



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: Limited
3 July 2020

Original: English

Committee for Programme and Coordination

Sixtieth session

8 June–3 July 2020

Agenda item 7

Adoption of the report of the Committee on its sixtieth session

Draft report

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Addendum

Programme questions: proposed programme budget for 2021

(Item 3 (a))

Programme 21

International protection, durable solutions and assistance to refugees

1. During its sixtieth session, the Committee considered programme 21, International protection, durable solutions and assistance to refugees, of the proposed programme plan for 2021 and programme performance information for 2019 ([A/75/6 \(Sect. 25\)](#)). The Committee also had before it a note by the Secretariat on the review of the proposed programme plan by sectoral, functional and regional bodies ([E/AC.51/2020/10](#)).

2. The representative of the Secretary-General introduced the programme and, together with other representatives of the Secretary-General, responded to queries raised by the Committee during its consideration of the programme.

Discussion

3. Delegations expressed support for the work carried out by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), including its work to provide protection, life-saving assistance and durable solutions to the millions of people displaced by conflict and persecution, including those who were stateless, and the comprehensive approach taken by the Office to structural reform, evaluation and its continued drive for improvement. A delegation also expressed broad support for the Office's efforts to adapt its approach through new initiatives that would promote



self-reliance and inclusion of persons of concern in national systems and the establishment of new or expanded modes of assistance and partnerships, such as those with private sector and development actors, to address the complexity of current humanitarian situations.

4. A delegation expressed support for the proposals contained in the programme plan, in particular the observations made on effectiveness, efficiency and changes to the Office, such as: (a) decentralization and regionalization; (b) results-based management; (c) people management and human resources; (d) data and digitalization; (e) United Nations reform; (f) business processes and systems; (g) risk management; and (h) implementation of the global compact on refugees (as reflected in para. 25.9). A delegation highlighted the importance of having adequate capacity in Geneva that would allow for interaction; as with decentralization and regionalization, the opportunities for local government interactions with the central office were limited.

5. A question was raised concerning the mechanisms used to measure the outcome of the organizational reform in terms of effectiveness and efficiency achieved, and the contribution of the delegation of authority to improving the performance of the work of UNHCR.

6. One delegation was of the view that the reflection of the proposed programme plan in 26 pages was not commensurate with the monetary value of the budget (\$40 million from the regular budget and \$8.8 billion from extrabudgetary resources). The view was expressed that the programme plan should have been subdivided into subprogrammes such as protection, emergency, operations, resettlement, stateless persons and asylum seekers. Another delegation was of the view that the length or brevity of the report should not serve as a measure of the quality of the programme.

7. Delegations expressed support for the Office's commitment to building its programme activities on the basis of the global compact on refugees, the work on refugee education for 2030, the promotion of self-reliance and inclusion of persons of concern in national systems, and the partnerships with private sector and development actors to address the ongoing global migration and refugee crisis.

8. With regard to the global compact on refugees, a delegation noted that, given the legally non-binding nature of the global compact agreement, it would be important for UNHCR to align its activities with the national laws and policies of the affected States. A delegation expressed its appreciation to UNHCR for the successful outcome of the Global Refugee Forum, which was held at the end of 2019. It was highlighted that the Forum served as an important opportunity to secure new pledges and support, in terms of both funding and policy, and that it marked a significant stepping stone in the process of implementing and delivering on the promise of the compact. The view was expressed that greater private sector engagement was key, and some delegations welcomed progress made on that front at the Forum, including support for efforts to increase engagement. A delegation emphasized its support for the continued implementation of the compact and the principles that it represented, in particular longer-term self-reliance of refugees, and sought clarification on how support would be provided for those principles, in terms of opportunities, jobs and access to services, at a time when countries would be under greater economic pressure to rebuild after the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

9. It was noted that some of the activities and terms used in the programme plan were not based on agreed mandated terms. Some delegations stressed that the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its Protocol of 1967 were the only legal foundation of the international refugee protection regime, and emphasized that they would not support expansion of the list of causes of the movement of refugees that related to, for example, climate change, environmental degradation and natural disasters. It was highlighted that there was no universally recognized scientific

evidence for the correlation between climate change and displacement, as well as the predominance of environmental factors in displacement, and that such a relation was not recognized in the global compact on refugees. A delegation expressed the view that the first part of paragraph 25.7 and the fifth paragraph of the “Foreword” section should be deleted, as the issues described on “the establishment of appropriate legal mechanisms and protection gaps that would arise as a result of population movements caused by climate change and disasters” were not part of the mandate of UNHCR. The view was also expressed that another option would be to revise the language on the basis of paragraph 58 of General Assembly resolution [74/130](#) to reflect the fact that “the challenges associated with climate change and environmental degradation continue to affect the operations of the Office of the High Commissioner and the assistance it provides to vulnerable populations of concern across the globe, particularly in the least developed countries. In this regard the Office will continue to address such challenges in its work, within its mandate, and in consultation with national authorities and in cooperation with competent agencies in its operations”. A delegation expressed support for any language that would address the root cause of migration or displacement and highlighted that, if conflict was rooted in climate change, it would be logical to reflect that in the programme plan.

