

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

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**Report of the eighty-first meeting of the Standing
Committee (5-7 July 2021)**

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I. Introduction

1. The Chairperson, Her Excellency Ambassador Maria Nazareth Farani Azevêdo (Brazil) opened the eighty-first meeting of the Standing Committee and chaired the meeting in its entirety.
2. Presentations made by senior managers in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are available on the Standing Committee webpage¹.

II. Adoption of the agenda

3. The agenda for the meeting (EC/72/SC/CRP.9) was adopted as presented.

III. Opening remarks by the Deputy High Commissioner

4. The Deputy High Commissioner spoke about the state of forced displacement around the world, noting the profound health and socioeconomic impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on persons of concern to UNHCR. At the end of 2020, some 82.4 million people were forcibly displaced by conflict and persecution. To respond to the vast needs, the Committee heard about the investment of UNHCR in partnerships, including through the World Bank and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group. The organization's approach to regionalization and decentralization moved structures, authorities and decision-making closer to the people it served, improving the delivery of protection and assistance. The business transformation programme, which aimed to bring greater agility and simplification to the operations of UNHCR, was highlighted as being the final step to completing these reforms.

5. The Deputy High Commissioner touched on the roll-out of COMPASS, the new tool for multi-year planning, budgeting, monitoring and reporting, which had renewed UNHCR's approach to results-based management and enabled operations to develop longer-term protection and solutions strategies. The initial planning exercise for 2022 was nearing completion and contributed to furthering the realignment of headquarters initiated in early 2020. The Deputy High Commissioner expressed concern that UNHCR operations were underfunded for 2021, noting in particular for the COVID-19 appeal. UNHCR was deeply grateful for the financial contributions of States, particularly flexible funding – which allowed the organization to move quickly in responding to people in greatest need. The Deputy High Commissioner concluded by thanking States that hosted refugees and supported inclusion in national systems, and noted the significant efforts of UNHCR personnel and partners during a challenging year.

IV. International protection

6. The Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) provided an overview of the protection challenges facing the organization, particularly in the context of COVID-19. She highlighted growing concerns about threats to the integrity of the global asylum system and noted that opportunities for solutions had declined dramatically over the last year. At the same time, she highlighted the exemplary measures taken by some States to manage their borders while also enabling access to territory for asylum-seekers, including through pragmatic solutions. The Assistant High Commissioner underscored the enduring value of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951 Convention), seventy years since its adoption, noting that its principles were reaffirmed through the global compact on refugees.

¹ See <https://www.unhcr.org/81st-meeting-of-the-standing-committee>.

A. Note on international protection

7. The Director of the Division of International Protection presented the note on international protection (EC/72/SC/CRP.10). She spoke about how UNHCR had adapted to changing times and demands, and risen to contemporary challenges, reshaping its approach, while remaining committed to the principles set out in the Statute. Among the current challenges, she highlighted violations of the principle of non-refoulement, gender-based violence, gender inequality, the exclusion of marginalized groups and the increased use of detention. The Director also highlighted efforts to end statelessness, address the increasing number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and make progress towards solutions, noting that these issues would be discussed in more detail during subsequent agenda items.

8. Numerous countries paid tribute to UNHCR and partner staff for their commitment to “stay and deliver”, many placing the service of others over their own health and safety. UNHCR was commended for its engagement in the global response to COVID-19, addressing the various challenges posed by the pandemic, and for its swift adaptation to meet the changing needs on the ground. Despite the challenges, the pandemic created opportunities and space for innovative solutions and policies. The positive contributions of refugees, making available their skills, knowledge and experience, most often on a voluntary basis, was also recognized. The pandemic had underscored that local responders were essential providers of protection.

9. The impact of COVID-19 on persons of concern and on protection systems featured prominently in the discussion. The pandemic was described as having become a crisis of protection, challenging the fundamental norms of refugee law, particularly the right to seek asylum and the cardinal principle of non-refoulement. Regret was conveyed over the actions by some States to close their borders and refuse access to asylum, and to externalize their protection obligations, contrary to the spirit of solidarity underpinning the 1951 Convention and the global compact on refugees. In the seventieth anniversary year of the 1951 Convention, numerous countries reaffirmed their commitment to this instrument and called on others to respect their international protection obligations.

10. It was emphasized that protection should be a shared priority. The pandemic had underscored the need to put burden- and responsibility-sharing into action more concretely. Some felt that the international community was not delivering as it should on durable solutions and that protection and solutions should be pursued with the same enthusiasm. The already challenging situation of people on the move was exacerbated by COVID-19. UNHCR participation in the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons, as well as in the United Nations Migration Network, was welcomed in this regard. There was also broad agreement that the return of those not in need of international protection was vital to the credibility of the asylum system.

