



Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

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Organizational matters

Report on the annual session of 2021, 21–23 June 2021¹

I. Organizational matters

1. The annual session of 2021 of the Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) was held virtually due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, via the Zoom platform, from 21 to 23 June 2021.
2. The Executive Board adopted the annotated provisional agenda and workplan for the annual session ([UNW/2021/L.3](#)) and approved the report of its first regular session held on 15 and 16 February 2021 ([UNW/2021/1](#)). The Executive Board also approved the provisional agenda and workplan for the second regular session of 2021 ([UNW/2021/CRP.4](#)), to be held on 14 and 15 September 2021.
3. The Executive Board adopted three decisions (2021/2, 2021/3 and 2021/4) as contained in the annex to this report.

II. Opening statements

4. Opening the session, the President of the Executive Board mentioned that it was encouraging to witness UN-Women's unwavering commitment in exercising its triple mandate considering the global COVID-19 pandemic. He added that rebuilding better from the pandemic and getting on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) would require significant and collaborative efforts. He specified that partnerships, multilateralism and focus on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged would be crucial.
5. In her opening statement, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director thanked the President and the Bureau for their support throughout the year. The head of UN-Women expressed the Entity's solidarity with countries that were still struggling with the pandemic and called on all nations to direct their fiscal response and government stimulus packages to support women. She highlighted the impact of

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COVID-19 on women and girls and identified the relief needed to prevent a major regression in gender equality due to the pandemic. The head of the Entity then mentioned that the Global COVID-19 Gender Response Tracker had been a key asset in recognizing these acute vulnerabilities and stimulating responses.

6. Presenting her annual report, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director highlighted how UN-Women had implemented its normative mandate and had supported many countries in strengthening their legal and policy frameworks in UN-Women's thematic areas over the past 10 years. She recognized that this would not have been possible without collaborative work with Member States and civil society. She further described UN-Women's work to end violence against women, noting the importance of coordination in such work. She added that the Entity had also pushed forward on women's economic empowerment, and specifically underscored the vital importance of solving women's unpaid care burden as brought on by the pandemic. The Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director named the climate-smart agriculture programme in 19 African countries and the Women's Empowerment Principles as examples of UN-Women's work on women's economic empowerment. She then described the Entity's efforts to increase women's representation and leadership since 2010, including through engaging youth in decisions that affect their lives. The head of UN-Women also highlighted the Entity's work on promoting and entrenching positive social norms, as well as its work to end all forms of discrimination, including discrimination based on race and disability.

7. Discussing the Generation Equality Forum (GEF), the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director noted that the GEF intended to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the SDGs, and to respond to the pandemic, in alignment with UN-Women's next strategic plan. She added that the GEF aimed to raise funds so that the women's agenda would not just be implemented by UN-Women but also by other organizations. She thanked the governments of France and Mexico for their leadership, expressed her appreciation to the 54 governments committed to acceleration and welcomed civil society, youth, philanthropic organizations and individuals who had come forward in support of the GEF. She also thanked private sector partners for being leaders in the multi-stakeholder Action Coalitions and for being strongly supportive of and complementary to UN-Women's intergovernmental and civil society partners.

8. In closing, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director remarked that this time of crisis had highlighted the need to rouse all sectors of society to build a new, inclusive world through multilateralism that would build back better. She argued that the Commission on the Status of Women had become an important place to bring together all these stakeholders to propel women forward. She added that she was proud to have overseen an Entity that had significantly increased its influence within the United Nations system, and that had expanded its partnerships and influence beyond the system. Inter-agency resource mobilization, joint programmes and coordination through a network of 400 gender focal points were recognized for safeguarding gender equality gains and supporting the United Nations system's gender parity work. She thanked Member States for their support, as well as the dynamic UN-Women staff for their commitment and dedication.

9. Upon opening the floor to delegations, several Member States thanked the head of UN-Women for her comprehensive update. Member States expressed their appreciation to the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director for her work at UN-Women during the past eight years and for establishing UN-Women as the leading organization in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. In response to the presentation of the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director's annual report, delegations commended UN-Women's achievements over the past 10 years and especially during the difficult circumstances that 2020 presented. Several delegations

reiterated the far-reaching effects of COVID-19 on women and girls and noted that this had the potential to thwart progress on the achievement of most gender-related SDG targets. Member States also added that they were pleased that UN-Women was on track to achieve the targets as articulated in its Strategic Plan 2018–2021.

10. Discussing UN-Women's Strategic Plan 2022–2025, numerous delegations expressed their appreciation for the Entity's extensive and inclusive consultations on the development of its next strategic plan. Some Member States noted that the plan was the first concrete action plan that would guide UN-Women's work post-COVID-19 and would do so until midway through the Decade of Action. Several speakers expressed support for the overall direction of the strategic plan and for it being results-oriented and forward-looking. Several Member States welcomed its human rights-based approach (as reflected in the draft text), while others encouraged UN-Women to provide effective support for developing countries and to adopt a stronger development-based approach that respected national priorities and cultural contexts. Additionally, several speakers reiterated the importance of having a strategic plan that would build on lessons learned from UN-Women's current strategic plan, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic. Delegations also stressed the importance of resource mobilization and the allocation of adequate resources to the next strategic plan. Some delegations welcomed the Entity's strengthened focus on implementing its coordination mandate as well as its commitment to continue advancing United Nations reform, expanding its strategic partnerships, including through joint programmes, and working with international financial institutions and the private sector.

