragile contexts, the Director noted that UNHCR had provided a roadmap on how it could best contribute to the recommendations of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. She acknowledged the need for UNHCR to continue to improve and strengthen its partnerships with NGOs and reiterated UNHCR's commitment in this regard.

VIII. Update on budgets and funding (2020 and 2021)

69. The Director of DSPR and the Director of DER presented the update on budgets and funding for 2020-2021 (EC/72/SC/CRP.7). The Director of DSPR indicated that the final budget for 2020 stood at \$9.1 billion and included two supplementary budgets, for COVID-19 and the Sahel situations respectively. She informed the Committee that expenditure had increased across all the regions and global programmes, while there was a slight decrease in headquarters expenditure. The Director of DER thanked donors for the unprecedented amount of funds made available to UNHCR, which reached \$5.3 billion. For the first time, funding from the private sector amounted to over \$500 million and that of the public sector topped \$4 billion. She highlighted that flexible, unearmarked funding played a critical role in allowing UNHCR to deliver on its mandate.

70. Member States conveyed concern over the persistent funding gap, which amounted to 42 per cent of UNHCR's requirements in 2020, while forced displacement was on the rise and the Office faced new challenges such as the pandemic. UNHCR was commended for its efforts to secure funding from both traditional and new donors, and encouraged to further diversify its funding sources. Donor governments were urged to respond generously to the High Commissioner's appeals for resources, particularly through unearmarked and softly earmarked funds. UNHCR was also advised to seek improved economies of scale, reduce management costs and take other measures to make voluntary contributions stretch further. A request was made for annual briefings on management efficiencies.

71. UNHCR was encouraged to prioritize programmes based on need and vulnerability and to share information transparently, particularly at the field level, and in a timely manner. While acknowledging the importance of the availability of vaccines for persons of concern,

concern was expressed that resources would be diverted from other essential health services, and delegations enquired about collaboration with partners on this.

72. The Deputy High Commissioner expressed appreciation to donor and host countries. She acknowledged the appeal for diversification of the donor base and noted that States could be helpful in developing strategies to this end. On management efficiencies, the Deputy High Commissioner noted that these were woven into every aspect of UNHCR's work and that UNHCR was also contributing to discussions on efficiencies at the inter-agency level. She suggested that this topic could be discussed further at the next Standing Committee meeting. On the cost benefit analysis of the decentralization and regionalization process, the Deputy High Commissioner requested more time for a proper analysis considering that 2020 was a pandemic year with multiple challenges. Furthermore, it was important not to undertake the analysis too early as it would not be a representation of the long-term benefits to the organization.

73. In response to a question on the impact of United Nations liquidity challenges, the Director of DSPR informed the Committee that this had not had an impact on UNHCR funding. The contribution from the United Nations regular budget was received in full in 2020 and the expectation was the same for 2021. As to the effects of COVID-19 on the 2022 plans, these were still being assessed and the issue would be addressed with more precision at upcoming discussions on the budget. The Director of DER confirmed that increased funding from the private sector from individual and corporate donors, as well as foundations was expected despite the pandemic.

74. On the draft decision on budgets and funding for 2021-2022, one delegation requested that the word "greater" be included in the second paragraph to better reflect the level of the burden on host communities in relation to the pandemic as well as other crises. The revised draft decision contained in annex II was adopted.

IX. Any other business

75. In line with the practice of adopting the reports of the Standing Committee meetings through an electronic circulation process, the Chairperson indicated that the report on the eightieth meeting would be prepared by the Secretariat and circulated for comments by 16 April. Following a two-week review period, any comments or corrections from Member States in relation to their interventions would be incorporated, and the report would be subsequently recirculated and considered adopted.

Annex I

Decision on UNHCR's draft programme in the Secretary-General's proposed programme budget for 2022

The Standing Committee,

Takes note of part VI, section 25, programme 21: International protection, durable solutions and assistance to refugees of the United Nations proposed programme budget for 2022.

Annex II

Decision on budgets and funding for 2020 and 2021

The Standing Committee,

Recalling the Executive Committee's decisions, at its seventieth and seventy-first sessions on administrative, financial and programme matters (A/AC.96/1198, para. 13 and A/AC.96/1209, para. 12), as well as its discussions under the programme budgets and funding item at the seventy-ninth meeting of the Standing Committee in September 2020,

Reaffirming the importance of greater responsibility-sharing in solidarity with countries hosting refugees,

Recalls that the Executive Committee, at its seventieth session, approved original programmes and budgets for regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters under UNHCR's 2020-2021 biennial programme budget, amounting to \$8,667.7 million and \$8,615.8 million for 2020 and 2021, respectively,

Recalls that the Executive Committee, at its seventy-first session, approved revised programmes and budgets for regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters under UNHCR's 2020-2021 biennial programme budget (revised), amounting to \$9,131.3 million and \$8,615.8 million for 2020 and 2021 respectively,

Notes that the final 2020 supplementary budgets amounted to \$463.7 million for programmes benefiting UNHCR's global refugee programme, and projects for internally displaced persons,

Takes note of the increase in UNHCR's annual budget for 2020 to a final total of \$9,131.3 million, representing the sum of the original budget of \$8,667.7 million and the final supplementary budgets of \$463.7 million,

Takes note of the increase in UNHCR's annual budget for 2021 to a current total of \$9,152.3 million as at 31 January 2021, representing the sum of the revised budget of \$8,615.8 million and the supplementary budgets of \$536.4 million,

Recognizes that emergencies and unforeseen activities unfolding in 2021 may result in the need for additional or expanded supplementary budgets and that additional resources, over and above those for existing budgets, would be needed to meet such needs, and

Urges member States to continue to respond generously, in the spirit of solidarity and in a timely manner, to the High Commissioner's appeal for resources to meet in full the annual budget for 2021.