11. Alarm was expressed over the increase in sexual and gender-based violence and other forms of abuse against women and girls, referred to as a “shadow pandemic”. UNHCR was urged to step up its prevention and mitigation efforts as well as its support for access to appropriate services. Attention was drawn to the needs of boys and men who were also impacted by sexual and gender-based violence. The pandemic had particularly affected children and youth, and it was critical to restore access to education, sports and vocational training. Mental health was also a concern, and access to psychosocial support was emphasized. The importance of inclusion in the context of the pandemic, such as access to diagnostics, treatment and vaccines, was underscored by numerous delegations: no one was considered safe until everyone was safe.

12. Host countries, which were commended for their continuous efforts and generosity, spoke of the burdens they faced and having overstretched resources. While grappling with the socioeconomic challenges posed by the pandemic, many host countries remained committed to the inclusive approach set out in the global compact on refugees. Yet these efforts could not continue without sustained international support and solidarity. Some delegations expressed grave concern over the negative impacts of sanctions on the capacity of the affected host countries to protect and assist refugees, and asked UNHCR to effectively work to secure the required humanitarian space.

13. It was noted that ways of delivering protection and assistance in humanitarian settings continued to be insufficiently adapted for people with disabilities. In this regard, the five-year action plan of UNHCR on disability inclusion was welcomed. UNHCR and States were urged to improve protection and assistance for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex persons (LGBTQI). The importance of securing the meaningful and systematic participation of persons of concern was also highlighted. Work by UNHCR to strengthen refugee-led organizations was welcomed in this regard. The pandemic had exacerbated existing inequalities, and UNHCR was encouraged to strengthen cooperation with women's organizations and prioritize the empowerment of women and girls. UNHCR was also urged to redouble its efforts in the fight against discrimination, xenophobia and hate crimes against asylum-seekers and refugees.

14. Increased engagement by UNHCR in situations of displacement due to disasters and its new "Strategic framework for climate action" were welcomed. At the same time, the need to respect existing roles and mandates was also underscored. The importance of clean energy was raised, and the measures taken by UNHCR to green its own environmental footprint were welcomed.

15. 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.

16. The Director of the Division of International Protection applauded the numerous examples given that demonstrated how national asylum systems had adjusted to the realities of COVID-19 in a manner that ensured that the doors to asylum were not closed, despite the legitimate public health requirements. In response to one country's initiative to envision protection for refugees sur place, she noted that this concept was the intention behind Article 11 of the 1951 Convention. She took note of several interventions calling for the global compact on refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration to come together, observing that this reflected the reality of mixed movements which had come to the fore. The Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) added that strengthening legal pathways to migration would reinforce the asylum system and avoid abuse.

B. Statelessness

17. In presenting the paper on statelessness (EC/72/SC/CRP.11), the Director of the Division of International Protection provided an update on the pledges made at the high-level segment on statelessness, which took place during the seventieth session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme in 2019. She referenced the positive examples of progress made by States to fulfil their pledges; at least 19 had been fully implemented, while another 12 had been partially implemented. She stressed the central role of partnerships in achieving the ambitious objectives of the #IBelong Campaign. Drawing attention to the sixtieth anniversary year of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, the Director encouraged those States that have not yet acceded to the statelessness conventions to consider doing so, including at a treaty event to be organized by UNHCR in the margins of the opening of the seventy-sixth session of the United Nations General Assembly.

18. Concern was expressed over the impact of COVID-19 on stateless populations. Birth registration, statelessness determination procedures and visa renewal procedures were halted in some countries, leading to additional challenges. It was stressed that positive developments following the high-level segment on statelessness should not be undermined by the pandemic. Delegations also called for equal access to vaccines for stateless persons.

More broadly, the ability of statelessness to lead to or exacerbate conditions of poverty was underscored, as was the disproportionate impacts of statelessness on certain groups such as older people and LGBTQI people. Actions taken by UNHCR to combat statelessness for children were commended, as were legislative measures taken by countries to promote the right of children to a nationality. Support was also expressed for the #IBelong campaign, with many delegations noting the short timeframe remaining to advance its objectives.