11. Regarding the GEF, some speakers expressed confidence that it would accelerate progress towards achieving the SDGs and Beijing Platform for Action by bringing together stakeholders. However, one Member State noted that the GEF was not supported by all Member States and was therefore a divisive tool to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women.

III. Special segment bidding farewell to the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director

12. During a special segment, several speakers paid tribute to the outgoing Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director. The President of the Executive Board commended the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director for her unwavering commitment and dedication to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. On behalf of the Executive Board, he expressed profound gratitude for her leadership of UN-Women and highlighted key results achieved during her eight-year tenure. Through a video message, the Deputy Secretary-General similarly thanked the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director for her creativity, energy, compassion and knowledge in advancing the cause of gender equality and the rights of women and girls everywhere. She commended the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director for being a relentless advocate for the strengthening of norms and standards for gender equality and for being a strong ally for a more effective United Nations system. The Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations – also a former Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women – recalled how the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director served as Deputy President of South Africa and introduced policies and programmes that oversaw poverty alleviation and gave rights to a broader segment of the population. The Permanent Representative highlighted how the head of the Entity had supported women peacebuilders, assisted survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in their demands for justice, built strong partnerships to promote African women's leadership and successfully pushed for women's meaningful participation in conflict. An animated slideshow highlighted the Under-

Secretary-General/Executive Director's eight-year tenure, while another video compilation showed partners, colleagues and friends sharing their one-word description of the head of the Entity. In response, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director thanked all speakers for inspiring her and giving her this gift.

IV. Strategic plan

13. The Executive Board was presented with the draft Strategic Plan 2022–2025. Deputy Executive, Åsa Regnér, highlighted both the challenges and opportunities presented by the current global context, before outlining the seven cross-thematic systemic areas of the new strategic plan. Deputy Executive Director, Anita Bhatia, explained what UN-Women aimed to do differently and better in its new strategic plan and how UN-Women would lead and work with the rest of the United Nations system to achieve results at scale for gender equality and women's empowerment.

14. Member States thanked UN-Women for grounding the Strategic Plan 2022–2025 in human rights law principles and the commitment to leaving no one behind. Other delegations highlighted the need for the strategic plan to reflect the core principle of supporting national ownerships and to ensure alignment with national priorities. Several delegations stressed the need to use inter-governmentally agreed terminology to ensure that the next strategic plan would achieve consensus. One delegation conveyed that it could not support the draft strategic plan and underscored that it needed serious improvements.

15. In a joint statement, delegations highlighted how COVID-19 had exposed persistent gender inequalities around the world. The statement noted that to get back on track towards fulfilling SDG 5 and to rebuild better, greener and more equally, it would be necessary to rethink business as usual and start addressing the root causes of gender inequality. Several Member States added that the strategic plan must prioritize the negative social and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls and address the feminization of poverty, among other developmental issues. One Member State urged UN-Women to continue advocating for the inclusion of gender-responsive plans in the global recovery response to build back better.

16. Delegations further stressed the importance of strategic and broad partnerships for UN-Women to leverage results through cooperation and welcomed the clearly articulated commitment to the United Nations reform as a core principle in the draft strategic plan. A joint statement highlighted the importance of setting clear gender equality incentives and accountability measures throughout the system and encouraged UN-Women to engage with other United Nations entities to prepare for the programming, monitoring and reporting of collected results. One delegation added that the draft should include a concrete description of collaboration with other organizations to clearly delineate work, avoid duplication and stress comparative advantages. The speaker encouraged UN-Women to strengthen its system-wide mandate to achieve gender parity and an enabling environment across the United Nations.

17. With regard to the integrated results and resources framework, one delegation urged UN-Women to design its monitoring and reporting framework with specific and measurable performance indicators, with a view to measuring the Entity's contribution to the system-wide implementation of the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development (QCPR), and to include indicators on the output level. The speaker encouraged UN-Women to continue to work towards the harmonization of the different organizations' monitoring frameworks.

18. Some Member States were pleased that climate change had been integrated across the thematic priorities, with one delegation reiterating that the issue of biodiversity should also be reflected alongside climate change. One speaker emphasized the importance of the promotion of digital education to address the digital divide, while stressing the need to promote and produce data and knowledge on gender equality to keep track of achievements and challenges.

19. Although several delegations expressed support for the GEF and Action Coalitions, other delegations remarked that the Forum did not enjoy the support of all Member States. One delegation questioned the linkages between the GEF and United Nations work.

20. The Secretariat thanked the delegations for their comments and shared information about the next steps in the development of the strategic plan. The Deputy Executive Director, Åsa Regnér, reiterated that the implications of COVID-19 on women and girls had been central to UN-Women's analysis underpinning the draft strategic plan, while Deputy Executive Director, Anita Bhatia, reassured the Executive Board that UN-Women would seek to incorporate all comments.