10. Some delegations expressed support for UNHCR assistance to communities generously hosting refugees and other persons of concern. A delegation remarked that developed countries should honour their commitments by increasing their assistance to UNHCR and refugee-hosting countries. It was also stated that the international community should focus on solving underlying problems such as conflict and poverty in order to create conditions for the return of refugees and help countries of origin to embark on the journey to achieve lasting peace, stability, development and prosperity. The delegation stressed that the problem of refugees should be guided by the principle of objectivity, neutrality and non-politicization in order to safeguard the credibility of the international refugee protection system.

11. Concerns were raised by other delegations regarding the lack of reference in the programme plan to the support that UNHCR provided to host countries. Delegations expressed the view that more attention should be given to a fair and balanced burden-sharing, taking into account the different capacities and resources of host countries. Clarification was sought on the partnership between UNHCR and the World Bank referred to in paragraph 25.30. A delegation expressed its reservation about the benefits of cash loans provided to refugees and sought clarification on the results achieved as a consequence of that initiative.

12. Under the section on mandates and background, clarification was sought by one delegation on the definition of the term “new ways of working” used in paragraph 25.8. Confirmation was sought on whether the programme narratives encompassed all funding sources. The importance of ensuring that the programme plan provided an overarching view of the activities of the Office, irrespective of the funding source, was stressed.

13. Under the section on objectives, the view was expressed that the objectives were not defined in terms of results but in terms of a means to achieve the result. A delegation emphasized the important work of the Office as the main international institution providing protection, life-saving assistance and durable solutions to refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons, while another delegation emphasized that the protection of refugees should be focused on their right to develop, and sought clarification on the reasons for the change in the objective of the Office, compared with the objective approved by the General Assembly in the context of the programme plan for 2020 (see [A/74/6 \(Sect.25\)](#), para. 25.16).

14. Under the section on strategy, clarification was sought on the progress made on the ongoing efforts by some States to end the detention of refugees and asylum seekers or to pilot alternatives to detention, in line with the Beyond Detention strategy of UNHCR, which was referred to in paragraph 25.12. It was acknowledged that the issue affected both refugees and host countries. Clarification was also sought on the reference to the promotion and dissemination of refugee law and protection principles, in particular through the training of government officials and staff of non-governmental agencies, as reflected in the same paragraph. It was emphasized that the different preoccupations of affected countries should be taken into account in the content of the curriculum.

15. Under the section on external factors (referred to in para. 25.16), clarification was sought on the type of cooperation undertaken with other entities and the engagement of a broad range of actors, including those beyond the traditional humanitarian sphere. A delegation stressed the importance of having measures in place to monitor and measure performance of those actors, as there were risks involved, and further clarification was sought on the measures put in place by the Office to monitor their performance.

16. Under the section on programme performance in 2019, a delegation commended UNHCR on its performance that year to protect, assist and seek solutions for refugees and other persons of concern. One delegation highlighted that the programme performance in 2019 was well presented compared with other programmes, as it provided information on refugees globally and was a broader reflection of the work of UNHCR compared with other cases in which the presentations were narrower and did not portray the work of the programme.

Conclusions and recommendations

17. **The Committee noted with appreciation the irreplaceable contribution of UNHCR to the protection of an estimated 79.4 million refugees and other persons of concern throughout the world and in pursuance of solutions to their plight.**

18. **The Committee took note of progress made in support of a comprehensive refugee response model thanks to the implementation of the global compact on refugees, as affirmed by the General Assembly in its resolution 73/151 in December 2018.**

19. **The Committee expressed its expectation that, as an outcome of the first Global Refugee Forum, held in December 2019, UNHCR would actually build new partnerships to expand the inclusion of refugees.**

20. **The Committee concurred that resettlement was one of the lasting solutions to the problem and encouraged UNHCR to continue its efforts to increase the number of countries willing to accept refugee resettlement.**

21. **The Committee recommended that the General Assembly approve the programme narrative of programme 21, International protection, durable solutions and assistance to refugees, of the proposed programme budget for 2021, subject to the following modifications:**

A. Proposed programme plan for 2021 and programme performance for 2019

Overall orientation

Mandates and background

Paragraph 25.7

Replace the first and second sentences with the following:

“The challenges associated with climate change and environmental degradation continue to affect the operations of UNHCR and the assistance it provides to vulnerable populations of concern across the globe. In the coming period, the Office will continue, according to its mandate, to explore and seek to highlight the relevant legal frameworks and protection gaps that may result from displacement affected or aggravated by the adverse effect of disasters and climate change.”