19. The importance of ensuring adequate resources for statelessness was stressed. UNHCR was asked to provide a better understanding of how resources and staffing were allocated towards statelessness, which could be covered at the upcoming informal consultative meeting on the budget and the Standing Committee meeting in September. Concern was conveyed over the insufficient prioritization of statelessness by the international community, with a request for more information on how UNHCR was increasing its partnerships to mobilize action to resolve statelessness. A recommendation for statelessness to be mainstreamed and integrated into priorities such as the high-level officials meeting in December was furthermore conveyed.

20. In response, the Director of the Division of International Protection thanked those delegations that had mentioned the two statelessness evaluations, one conducted by UNHCR and the other by the United States of America, and noted that the management response to these evaluations would address recommendations on resource allocation to ensure alignment with the commitments of UNHCR. She also hoped to see statelessness priorities reflected in 2022 planning and noted that UNHCR was working to identify those pledges that could be accelerated with financial support from the organization. In response to the question on staffing for statelessness, the Director noted that as part of the regionalization process, it was decided that each regional bureau would have a dedicated position on statelessness. While there were limited dedicated human resources within country operations on statelessness, UNHCR considered that all protection staff should be competent in all elements of the mandate of UNHCR, including statelessness. In this vein, measures had been taken to enhance training on statelessness. Regarding partnerships, UNHCR had strengthened relations with civil society, including with national non-governmental organizations (NGOs). She also noted the increase in the practical and operational engagement of UNHCR in statelessness, beyond research and legal analysis, and hoped to see more of this work moving forward.

C. Solutions

21. The Director of the Division of International Protection presented the update on solutions (EC/72/SC/CRP.12), highlighting cooperation with the Division of Resilience and Solutions around the sustainability of voluntary returns and inclusion in social services. She recalled that the mandate of UNHCR covered not only protection but also the achievement of solutions, notably voluntary repatriation, local integration and third-country solutions, such as resettlement. The Director recalled that voluntary repatriation was unique among the three durable solutions in that it was the only one that concerned the exercise of an individual human right. With respect to local integration, she highlighted that the emphasis on inclusion should not be equated with the achievement of a lasting and durable solution. Turning to resettlement, she noted that for the first time in the history of UNHCR, the organization had to pause resettlement travel due of the pandemic, although processing continued. She also stressed that complementary pathways for the admission of refugees to third countries should be conceived as complementary to resettlement.

22. The organization's focus on finding solutions from the outset of a crisis was highlighted as critical. The need for the pursuit of solutions to involve all relevant actors was emphasized, including development actors, the private sector, the forcibly displaced and host communities. In this respect, the application of a development lens to displacement was noted as a step towards inclusion, and the World Bank's contributions were held up as a model in this regard. Mention was also made of the important role of peace actors, and the organization's strengthened relationship with the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund was applauded. Serious concern was conveyed over the decrease in numbers of voluntary repatriation due to COVID-19. Despite this, UNHCR was commended for its efforts to create

conditions conducive to return, and it was suggested that such efforts should become integrated in the work of development actors. Resettlement was recognized as a key tool for those most in need, and a call was made for as many countries as possible to engage in resettlement efforts.

23. Support was expressed for UNHCR leadership in implementing the global compact on refugees and its efforts to facilitate solutions for refugees, especially given the difficult global environment. Host countries were commended for their efforts to provide local solutions for refugees and applauded for commitments towards inclusion. The three support platforms were highlighted as an innovative arrangement, and UNHCR was asked about plans for applying lessons learned from the three support platforms moving forward. The need for the support platforms to remain focused on the achievement of durable solutions for refugees was underscored. Delegations stressed that one of the most effective ways to achieve solutions was eliminating root causes as drivers of movement of people.

24. The Director noted that the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement had taken place the previous week and that the chairing of the process had been transferred from Switzerland to the United States of America. She reiterated the need for an increase in States participating in resettlement and more opportunities to be given for resettlement. She also noted that complementary pathways could reduce irregular movements and dangerous journeys, and implored States to use such pathways as complementary to resettlement and not to replace or limit resettlement. The Director further noted the close collaboration between UNHCR, the World Bank and other international financial institutions to achieve positive protection impacts, and highlighted the close engagement of UNHCR with the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office and the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, in addition to that of the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund.

D. Oral update on Executive Committee conclusion(s)

25. The Executive Committee Rapporteur briefed the Committee on the progress made during the negotiations of a conclusion on international protection and durable solutions in the context of a public health emergency, the first topic on the work programme adopted at the seventy-first plenary session of the Executive Committee. He thanked delegations for their continued engagement, flexibility and good spirit for compromise. He suggested that Executive Committee members demonstrate unity in order to overcome the challenges, in solidarity with persons of concern.