V. Financial, budgetary and administrative matters

21. Deputy Executive Director, Anita Bhatia, delivered opening remarks, which were followed by a preliminary presentation by the Director, ad interim, of the Strategy, Planning, Resources and Effectiveness Division to the Executive Board – prior to its formal submission at the 2021 second regular session – on UN-Women's draft integrated budget estimates for 2022–2023. To deliver on its commitments during the first two years of the next strategic plan, UN-Women proposed an integrated budget with estimated voluntary contributions of \$1 billion for 2022–2023 and requested a zero-growth institutional budget appropriation of \$204.4 million.

22. The two-year integrated budget was guided by the overarching ambition for UN-Women to continue its business transformation to achieve impact at scale and deliver measurable development results in line with the needs and opportunities of a repositioned United Nations development system. Despite the challenging global financial context, which continues to be negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, UN-Women proposed to maintain the same estimated level of contributions of \$400 million for regular resources. This resource level would allow the Entity to reach the critical mass required to deliver on its composite mandate. The proposed integrated budget reflected a projected contribution of \$600 million in other resources, as well as a capital investment of \$5 million under information and communication technologies (ICT) to replace the existing Atlas system with a new cloud-based enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution system developed in partnership with other United Nations entities.

23. After opening the floor, one delegation congratulated UN-Women for its successful resource mobilization, which it considered a sign of UN-Women's relevance and partners' trust in the Entity. Speaking in its national capacity, the delegation noted concern that the regular resource targets for 2020 were not reached and emphasized the importance of adequate and increased regular resources. It also expressed its expectation for Member States to fulfil their commitment on the funding compact. The delegation asked UN-Women to elaborate on how core functions and operations, including coordination, would be affected if the targets for regular resources could not be reached.

24. In response to the question raised, the Director, ad interim, of the Strategy, Planning, Resources and Effectiveness Division agreed that it was essential for

UN-Women to have a healthy balance between core and non-core resources. She noted that while 50 per cent would be ideal, UN-Women considered 40 per cent a suitable balance. She added that while it could not be guaranteed that UN-Women would be able to generate the full projected resources, the Entity would continue to exercise the same prudence to identify efficiencies, make use of direct project costing and align with the cost recovery policy, while prioritizing the part of the budget that was dedicated to development activities and delivering on the normative and coordination functions at the regional and country levels.

VI. Evaluation

25. The Director of the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS) presented the report on the evaluation function of UN-Women, 2020 ([UNW/2021/3](#)). The report summarized the completed strategic evaluations, the performance of the UN-Women evaluation function for centralized and decentralized evaluations, UN-Women's contribution to promoting gender-responsive evaluations in the United Nations, and national evaluation capacity development. The 2021 programme of work and budget for the Independent Evaluation Service (IES) was also outlined. The report covered two corporate thematic evaluations and a meta-synthesis of UN-Women evaluations. In 2020, UN-Women completed three joint, three regional and seven country portfolio evaluations and IES provided technical assistance for 29 decentralized evaluations. The overall evaluation results showed sustained progress on the key performance indicators.

26. The Director of the IEAS presented the corporate evaluation of UN-Women's United Nations system coordination and broader convening role in ending violence against women (UNW/2021/CRP.5), which assessed the value and benefit of UN-Women's system coordination and broader convening role in ending violence against women to UN-Women, United Nations entities, governments and other partners, and to the overall achievement of collective outcomes in this area. The evaluation identified three key lessons and concluded that UN-Women's mandate to lead, promote and coordinate mainstreaming of gender equality and women's empowerment across the United Nations system was a strong strategic asset, and that UN-Women had achieved successful results with significant linkages to its United Nations system coordination and collaborative efforts. The assessment revealed that there was a lack of articulation of a concrete value proposition regarding coordination in thematic areas and that successes were achieved more through individual leadership, motivation, charisma and other interpersonal skills. As a result, the evaluation made six recommendations.

27. Speaking on behalf of UN-Women's management, Deputy Executive Director, Åsa Regnér, thanked the IEAS for its work in 2020. She discussed the different evaluations it produced in 2020 and noted that key performance indicators were showing a positive trajectory. Regarding the corporate evaluation on UN-Women's coordination and convening role in ending violence against women, the Deputy Executive Director reiterated that the Entity was committed to implementing the recommendations in its own work to end violence against women, as well as in its work within the United Nations reform. She noted UN-Women's commitment to ensuring that the value proposition to further accelerate results on ending violence against women through a systemic approach and with its external partners was clearly combined, conveyed and enhanced. Moreover, she highlighted that the integrated results and resource framework for the Strategic Plan 2022–2025 presented an opportunity to strengthen the scope of UN-Women's coordination and convening mandate.

