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Update on the implementation of the recommendations made in the independent panel review of the UNICEF response to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and the report of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to Executive Board decision 2020/21, which "...requests UNICEF to continue to provide updates to the Executive Board on how UNICEF is preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in its policies, procedures and operations at all levels, taking into account the recommendations from the independent review"; "requests UNICEF to highlight in particular its actions taken in implementing the Independent Task Force's recommendations related to abuse of authority in its next update on this matter at the annual session of 2021"; and "Takes note with appreciation of the establishment of an Internal Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination and requests UNICEF to report to the Executive Board at the annual session of 2021 on the work of this task team and on UNICEF actions to prevent and respond to all forms of discrimination, including racism and racial discrimination, in its policies, procedures and programmes".

The report provides a progress update on the work of UNICEF to improve its organizational culture, as well as actions taken to implement its strategy to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

* E/ICEF/2021/9.



I. Overview

1. UNICEF has made significant progress in follow-up actions to implement the recommendations made in the independent panel review of the UNICEF response to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse; the Morgan Lewis report on sexual harassment investigations conducted by the UNICEF Office of Internal Audit and Investigations (from 2013 to 2017); and the report of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority. However, further efforts are needed to accelerate progress and institutionalize the changes across offices, systems and processes.

2. With respect to progress in strengthening the organizational culture, several initiatives stand out as key results in 2020. A Values Charter was produced and shared with staff, setting out the key behaviours that are expected of all UNICEF personnel, including a distinct set of behaviours that are expected of all managers and what UNICEF personnel can expect of UNICEF as an employer. Many offices are localizing the Values Charter for their context and using it in staff retreats and other moments of reflection. UNICEF was recertified through the Economic Dividends for Gender Equality (EDGE) process, demonstrating progress in becoming a more gender-sensitive organization in many areas, including gender parity in staffing, as well as identifying some areas where further progress is needed, such as staff perceptions concerning progress on gender equity. The Humans of UNICEF peer-to-peer employee appreciation programme was launched in February 2020, and by the end of the year some 1,300 employees had been nominated for demonstrating the organization's core values.

3. Dedicated national staff learning and career management programmes were rolled out, reaching 682 national staff, and a global mentoring framework was developed, starting with younger staff as a first cohort. More than 600 managers and senior leaders benefitted from training, orientation, feedback assessments and coaching.

4. A Global Staff Survey was completed in 2020. The results showed progress in areas such as personal empowerment and employee engagement, and also demonstrated staff appreciation for the UNICEF response as an understanding and empathetic employer during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Nevertheless, some areas of concern were highlighted, relating to diversity (for example, perceptions of unconscious and conscious bias in the office) and an insufficiently robust "speak-up" culture (for example, non-reporting of possible cases of bias and racism). Follow-up conversations were held with 55 country offices to discuss their survey data, document good practices and share advice and suggestions for areas where offices had lower scores.

5. An internal Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination was established. The Task Team held conversations with hundreds of staff in all regions and from different affinity groups and developed an action plan with recommendations to make UNICEF a more inclusive workplace for all its employees.

6. UNICEF has made significant progress since releasing its strategy to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in January 2019. Now, more than 44 million children and adults have access to safe and effective reporting channels, compared to 8.9 million in 2019. The number of countries having quality standard operating procedures on referral and provision of services for survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse increased by 50 per cent.

7. Investigative capacity has been expanded. Almost all country offices have improved partner reporting or training, and there was a 50 per cent increase in the number of offices with procedures for referral to high-quality victim assistance. Continued work is required to strengthen inter-agency coordination; prevention (vetting and training, and risk assessment and management of programmes, personnel and partners); reporting, including in the community; investigations by partners; and the availability of quality comprehensive victim assistance. The fundamental drivers of sexual exploitation and abuse, including gender inequality and discrimination and gender-based violence, persist; they demand gender-transformative programming across sectors, including education and health. Gender parity in staffing and accountability in addressing sexual exploitation and abuse across all functions in the organization are critical. A commitment to longer-term holistic programming is also vital.

8. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented new risks of sexual exploitation and abuse, requiring emergency planning, remote support and risk communication. UNICEF scaled up work on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in its COVID-19 response in 91 countries. The organization led the development of technical guidance on addressing those risks in the emergency response to the pandemic at the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). UNICEF participated in the creation of an IASC field support team for prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, which provides remote support to these efforts in 35 countries. UNICEF held a five-part webinar series on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic for more than 250 specialists.

9. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the UNICEF work on organizational culture. The pandemic has provided an opportunity to adopt a more agile and responsive culture, as the organization pivoted to different ways of working in remote and hybrid teams. Relevant guidance from the Division of Human Resources was issued to all employees quickly as lockdowns spread across the globe and was updated throughout the year. UNICEF headquarters initiated a series of conversations with heads of office on leading during COVID-19. Learning programmes were moved online in many cases. Offices demonstrated flexibility in various areas, including onboarding, transaction approvals, programme delivery, programme monitoring and promotion of staff well-being.

10. During the COVID-19 pandemic, work-life harmony, and specifically the boundaries between work and home life, and the mental and physical well-being of many employees and teams, have been negatively affected. Going forward, UNICEF will focus on implementing the remaining recommendations from report of the Independent Task Force, as well as the recommendations from the action plan prepared by the Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination. Efforts will focus on institutionalizing and sustaining the changes and progress made through stronger monitoring and accountability systems. A focus will be maintained on further improving communications and staff engagement in all aspects of organizational culture, especially to encourage staff to consider a variety of responses, such as recourse to management; mediation; guidance from the Ethics Office; and reporting to the Office of Internal Audit and Investigations (OIAI) when dealing with possible misconduct or inappropriate behaviour. Collaboration and sharing within the broader United Nations community and other partners remain key.

11. To address sexual misconduct and implement the outstanding recommendations of the independent panel review, UNICEF will pursue its 2019 strategy to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. The organization will continue to improve vetting, training and accountability of personnel and

partners, in all contexts, including at the onset of emergencies. Communities will be engaged in the design of reporting mechanisms for sexual exploitation and abuse, with expanded reach. Ensuring access to quality victim assistance will remain a programmatic priority. UNICEF will work with its partners and other agencies within the United Nations system to address those issues, including improving the capacity of civil society organizations to investigate allegations and provide quality support to victims.

II. Introduction

12. In its decision 2020/21, the Executive Board requested UNICEF to provide updates on how the organization is preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in its policies, procedures and operations at all levels, taking into account the recommendations from the independent review. The Board also requested UNICEF to highlight its actions taken in implementing the recommendations of the Independent Task Force related to abuse of authority in its next update on this matter at the annual session of 2021, and to report on the work of the Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination.

13. This document is being submitted to the Executive Board in fulfilment of those requests. It contains a detailed update on the progress made since the 2020 second regular session of the Executive Board in countering sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and in improving the organizational culture.

14. Although the work of UNICEF on sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment is closely linked to efforts to improve its organizational culture, this update separates the two workstreams, although the linkages between them are highlighted throughout the document.

15. The work of UNICEF to prevent and respond to sexual misconduct, and to improve its organizational culture, does not come at the expense of its mandate for children, but in service to it. UNICEF is committed to realizing the rights of the children and communities it serves to have access to the protection and assistance to which they are entitled, without the fear or actual occurrence of sexual exploitation and abuse, and to ensuring that all UNICEF staff can work in a respectful and empowering environment free of sexual harassment, racism, discrimination and all other forms of workplace abuse.

III. Organizational culture

16. To ensure coherence in its actions in follow-up to the recommendations of the independent panel review and the report of the Independent Task Force, UNICEF grouped those actions into three pillars: (1) Living our core values and behaviours and embedding them in all facets of our work; (2) Redefining people management; and (3) Maintaining appropriate incentives and accountabilities to promote our core values as well as deter inappropriate behaviours.

A. Pillar 1: Living our core values and behaviours and embedding them in all facets of our work

17. Progress continues towards full implementation of the accepted recommendations from the Independent Task Force report. As of March 2021, 80 per cent of the recommendations have been implemented, are on track or ongoing. Of the remaining 20 per cent, 7 per cent (four actions) are delayed but in progress; 5 per cent (three actions) have not yet started; 5 per cent (three actions) were not

accepted or considered relevant by UNICEF; and for one action there is insufficient data to determine progress.