26. The Executive Committee Chair proposed to open the floor only to observers so as to not pre-empt the next informal preparatory consultations of members that would take place the following day. No observer asked for the floor. The Chair noted that the process had advanced too far to see it founder on issues that had been agreed in other fora, and called upon Executive Committee members to find creative ways to address them with a flexible and principled approach.

V. Regional activities and global programmes

A. Emergency preparedness and response, and the security of the organization's workforce and operations

27. The Deputy Director of the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply presented the conference room papers on emergency preparedness and response (EC/72/SC/CRP.13) and the security of the organization's workforce and operations (EC/72/SC/CRP.18). She highlighted the impact of the pandemic on global emergency responses and touched on the organization's streamlined supply processes. She also briefed the Committee on efforts to manage its workforce and operations in a secure manner.

28. With regard to emergency preparedness and response, appreciation was expressed for the organization's commitment to "stay and deliver" in increasingly complex environments throughout the pandemic. Collaboration and partnerships, including with other United

Nations entities, had proved invaluable in gaining efficiencies in supply management, freeing up funds to directly benefit persons of concern. The organization's increased collaboration with development actors was particularly appreciated. Delegations welcomed the continued mainstreaming of age, gender and diversity in the work of UNHCR, and the organization was encouraged to invest in balanced gender capacity from the outset of emergencies. The importance of the organization's efforts on forecasting and early awareness of emergency risks and trends was underscored, with further updates requested going forward. Delegations voiced appreciation for efforts by UNHCR to expand the internal capacity of emergency responders and standby partners, and its consideration of gender and geographic diversity in such rosters. The positive impact of regionalization and decentralization on emergency preparedness and response was recognized, with delegations noting that clearly defined responsibilities and continuous updating of risks were essential to identify potential displacement situations and to adapt programming. More information was sought on how persons of concern and local and community organizations led by refugees, women and people with disabilities were playing a part in the response.

29. Delegations commended UNHCR for its efforts to care for its workforce in challenging and often high-risk field locations. The need for UNHCR to ensure a duty of care with regard to the security, health and well-being of its staff was stressed. It was noted that this duty extended to partners, including local implementing organizations, and that deeper investment in the localization agenda was key. Delegations underscored the importance of mental health and psychosocial support, and UNHCR was urged to continue to take appropriate measures in this regard. Collaboration within the United Nations system and other partners, including NGOs, was appreciated. Delegations commended the organization's efforts to increase diversity among its security staff, while encouraging accelerated efforts to increase the representation of female staff. Attacks on aid workers were condemned, and several delegations conveyed their condolences for the staff who lost their lives due to COVID-19.

30. The Deputy Director of the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply agreed with the emphasis placed on the importance of localization in emergency preparedness and response, and assured the Committee that UNHCR prioritized the work of local and national actors in its contingency planning, procurement and operational strategies. UNHCR would continue to invest in local security staff to ensure "duty of care" towards its workforce, including with regard to mental health. She responded to a question on remote working arrangements during the pandemic, noting that emergency staff continued to be deployed and, in some situations, commenced their work remotely.

B. Engagement with internally displaced persons

31. The Principal Advisor on Internal Displacement presented the update on the organization's engagement in situations of internal displacement (EC/72/SC/CRP.14), referencing the revised IDP policy released in September 2019 and the "IDP Initiative" launched in March 2020. She situated the IDP Initiative within ongoing change processes in UNHCR, including decentralization and regionalization, and the introduction of COMPASS, the organization's new results-based management system. She provided updates on the organization's work on internal displacement in the areas of emergency preparedness and response, cluster coordination, solutions and data partnerships, among others.

32. During the discussion, many delegations lamented the fact that 2020 saw the number of IDPs reach a new high and called for strengthened international efforts in this regard, while recalling the primary responsibility of States for the response to internal displacement. More systematic engagement by UNHCR on IDPs was welcomed, and UNHCR was commended for progress in implementing the 2019 IDP policy and its corresponding IDP Initiative. The importance of advancing IDP solutions was a dominant theme, with many countries expressing support for the attention that UNHCR had placed on this issue, including the need for local-led durable solutions. To further support solutions, UNHCR was encouraged to continue working with partners on promoting access to livelihoods, particularly after the emergency phase and in urban settings. Interest was expressed in the organization's work across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, with recommendations for UNHCR to

stimulate innovative solutions in this area and move beyond pilot projects. The need for UNHCR to work in close partnership with key stakeholders in IDP situations was underscored, including development actors and those within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) system. The reference by the Principal Advisor to the organization's cooperation with the World Bank on IDPs, notably in the area of solutions, was warmly welcomed, and several delegations requested to learn more about this initiative. Many delegations also referenced the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement and noted they were looking forward to its recommendations.