28. In a joint statement, Member States thanked the IEAS for the corporate evaluation of UN-Women's coordination role in ending violence against women and expressed their appreciation for management's response outlining how the recommendations would be addressed. On the value of coordination, the statement requested information on the steps that could be taken to address the lack of acknowledgement of UN-Women's coordination role by larger United Nations entities, and conversely UN-Women's responsibility to gain such acknowledgement, while recognizing the duty of the wider United Nations system to request UN-Women's engagement. Given the size of UN-Women's field programme and that coordination successes were more based on individual characteristics and capacity, the statement asked how institutional arrangements could be strengthened at the country level and what role Resident Coordinators could play. It encouraged UN-Women to recruit experienced and more senior staff with the necessary skills or to strengthen staff competence and capacity. The statement also asked how UN-Women planned to operationalize a system-wide accountability and reporting framework on ending violence against women and whether it had the required resources. The statement urged all donors to contribute core resources to enable UN-Women to fulfil its coordination mandate and encouraged the Entity to contribute flexible and predictable funding to women's rights organizations.

29. A second joint statement thanked the Independent Evaluation Service (IES) for the presentation of its annual report and commended the IES on quickly and flexibly adapting the evaluation function to the context of the global pandemic to ensure that evaluations remained gender responsive. It expressed its appreciation for IES' efforts to improve the use of evaluations so far and noted that the next UN-Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025 was informed by lessons learned and recommendations from past evaluations, especially around coordination, increasing efficiency and programming effectiveness. While congratulating the IES on its excellent performance during this challenging year, the statement noted that to reach the 2021 targets, further improvements were needed in several key performance areas. The joint statement encouraged UN-Women's management and IES to pay attention to these areas to strengthen accountability, recommending the following to achieve this: strengthening capacity at the country level; continuing IES-led country portfolio evaluations to focus on strategic evaluations and higher-level results; continuing the use of evaluations; and improving the monitoring of the results of these efforts. It strongly encouraged UN-Women to implement the resource allocation range set in the revised Evaluation Policy and considered the upper end of the range of 3 per cent as an important element to strengthen this core function.

30. In response to Member States' comments on the corporate evaluation on ending violence against women, the Director of the IEAS reiterated the report's recommendation to articulate a value proposition for UN-Women's coordination for results across the United Nations system, as well as the need to increase investment in coordination, particularly with regard to staff skill sets, with a view to ensuring stability and seniority at the country level to coordinate for results. She recognized that coordination depended on organizations wanting to be coordinated and therefore requested that delegations encourage other United Nations entities to work with UN-Women. The Director of the IEAS took note of comments made on the report on the evaluation function, including on strengthening capacity at the country level. Deputy Executive Director, Åsa Regnér, underscored the importance of using the findings and recommendations of both reports and explained that work was already ongoing to develop a system-wide accountability framework.

VII. Audit and investigation matters

31. The Director of the IEAS presented the report of the Internal Audit Service (IAS) on internal audit and investigation activities for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2020. As requested by the Executive Board in its decision [UNW/2015/4](#), and in relation to internal audit activities, this report included: (a) an opinion, based on the scope of work undertaken, on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Entity's framework of governance, risk management and control; (b) a concise summary of work and the criteria that supported the opinion; (c) a statement of compliance with internal audit standards; and (d) a view on whether resourcing of the function was appropriate, sufficient and effectively deployed to achieve the desired internal audit and investigation coverage. The report provided an update on the status of management's implementation of internal audit recommendations. Based on the internal audit work performed in 2020, the IAS's overall opinion was that the Entity's governance, risk management and control processes were generally established and functioning but needed some improvement. More specifically, the report identified four risks that required UN-Women management's attention: (1) further enhance its second line of defence; (2) improve management's absorption capacity to implement corporate audit recommendations; (3) strengthen capacity, particularly in the field, both in terms of staffing and skills; and (4) further demonstrate management's accountability for risk management and related systems of internal control through preparing an annual Statement of Internal Controls.

32. On the caseload of investigations in 2020, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) registered an intake of 28 allegations against UN-Women, with a further 21 carried over from 2019. Out of the 49 total allegations, 31 were closed in 2020, 21 of which were closed after a preliminary assessment by OIOS, and 10 after an OIOS investigation. Of the 21 allegations closed after a preliminary assessment, OIOS referred 10 allegations to UN-Women for potential management action, four of which were substantiated, three unsubstantiated and three merged with another related allegation case. Prohibited conduct constituted the largest category (21 per cent) of types of allegations registered by OIOS in 2020, followed by fraud (16 per cent) and financial misconduct (16 per cent). Additionally, 12 per cent related to misuse of office/position, 9 per cent to personnel, 9 per cent to recruitment and 7 per cent to procurement. Criminal activity and sexual harassment each constituted 2.5 per cent.