18. A major result achieved in 2020 was the development of the Values Charter, which lists the behaviours UNICEF expects of all its employees; behaviours expected of managers in particular; and what all employees can expect of UNICEF as an employer. The Values Charter is based on the standards of conduct for the international civil service, other relevant ethical standards and the updated UNICEF competency framework, and structured according to the UNICEF core values (care, respect, integrity, trust and accountability), listing key behaviours under each.

19. In June 2020, the Executive Director established an internal Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination, partly in response to the rising global movement for racial justice. Between July 2020 and March 2021, the Task Team held focus group discussions with almost 1,000 employees in all regions; established an Intranet page with learning resources, updates and information for all UNICEF employees on racism and discrimination; and hosted a series with 15 experts speaking on issues related to disability, race, ethnicity and gender identity. The Task Team completed its work at the end of March 2021, with the issuance of an action plan for UNICEF to eliminate all forms of racism and discrimination.

20. Staff participation and engagement have been a hallmark of the ongoing effort to build a more positive organizational culture. Since June 2020, the Global Staff Association has been one of three co-chairs of the Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination. The Association has also been actively engaged in organizational improvement processes and, in the fourth quarter of 2020, was instrumental in co-organizing dialogues with staff across UNICEF on organizational improvement initiatives.

21. Other groups of staff are actively engaging in making UNICEF a better place to work. Young UNICEF continues to contribute in a variety of forums, with many management teams at the country and regional levels now including members of Young UNICEF. The Humans of UNICEF nominees (around 1,300 in 2020) are a highly motivated and inspirational group who share and spark culture change in their offices. A new Yammer group was established in July 2020, consisting of employees who volunteered to contribute to the organization's work on anti-racism and discrimination; that group now has close to 400 members.

22. Internal communications remain a key strategy to enable improvements in organizational culture and all other organizational changes under way in UNICEF, especially by engaging staff and listening to their views and feedback. Through a series of eight regional dialogues and consultations, more than 5,000 staff were able to engage on various change initiatives, including 800 staff who participated in breakout groups that focused on improving organizational culture, making it one of the most subscribed topics of discussion. In June 2020, an online conversation with the Deputy Executive Director, Management focused on two topics: racism and discrimination, and the impact of COVID-19 on the UNICEF workforce. more than 3,200 staff joined the conversation, making it the best-attended ever, with a 100 per cent increase in staff participation from six out of seven regions. Over 90 per cent of the feedback provided on the event was positive.

23. In January 2020, UNICEF initiated the recertification process for EDGE, the leading global assessment methodology for workplace gender equality. In June 2020, UNICEF was recertified at the second level of EDGE certification, EDGE Move. A new EDGE action plan for 2020–2021 was developed, with a focus on four areas: (a) recruit and promote to achieve gender parity; (b) clarify career progression paths and

fair access to opportunities; (c) implement work-life harmony actions equitably; and (d) promote a healthy and safe work environment free of discrimination, harassment and abuse.

24. In October 2020, the fourth annual Ethics Leadership Month focused on the core values of care and integrity with reference to the COVID-19 pandemic, and anti-racism and discrimination. Activities reached more than 5,100 staff members, in a total of 54 regional offices, country offices and headquarters divisions. The Ethics Office developed case studies to initiate conversations relating to those topics and organized five orientation sessions for 179 ethics focal points. The ethics focal points organized more than 60 sessions in their respective offices. The Ethics Office also organized a global webinar on the impact of the pandemic on UNICEF staff and how the organization was responding to their needs, as well on the global movement for racial justice and the work of the Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination. In 2020, the Ethics Office strengthened its institutional independence by establishing itself as a business unit separate from the Office of the Executive Director. The incoming head of the Ethics Office was recruited with a new title, Director, Ethics Office, and with a revised term of appointment, in line with the practice of other United Nations agencies. The preceding actions fulfilled a major recommendation from the Independent Task Force report.

B. Pillar 2: Redefining people management

25. A new competency framework was developed and rolled out to assess staff members' performance in 2020. The framework highlights behavioural and people management skills, including self-awareness and ethical awareness, while retaining a focus on delivery of results.