33. Support was expressed for the scaling-up of the organization's operational response, with particular attention given to advancements in emergency preparedness efforts for IDPs. In this vein, further clarity was requested as to how UNHCR coordinated with other members of the IASC with respect to standby rosters. The potential for the organization's results-based management system to support planning and programming in IDP situations, through an area-based approach, was welcomed. Many delegations underscored the central role of the inter-agency clusters in responding to internal displacement and recognized the organization's tri-cluster responsibilities. UNHCR was urged to continue its efforts to align staffing, funding and policies to become a more predictable partner in IDP situations, particularly with respect to protection and solutions. Moreover, the availability of reliable and quality data was stressed as crucial to guide prioritization and provide lasting solutions for IDPs. Project 21, a collaborative initiative on data in the Sahel, was highlighted as a positive model for achieving improved protection analysis.

34. In response, the Principal Advisor appreciated the support expressed for work by UNHCR on addressing internal displacement and agreed with the observation that a more structured approach had been pursued since 2016. She underscored the organization's commitment to its responsibilities on cluster coordination and noted that UNHCR supported protection mainstreaming through close collaboration with those clusters where it was not in the lead. The need to further demystify the triple nexus through specific activities was acknowledged, including through consultation with affected communities and concerned States. The Advisor also noted the development of a one-time dedicated report on IDPs that would cover the period 2019 to 2021 and consider the impact of the IDP Initiative.

VI. Programme/protection policy

A. Oral update on the preparations for the Global Refugee Forum high-level officials meeting

35. The Head of the Global Compact on Refugees Coordination Team briefed the Committee on preparations for the high-level officials meeting, which would take place in December 2021. She highlighted the three priority areas for the meeting: expanding support for refugees and the countries that receive and host them; advancing implementation of the pledges made at the first Global Refugee Forum in 2019; and identifying areas in need of further support to inform the development of pledges and contributions for the next Global Refugee Forum in 2023. A series of stocktaking events had been held at the regional level and for different stakeholder groups, the outcomes of which would inform discussions at the preparatory roundtables in November and ultimately the high-level officials meeting. She encouraged States and other stakeholders to consider aligning financial and other pledges of support with policy pledges made by refugee-hosting countries in the time that remained until the meeting and to actively engage in the upcoming preparatory roundtables.

36. Delegations expressed appreciation for the efforts of UNHCR to conduct consultations with all stakeholders in preparation for the meeting. The pandemic had further demonstrated the critical importance of advancing implementation of the global compact on refugees. UNHCR was encouraged to align the priorities and expected outcomes of the meeting more closely with the objectives of the global compact on refugees so as to better reflect its ultimate goal of more predictable and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing. The organization was requested to provide more concrete information about the expected outcomes of the meeting and the vision for the next two years until the 2023 Global Refugee

Forum. While the early launch of the first global compact on refugees indicator report was welcomed, it was deemed important that sufficient time be allocated at the high-level officials meeting to a discussion on the findings. The importance of ensuring robust participation from refugees and host community representatives at the preparatory events and the meeting itself was also underlined. Delegations affirmed their support for the first high-level officials meeting and expressed their commitment to working with all relevant stakeholders on the preparations.

37. The Head of the Global Compact on Refugees Coordination Team stated that while the pandemic had delayed implementation of some of the pledges, it had expedited that of others with a view to addressing the needs arising from the situation. This had provided an opportunity to examine the ways in which the global compact on refugees could be utilized in a more strategic and systematic manner to help respond to crises of this type. Building on the outcomes of the 2020 High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges, a dedicated spotlight session would be held at the high-level officials meeting to take an in-depth look at the role of the global compact on refugees in medium- to longer-term responses to pandemics.

38. In response to remarks about the priorities of the high-level officials meeting, she affirmed that the themes of the preparatory roundtables were closely aligned with the objectives of the global compact on refugees and would allow for in-depth discussions on the different issues under each objective. Responding to a question about the matching of pledges, she noted that UNHCR would soon be publishing a series of infographics that would indicate areas where States and other stakeholders may wish to consider aligning their pledges. In the meantime, the organization would continue bilateral engagements to help advance the matching and implementation of pledges. She concurred that inclusive participation was essential to the success of the meeting, though cautioned that the modality would be different from that of the 2019 Global Refugee Forum due to the differing nature of the two events. Nevertheless, she asserted that the preparatory roundtables would provide ample opportunity for the participation of the different stakeholders.