33. Deputy Executive Director, Anita Bhatia, presented management's response to the respective recommendations received. Leveraging on audit and advisory results, she highlighted that UN-Women had incorporated all lessons learned from previous audits and evaluations into the formulation of UN-Women's next strategic plan. She further emphasized that the Entity continued to undertake improvements in governance, risk management and compliance for a stronger second line of defence. She highlighted that UN-Women had begun work on standardizing products and services to facilitate scaling for impact and capacity strengthening at the field level. The Deputy Executive Director then commented on the report's four overarching areas for improvement, listing how UN-Women would address each area, and shared some of the positive impacts from the actions that the Entity had taken in response to key recommendations from previous years. With regard to investigations, she emphasized that UN-Women was committed to an inclusive and supportive work environment and discussed several key initiatives that the Entity conducted in 2020, such as the roll-out of the 2020 annual United Nations Leadership Dialogue programme on the topic of civility and dignity in the workplace, designed to drive and promote a robust culture of ethics in the organization. She further highlighted that the 2020 disciplinary report demonstrated UN-Women's prompt and appropriate

action to implement a zero-tolerance policy in those cases where an investigation was warranted and substantiated.

34. The Chair of the Advisory Committee on Oversight (ACO) presented its report for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2020. The report reviewed the performance of the Entity's oversight function, as well as its internal control accountability, including governance, risk management and control systems. Overall, the ACO concluded that all oversight functions were providing useful results to the Entity. Despite the limitations of the pandemic, the ACO noted that the IAS continued to produce audits, reports, studies and assessments, including risk assessment advice for the Entity's pandemic response, further noting that the IAS' 2020 products continued to highlight the need for stronger governance capacity and accountability structures. With regard to the IEAS, the ACO stated that it provided valuable corporate evaluation results and promoted overall evaluation capacity in the Entity, noting that evaluation work could be enhanced with clear definitions of regional and country office roles to ensure appropriate evaluation resources. In terms of evaluation, the ACO concluded that the IES also provided valuable corporate results and promoted overall evaluation capacity. The ACO announced that it would focus on ensuring improvements were made in the time taken to complete investigations and noted that the IEAS would benefit from added resources to focus on lessons learned and fraud prevention. It then highlighted the IEAS advisory report on the ethics and integrity function – which revealed low levels of maturity and the need for strengthening – and advised that audit recommendations include some aspects of systems accountability for findings and audit resolution.

35. With regard to overall internal control and accountability, the ACO applauded UN-Women for adapting its programmes to pandemic responses and incorporating the needs of women arising from COVID-19. The ACO also commended the Entity for completing the Presence Governance Framework and encouraged UN-Women to build on this policy to create an organizational footprint that fitted within realistic resource estimates. The ACO then noted that key governance positions were too thinly resourced and that planned improvements in this area were delayed. It underscored the importance of dedicating more robust resource levels for these functions and argued that a realignment of headquarter functions should consider the resource needs of these offices. The ACO remarked that audits and evaluations highlighted a lack of clear policy on the role of headquarters in relation to field offices and argued that management's initiatives to address this had slowed. It recommended that the Entity redouble its efforts to rationalize these roles after the pandemic and repeated its call for more robust accountability frameworks, including clearer business process owners and roles identification, along with accountability centres for management processes. It recommended that UN-Women's Executive Leadership Team increase focus on absorption capacity and the implementation of agreed upon actions for increased accountability.

36. Deputy Executive Director, Anita Bhatia, delivered management's response to the ACO report, highlighting UN-Women's achievements in response to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the Entity's ninth unqualified audit opinion from the Board of Auditors. In her remarks, the Deputy Executive Director underscored UN-Women's commitment to strengthening key aspects, particularly around risk management and internal governance. She highlighted UN-Women's actions to address this and referred to the revised risk management policy framework, the presence governance policy framework and successful operationalization of the Business Review Committee as examples. However, she agreed that more work was needed and highlighted that UN-Women would continue to work on a responsibility assignment matrix to clarify roles and responsibilities between offices and deepen the office typology work. The Deputy Executive Director remarked that additional resources were needed to

implement the ACO's recommendation to increase resources for key governance functions and establish a dedicated ethics function. She noted that UN-Women was assessing the feasibility of developing a Statement of Internal Controls but mentioned that initial analysis showed that the Entity would need additional resources for this. In response to the ACO's observation that limited resources may pose a risk to achieving UN-Women's organizational and programmatic goals, the Deputy Executive Director highlighted several steps taken to increase delivery-oriented support, integrated planning, better linking of results and resources, and the establishment of a framework for performance oversight and monitoring. Finally, she referred to UN-Women's discussions with the United Nations Development Coordination Office to influence gender equality in countries where UN-Women was not present through the Resident Coordinators.

37. In an interactive dialogue following the presentations, one delegation thanked the Internal Audit Service, the ACO and UN-Women management for the updates and important insights. The Member State felt reassured that UN-Women's oversight functions were able to adapt to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and encouraged the Entity to follow up on the recommendations issued to improve its oversight functions. It also asked about where UN-Women sees potential for harmonizing certain definitions and reporting with other United Nations entities, while noting that this was an important exercise that would enhance transparency and oversight and allow organizations to draw lessons learned from each other's work. The Director of the IEAS responded that since late 2020, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Food Programme (WFP) and UN-Women had been working together on harmonization in response to a decision adopted by the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS in 2020. She added that the organizations had established two working groups, one for internal audit and one for investigations, to study the potential and opportunities for harmonization and to make recommendations for the organizations to consider. The Director underscored that UN-Women was committed to harmonization, while acknowledging that other organizations had varying maturities in terms of their internal audit service or functioning of their governance risk management and control. She noted that the investigation aspect could be more challenging, given that OIOS provides these services to UN-Women, but assured the Executive Board that UN-Women would continue to engage proactively and work collaboratively with the five other organizations to determine where harmonization was possible.