B. Oral update on coordination efforts to measure the impact arising from hosting, protecting and assisting refugees

39. The Director of the Division of Resilience and Solutions briefed the Committee on the progress made by UNHCR on its coordination of efforts to measure the impact of protecting, hosting and assisting refugees. While COVID-19 had delayed advancement on some components of the initiative, UNHCR and the World Bank had successfully released the report on the global cost of inclusive refugee education. The findings of the report had informed discussions with development and private-sector partners on financing for refugee education, as well as national efforts to cost education. UNHCR and the World Bank would continue to explore new and emerging tools for collecting data to support the methodology for the initiative.

40. The Director noted that the objective for 2021 had been to begin work on a similar exercise with regard to the cost of refugee inclusion in national health systems. However, the planning of regional and local activities aimed at advancing this work had been hampered due to the pandemic. He therefore proposed that UNHCR organize a meeting in early September with interested member States to discuss the best way forward. He concluded by reiterating the readiness of UNHCR and the World Bank to provide support for further advancing this initiative.

41. The Committee thanked UNHCR for its continued efforts to advance the initiative to measure the impact of protecting, hosting and assisting refugees. It was underlined that while the number of forcibly displaced people had continued to rise, as indicated in the organization's report on global trends in forced displacement in 2020, support for host countries which faced overstretched resources remained insufficient. It was recalled that responding to refugee situations was a shared responsibility for the international community as a whole and should not be left to a handful of host countries. Delegations emphasized the importance of the initiative as one of the key mechanisms of the global compact on refugees,

alongside the indicator framework and the Global Refugee Forum pledges, that would help advance and gauge progress on burden- and responsibility-sharing.

42. Moreover, appreciation was expressed for the data and evidence generated as a result of the report on the global cost of inclusive refugee education which had captured the contributions of host countries and helped inform policy decisions of donor countries, particularly for development action. The need for more data and research on measuring the impact of hosting refugees aimed at increasing burden- and responsibility-sharing was emphasized. Stakeholders were urged to ensure that the initiative would advance at a pace comparable to that of other components of the global compact on refugees. UNHCR was encouraged to report on the concrete outcomes of the initiative as part of the broader stocktaking efforts in the lead-up to the high-level officials meeting.

43. The Director acknowledged the need for efforts to share the data more broadly, particularly at the regional level. He assured the Committee that UNHCR would explore how best to utilize the upcoming preparatory events and the high-level officials meeting as a platform for presenting and discussing the outcomes of the initiative. Responding to comments about the methodology used for the costing exercise, he explained that it was developed jointly with member States and the World Bank, and that it included different components, including the calculation of costs on a per capita basis. While a number of considerations from the initial exercise would need to be taken into account in future discussions, the methodology had provided a clear roadmap for how member States, in collaboration with UNHCR, the World Bank and the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement, could determine costs. He highlighted that the pandemic had further demonstrated the need to collect data on the inclusion of refugees in national health systems as the next step, and concluded by inviting delegations to consider joining the proposed meeting in September to discuss how best to take this initiative forward.

VII. Programme budgets and funding

A. Update on budgets and funding

44. The Director of the Division of Strategic Planning and Results presented the update on budgets and funding for 2020 to 2021 (EC/72/SC/CRP.16). The final annual programme budget for 2020 stood at \$9.1 billion, while some \$4.7 billion was received in contributions. This left a funding gap of 41 per cent, slightly lower than the previous year. She noted that in 2020, expenditure increased across all regions, demonstrating the organization's capacity to increase its implementation rate when more funding becomes available. For 2021, two supplementary budgets had brought the annual budget to \$9.1 billion as of June.

45. The Director of the Division of External Relations noted that UNHCR was 38 per cent funded for 2021, with an estimated \$3.5 billion in available funds. She thanked donors for their timely support which was critical to the management of operations. At the same time, she noted that 26 per cent of the contributions received was flexible, out of which 14 per cent was unearmarked. The Director stressed the importance of flexible funding for the predictability and efficiency of the work of UNHCR and informed the Committee of a new report on the use of flexible funding, available on the organization's [Global Focus](#) website.