VIII. Policy and programme matters

38. The Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director presented an update on sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment (SEA/SH). She underscored UN-Women's deep commitment to provide a safe, inclusive and respectful work environment, while having the highest standards of policies and processes in place to ensure the effective prevention and response to SEA/SH using a victim-centred approach. She noted that, to tackle the root causes, UN-Women aimed to achieve a culture change that examined power relations, leadership and the role of civility to build an environment where dignity and respect were the norm. In pursuit thereof, she highlighted how UN-Women had developed an inclusive workplace strategy which aimed to strengthen leadership, focusing on people's management and promoting diversity, inclusion and standards of conduct. The head of UN-Women further highlighted efforts taken in 2020 to address SEA/SH, which included providing scenario-based training, designing a multifaceted communications campaign on SH, training implementing partners and

their staff and developing posters and flyers in local languages with key reporting information.

39. The Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director added that SEA/SH risks were being assessed within UN-Women's enterprise risk framework and that mitigation measures were put in place when needed. She further emphasized that UN-Women ensured that its implementing partners had minimum standards in place to prevent and respond to SEA/SH and that it was working in collaboration with other United Nations entities to implement common pipeline assessment tools to further enhance safeguards and appropriate action relating to SEA/SH. She emphasized that UN-Women maintained and promoted a victim-centred approach in all matters relating to SEA/SH and ensured that the voices of survivors were at the heart of its efforts, including through safe and accessible reporting mechanisms. She reported that the SEA tracker was up to date. The Director of Human Resources added that UN-Women had implemented the 12 recommendations made by Deloitte.

40. Complementing the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director, Deputy Executive Director, Anita Bhatia, noted that UN-Women had been actively involved in the Chief Executives Board (CEB) Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment since its creation in 2017. She highlighted how UN-Women had contributed to the Task Force with policy guidance and the development of system-wide products, such as the United Nations system Model Policy on Sexual Harassment and the Clear Check screening database. She further outlined the Task Force's five work streams, in particular emphasizing the fourth work stream, which focused on creating a knowledge- and resource-sharing platform for both internal and external audiences to exchange good practices and undertake peer-to-peer learning. She added that the work stream also focused on enhancing targeted outreach to communicate about the United Nations system's efforts to eradicate SH through periodic briefings to Member States. She further mentioned that UN-Women led and coordinated the work of more than 400 gender focal points across the United Nations system, who had represented this network in the CEB Task Force since 2018. She noted that these gender focal points did not deal with cases as such, but had information in this area that enabled them to advise affected individuals where cases may arise.

41. After opening the floor, several delegations thanked UN-Women for its commitment to working towards a safe working environment for its staff and for tackling SEA/SH, through a joint statement. The joint statement identified four main elements that could help further improve UN-Women's response: (1) by addressing root causes and raising awareness; (2) by mitigating risk; (3) by strengthening country-level responses and inter-agency collaboration; and (4) by providing support to survivors and ensuring confidential reporting. The joint statement further asked what action UN-Women was taking to drive cultural change and address some of the root causes of SEA/SH, how these actions were reflected in country-level strategic notes and how UN-Women was aligning with an implementing initiative set out by the United Nations Secretary-General in his special measures report. Delegations also asked how UN-Women planned to keep Member States informed of progress and what action it was taking to ensure that the 12 recommendations continued to be monitored and evaluated for impact. Finally, the joint statement included a question about how UN-Women was implementing the United Nations Victim Assistance Protocol to ensure that survivors were aware of the rights and support available to them.

42. In response, the Director of Human Resources recalled that UN-Women acknowledged that SEA/SH was deeply rooted in inequalities and power imbalances and that it had developed an inclusive workplace strategy aimed towards strengthening leadership, improving people's management and promoting diversity, inclusion and standards of conduct. The Director of Human Resources also shared numerous examples from UN-Women's activities in 2020 related to this work. He

further discussed risk mitigation measures in place, including for implementing partners, and underscored that UN-Women maintained and promoted a victim-centred approach to all matters relating to SEA/SH. He confirmed that UN-Women had implemented the Victim Assistance Protocol through its regional and country protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) focal points and inter-agency network. The Director of Human Resources further noted that the inclusion of the prevention of SEA/SH in the 2020 QCPR would ensure that sexual misconduct remained central to the United Nations system's agenda and that UN-Women was providing inputs to ensure that SEA/SH targets were adequately reflected in the QCPR monitoring framework. Finally, he confirmed that the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director would continue to report to the Executive Board on this work and actions taken on an annual basis. Deputy Executive Director, Åsa Regnér, noted that SEA/SH was an issue that fell under the violence against women area on which many UN-Women country offices work, including through addressing social norms, and was reflected in strategic notes as such. Deputy Executive Director, Anita Bhatia, further added that UN-Women recognized the need for risk mitigation and analysis, which contributed to early detection and prevention and culture change.