46. The budget update was seen as a clear reminder of the enormous challenges UNHCR and its partners faced in meeting the vast needs. In this context, concern was raised regarding the large percentage of the budget that remained unfunded at the end of 2020. Delegations noted that the pandemic had demonstrated the importance of flexible funding, allowing UNHCR to quickly respond. Concern was further expressed with regard to the continued high level of earmarking and the consequent challenges for the organization to deploy resources in a flexible and efficient manner. Donor countries were encouraged to meet their commitments to the "grand bargain" and increase their share of quality funding.

47. Strong support was voiced for the organization's innovative approach to planning, budgeting and funding. The continued efforts by UNHCR to increase private-sector

engagement and expand its funding base were also commended. The Office was encouraged to allocate more resources to national partners.

48. The Director of the Division of Strategic Planning and Results thanked delegations for their support. She affirmed that UNHCR was committed to allocating more resources to national and community-based organizations. UNHCR was looking into distributing funds in ways that were efficient and minimized risk. In response to a question on the underfunding of statelessness activities, the Director explained that although it might appear that UNHCR was not allocating enough funds to this population, this was masked by the support that was included in other pillars, as many stateless people were also refugees or IDPs. She noted that UNHCR was examining how to provide a more precise picture of these activities. In terms of cash distribution, the Director informed the Committee that much of the cash assistance was provided through electronic means. She assured that there were strong controls in place for distribution to ensure that cash went to those who were supposed to receive it.

49. The Director of the Division of External Relations welcomed the interest in how States could help generate private-sector engagement ahead of the high-level officials meeting and noted that UNHCR would reach out to interested delegations.

50. The draft decision on budgets and funding for 2020-2021 was adopted.

B. Global Report 2020 and report on the global strategic priorities

51. The Directors of the Division of External Relations and the Division of Strategic Planning and Results jointly presented UNHCR's Global Report 2020 and the report on UNHCR's global strategic priorities (EC/72/SC/CRP.15). Regarding the Global Report on activities in 2020, the Director of the Division of External Relations highlighted key achievements and challenges, and noted the contributions of host and donor countries, donors, other partners and displaced communities themselves. The Director of the Division of Strategic Planning and Results presented the report on the global strategic priorities, updating on progress made in implementing the operational and support and management priorities for 2020 to 2021 during the first year of the biennium.

52. Appreciation was expressed for the Global Report 2020, which included reporting on the global strategic priorities. Delegations noted the usefulness of data analysis in the report, including with regard to funding sources and earmarking in the regional overviews, which increased transparency. Further steps being taken in this direction were welcomed. The organization's work on strengthening processes and implementation structures, the evaluation of programmes, and registration and identity management were underscored as being vital to improving outcomes for persons of concern.

53. The progress made by UNHCR in achieving its global strategic priorities was welcomed, especially in the context of the pandemic and an unprecedented level of displacement. Delegations applauded the organization's achievements towards its "grand bargain" commitments, including meeting its target on increased cash assistance and enhanced participation of women and girls in decision-making processes. UNHCR was encouraged to continue strengthening its partnerships and coordination efforts. Its participation in various monitoring and coordination frameworks was reflective of its work to deliver more coherent and effective responses to persons of concern, including in the context of COVID-19. The organization's new approach to results-based management was also welcomed.

54. In response to queries on the linkage between the global strategic priorities and the new results-based management system, the Director of the Division of Strategic Planning and Results explained that further streamlining would take place beginning in 2023, when the Global Report would mirror the global results framework and report against the organization's priorities with the core indicators. She informed the Committee that the High Commissioner's renewed strategic directions would be presented at the annual session of the Executive Committee in October and would be closely linked with the global results framework. On the question of reporting on the total number of assisted persons of concern, the Director stated that UNHCR intended to resume reporting with the introduction of

COMPASS and was working on refining its methodology and bringing more consistency across the organization in estimating these numbers.

55. The Director of Division of External Relations thanked the Committee for its positive comments and feedback on UNHCR's Global Report, inter-agency efforts and work on private-sector fundraising. Responding to issues raised on cash coordination, she informed the Committee that UNHCR had signed its first common cash statement with other United Nations organizations in 2018 and had raised the issue in the IASC a few years back. UNHCR looked forward to continued discussions on this matter.

56. The Deputy High Commissioner thanked the Committee for its support. She emphasized that the five core strategic directions, which the High Commissioner intended to renew in October, were still very relevant and would be matched against resources going forward to articulate the impact. The organization's work on strengthening integrity issues was highlighted, both at the inter-agency level and internally. On inter-agency efforts, she stressed that intensive collaboration with other organizations had taken place during the pandemic. Work would continue on inter-agency workstreams, including collaboration with regard to innovation and digitalization.