43. The Executive Board also received an update on the implementation of United Nations General Assembly resolution [72/279](#) as presented by Deputy Executive Director, Anita Bhatia. She emphasized that UN-Women continued to work closely with its United Nations partners for coherent, effective and efficient results for women and girls at the country and global level, and remained a committed partner to reposition and reform the United Nations development system. She specified that UN-Women had continued to advocate for and support efforts to ensure that gender equality remained at the centre of United Nations repositioning efforts, including through providing support to joint analysis and planning through inter-agency gender thematic groups, strengthening data and statistics to inform such analysis, setting gender mainstreaming standards and developing technical notes. She further mentioned UN-Women's advocacy and support of including gender equality markers in combination with financial targets and noted how effective this had been with the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund (COVID-19 MPTF). The Deputy Executive Director remarked, however, that this practice was not yet widespread enough as the gender markers and financial targets did not exist in all trust funds and pooled funding mechanisms, noting that UN-Women had been working closely with the COVID-19 MPTF office to bring its learnings into all other funds. The Deputy Executive Director underscored that, in the context of its new Strategic Plan 2022–2025, UN-Women would further refine its business model with an emphasis on operational performance management and would continue to drive for effectiveness and efficiency through coordination and collaboration.

44. After opening the floor, several delegations expressed their appreciation for UN-Women's active engagement in the United Nations reform agenda and for ensuring that gender equality was at the heart of the reform process. One Member State emphasized the importance of flexible and predictable funding, especially core funding, highlighting the important results achieved with the gender marker of the COVID-19 MPTF. It encouraged UN-Women to leverage this momentum to institutionalize financial gender targets for all trust funds and asked what Resident Coordinators, United Nations Country Teams (UNCT) and other organizations would have to do better to achieve higher quality gender mainstreaming and gender equality results across the United Nations system. Another delegation recognized UN-Women's contributions to the creation of the new Resident Coordinator's system and thanked the Entity for its efforts to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment remained common themes throughout joint United Nations programmes. The delegation encouraged UN-Women to partner with other United Nations entities to ensure complementarity in joint endeavours. It also encouraged the Entity to continue

to engage with the United Nations Development Coordination Office on updating the management accountability framework, ensuring its full implementation and providing feedback as needed.

45. In response to the question raised, Deputy Executive Director, Anita Bhatia, emphasized several aspects that would create incentives in the system to take gender equality seriously. For example, she highlighted the importance of having senior staff on the ground, for UN-Women to be involved in the recruitment and appointment of Resident Coordinators and for UN-Women to provide input into the performance of management and Resident Coordinators. She also noted the need to standardize UN-Women products that could be easily rolled out, such as the UNCT System-Wide Action Plan (SWAP) and gender equality profiles. The Chief of the Political Analysis and Programme Development Unit underscored the importance of having standardized tools to ensure the consistent application of gender equality. Deputy Executive Director, Åsa Regnér, added that almost half of all Resident Coordinators were women, which she argued made a big difference in relation to prioritizing these areas. Identifying a gap, the Director of United Nations Coordination suggested setting up a formal, systematic mechanism for pooling expertise on gender among the entities, as one did not already exist. Building upon that, Deputy Executive Director, Anita Bhatia, stressed the need for the allocation of financial resources to match the rhetoric on gender equality. She also highlighted that several United Nations entities continued to produce reports that lacked adequate attention to gender and gender equality issues. She requested that Executive Board members address such omissions at the respective governance bodies, while also acknowledging UN-Women's responsibility to create business processes and systems that allowed for early intervention.

IX. Closing

46. Delivering the closing statement on behalf of the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director, Deputy Executive Director, Åsa Regnér, thanked the President and Vice-President for effectively leading the session, as well as the other Bureau Members and delegations for their contributions and engagement, while also stressing the importance of the relationship between UN-Women and the Executive Board.

47. The Deputy Executive Director thanked delegations for their recommendations and support of UN-Women's progress in implementing its current strategic plan. In response to statements related to UN-Women's next Strategic Plan 2022–2025, the Deputy Executive Director expressed her appreciation for the Executive Board's broad support for the draft, though also acknowledged the concerns expressed by some delegations. She assured the Executive Board that UN-Women would diligently take all inputs into consideration.

48. On resources, the Deputy Executive Director appreciated the support and recognition from Member States of UN-Women's positive efforts to mobilize resources and noted that it was vital that the next strategic plan was adequately resourced. She highlighted that UN-Women had its largest presence in Africa but noted alarmingly that almost all programmes across the continent continued to need increased resources. In reference to concerns expressed by some delegations that UN-Women did not reach the 2020 regular resources target, the Deputy Executive Director encouraged Member States to strongly focus its commitments on the funding targets, while also emphasizing that UN-Women would continue to identify efficiencies to address a potential shortfall. She further emphasized the importance of building strategic and complementary partnerships, including with other United Nations entities. She also underscored the importance of inclusion and added that UN-Women wished to

increase its focus on representation of young women and girls and working with men and boys.

49. The Deputy Executive Director thanked delegations for their support to UN-Women taking an active role in the repositioning of the United Nations in the new United Nations development system and recalled the need for UN-Women to continuously work to strengthen accountability for gender equality both within the United Nations system and through its partnerships in programme countries. Apart from coordination, the Deputy Executive Director stressed that UN-Women would continue to leverage its triple mandate and support Member States to strengthen global norms and standards and translate these into real change in the lives of women and girls.

50. With regard to audits and evaluations, the Deputy Executive Director thanked delegations for their recognition of the strong work carried out by UN-Women and its oversight functions in 2020. She noted that UN-Women would use the results of the evaluations and its recommendations to inform the Entity's strategic plan. The Deputy Executive Director also specifically took note of comments from several delegations encouraging UN-Women to implement the financial targets of allocating 2–3 per cent of overall resources for evaluation. She further stressed that UN-Women prioritized the response to SEA/SH to tackle these crimes and abuse against women.

51. The President of the Executive Board concluded by conveying his appreciation for the commitment, dedication and contributions of all participants. He thanked his fellow Bureau Members for their guidance and leadership and expressed trust that the outcome of the annual session would efficiently and effectively guide UN-Women as it moved towards the end of its current strategic plan and looked towards its next cycle, seeking to ensure a better world for all, with women and girls at the centre.

52. The session was then adjourned.

Annex I

Decisions adopted at the annual session of 2021

2021/2

Annual Report of the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women on progress made on the Strategic Plan 2018–2021

The Executive Board,

1. *Takes note* of the report of the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women on progress made on the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2018–2021 ([UNW/2021/2](#)), and further notes UN-Women's strong performance to date in meeting its annual targets;
2. *Recognizes* the measures taken by UN-Women as part of a coordinated international response in the context of COVID-19, including through the creation and utilization of relevant analytical and data-collection tools that support mainstreaming a gender perspective in the COVID-19 response and recovery efforts;
3. *Encourages* UN-Women to take into account lessons learned from the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2018–2021, including its midterm review, as well as from its previous strategic plans;
4. *Encourages* UN-Women to assess the targets set for the outputs of the Strategic Plan 2018–2021, especially those that have consistently been overachieved, and present alternatives in the Strategic Plan 2022–2025;
5. *Urges* UN-Women to continue to align, as appropriate, its results framework with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals;
6. *Encourages* UN-Women to design the results framework of the Strategic Plan 2022–2025 in line with applicable guidance of the 2020 QCPR, and requests UN-Women while taking into account its own priorities, to harmonize, where appropriate, its indicators with other United Nations entities, with a focus on all results levels, and maximize the use of common results indicators;
7. *Requests* UN-Women to provide in a timely manner, ahead of the second regular session of 2021, more detailed information on the results framework, including on the relationship to the QCPR;
8. *Decides* to transmit the report to the Economic and Social Council.

23 June 2021

2021/3

Report on the evaluation function of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2020

The Executive Board,

1. *Takes note* the 2020 report on the evaluation function of UN-Women, the 2021 programme of work and budget of the Independent Evaluation Service;

2. *Takes note with appreciation* that UN-Women continues to maintain an independent, credible and useful evaluation function and its contribution to system-wide, gender-responsive evaluation efforts and national evaluation capacity development;
3. *Notes* the report on the corporate evaluation of UN-Women's United Nations system coordination and broader convening role in ending violence against women;
4. *Takes note* of the pilot assessment of disability inclusion in evaluation;
5. *Notes* the progress made in implementing decision 2020/4 and requests UN-Women to continue its efforts in order to fully implement this decision with a specific focus on key performance indicators which can be further improved, and further notes its efforts to actively adapt the evaluation function to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic;
6. *Encourages* UN-Women to increase investments towards allocation of at least 2 per cent and up to 3 per cent of its total programme expenditure to the evaluation function, and requests UN-Women to continue working to safeguard the independence of the Independent Evaluation Service and ensuring evaluation expertise in the Advisory Committee on Oversight (ACO);
7. *Expresses* continuing support for strengthening the independent evaluation function in UN-Women.

23 June 2021

2021/4

Report on internal audit and investigation activities for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2020

The Executive Board,

1. *Takes note* of the report on internal audit and investigation activities for the period 1 January to 31 December 2020 and the related management response;
2. *Takes note* of the Advisory Committee on Oversight's report for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2020;
3. *Encourages* UN-Women management to continue strengthening its second line of defence and its work on the establishment of a Statement of Internal Controls;
4. *Calls on* the Independent Evaluation and Audit Service of UN-Women, in coordination with UN-Women's external investigations provider, to continue working with UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF and WFP towards harmonized definitions and reporting for internal audits and investigation matters, where applicable and to the extent possible, and to provide feedback to the UN-Women Executive Board in an appropriate manner.

23 June 2021