VIII. Transformation in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

57. The Director for Change presented the paper on transformation in UNHCR (EC/81/SC/CRP.17), noting that the organization was entering a period of consolidation and fine-tuning. The new regionalized architecture was put to the test during the early stages of the pandemic. The structural changes and strengthened regional capacities, combined with increased delegation of authorities to the regional bureaux and country offices, were a huge asset and had streamlined, sped up and moved decision-making closer to the people UNHCR served. Building on this progress, headquarters divisions and entities were working to ensure the alignment of their functions, structures and capacities. The Director briefed the Committee on the organization's business transformation programme, which aimed to renew and upgrade outdated systems, leveraging the potential of new technology and industry best practices.

58. Delegations conveyed support for the regionalization efforts and welcomed the good first results. They urged UNHCR to undertake an evaluation and assessment of the process, including a cost-benefit analysis. While welcoming the strengthening of field operations, it was also important to ensure that technical support at headquarters remained strong, in order to ensure adequate quality control. UNHCR was commended for the formation of the Transformation Governance Board and Field Reference Group and asked how these entities interacted and, in particular, how the latter influenced decision-making. There were also questions regarding lessons learned from the transformation and how these would be shared with partners.

59. Given the ambitious and far-reaching nature of the business transformation programme, UNHCR was asked to provide further in-depth briefings on the plans and their implications. There were questions around the costing of these initiatives and whether a cost-benefit analysis had been conducted. On data safeguarding, UNHCR was called upon to ensure the highest standards. While data-driven decision-making was welcomed, it was also important to keep in mind the "do not harm" principle in all matters of data privacy and protection, including in relation to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. Support was also conveyed for the organization's new results-based management system. Delegations looked forward to seeing the organization's five-year risk management strategy and implementation in practice.

60. The Director thanked the Committee for its support and words of encouragement. He agreed with the need for an evaluation of the decentralization and regionalization process, though noted that it was considered too early. Regarding requests for cost-benefit analysis, he acknowledged that the scale of investment required careful oversight. At the same time, he cautioned that the benefits could not be monitored only in a quantitative way and that there were other impacts besides costs such as quality, efficiency and transparency. On concerns

around data protection, the Director assured the Committee that UNHCR was reviewing its data protection policy and noted the importance of the Global Data Service in this regard.

61. The Deputy High Commissioner recalled the aims of the transformation, noting that the intent was to have a strong headquarters, strong regional bureaux and strong country offices. Efforts were now focused on strengthening the capacity of country offices to respond to contemporary challenges. Investments were being made to help the organization work faster and better. With regards to the United Nations reform, referenced by numerous delegations, she noted that UNHCR continued to be an active member of the Business Innovations Group and involved in discussions around efficiencies, including common back offices and global shared services.

IX. Governance

62. The Chairperson reminded the Committee that the High Commissioner's opening statement at the seventy-second annual plenary session of the Executive Committee in October would form the basis of the general debate. Delegations were invited to propose topics for inclusion in the High Commissioner's statement, noting that suggestions could also be transmitted to the Secretariat at a later date.

63. It was proposed that the High Commissioner share his views on the importance of localization and its impact on the work and mandate of UNHCR.

X. Any other business

64. The Chair informed the Committee that its approval was sought to add an agenda item to the Standing Committee's programme of work for 2021, in relation to the eighty-second meeting in September. Falling under management, financial control, administrative oversight and human resources, the Committee would be asked to consider an additional item on the financial regulations of UNHCR. A conference room paper with a draft decision would be presented for consideration. The Committee agreed, and the Chairperson indicated that the Standing Committee programme of work would be revised as EC/72/SC/CRP.2/Rev.1 to reflect this.

65. 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 eighty-first meeting would be prepared by the Secretariat and circulated for comments by 26 July. Following a two-week review period, any comments or corrections from member States in relation to their interventions would be incorporated as appropriate and the report would be subsequently recirculated and considered adopted.

Annex

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 eightieth meeting of the Standing Committee in March 2021,

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,

Takes note of the increase in the annual budget of UNHCR 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 financial and budgetary performance in 2020,

Notes that the supplementary budgets for 2021, which amount to \$536.5 million as at 30 April 2021 are for programmes benefiting the global refugee programme of UNHCR and for internally displaced persons,

Takes note of the increase in the annual budget of UNHCR for 2021 to a current total of \$9,152.3 million as at 30 April 2021, representing the sum of the revised budget of \$8,615.8 million and the supplementary budgets of \$536.5 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.