26. UNICEF continues to invest in building the skills of different levels of staff. Due to COVID-19, many global learning programmes were moved fully online, yet completion rates remained high. More than 440 managers participated in the Management MasterClass in 2020, undergoing 360-degree assessments. At the September Global Management Team meeting, team members were sensitized to issues of racism and discrimination, in the team's first-ever session on these issues.

27. As part of the UNICEF Executive Insight programme, 93 members of the senior staff cadre underwent 360-degree assessments in 2020. For the first time, the orientation provided to all new and rotating senior leaders was delivered online. For national staff learning and career management, UNICEF launched several new programmes in 2020, including Aspire and Reach. Some 259 staff are currently enrolled in the Aspire programme, which strengthens people skills in staff preparing for supervisory roles and those who are first-time supervisors. In addition, the Impact+ programme was rolled out, to equip national staff with the core skills and abilities to become even higher-performing in their roles; 379 national staff participated in the programme in 2020. The programmes are continuing and are being scaled up in 2021.

28. The Humans of UNICEF programme was launched in February 2020 with unprecedented staff engagement and uptake. Around 1,300 employees were nominated by their colleagues for demonstrating the organization's core values. Around 13 per cent of UNICEF personnel were engaged in the programme, either as nominators or nominees. More than 4,000 comments have been received on the programme through different channels. A total of 81 per cent of the nominations are from the regional and country offices, with the highest number coming from the Eastern and Southern Africa region. Managers represent 19 per cent of the

nominations. More than 70 diverse “Humans” have been profiled in articles on the UNICEF Intranet, with a large number of views, likes and comments.

29. This report has been prepared in response to Executive Board decision 2020/21, in which the Board requested UNICEF to highlight in particular its actions taken in implementing the Independent Task Force’s recommendations related to abuse of authority in its next update on this matter at the annual session of 2021. Abuse of authority is considered part of the overall category of interpersonal misconduct in UNICEF and is therefore included in the UNICEF policy on the prohibition of discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment and abuse of authority (updated in March 2020), as well as training on overall ethical standards and management skills. As of February 2021, 95 per cent of UNICEF personnel (more than 14,000 employees) had completed the training on prevention of sexual harassment and abuse of authority. Other measures, including the introduction of matrix management in 2020 and promotion of the use of multi-rater feedback on performance appraisals, were also intended to help to prevent possible abuse of authority by providing multiple sources of feedback on a staff member’s performance. In addition, an independent rebuttal process was set up in 2020 to help to bring more objectivity and trust to the performance appraisal process.

30. In the second quarter of 2021, additional guidance tools will be prepared for consolidating support measures in cases of sexual harassment and other types of interpersonal misconduct, including the abuse of authority. The tools are intended to raise awareness; refer staff to the appropriate policies; and encourage a better understanding of what behaviours might constitute this specific form of misconduct and which ones would not (for example, disagreements over performance would not normally constitute abuse of authority), while recognizing that facts may differ in each case. Focus group discussions are planned with Young UNICEF and with General Service staff in 2021 to obtain a better understanding of abuse of authority from the perspectives of those two specific groups and gather their ideas about UNICEF prevention and response efforts.

31. In June and July 2020, UNICEF conducted the Global Staff Survey, which had a response rate of more than 80 per cent. The survey results indicated progress between 2017 and 2020 on various aspects of culture, including the employee-engagement index, which increased by 11 per cent between 2017 and 2020. The overall score for personal empowerment increased by 15 per cent between 2017 and 2020. A total of 83 per cent of respondents agreed that their offices were taking “appropriate and necessary actions” to follow up on the report of the Independent Task Force. Eighty-eight per cent of respondents believed that their manager had demonstrated “empathy and understanding” under the unique situation of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, scores were lower in 2020 as compared to 2017 in two important areas: (a) “In my office, managers are held accountable for their decisions” (a decrease of 4 per cent), and (b) “At UNICEF, the mechanisms to resolve questions of misconduct are applied fairly and timely” (a decrease of 2 per cent). The data on diversity were also of concern: for example, 52 per cent of respondents believed that conscious or unconscious bias existed in their office, but only 41 per cent would be comfortable discussing the matter.

32. The organization took a new, tailored approach to following up with offices on the Global Staff Survey in 2020. The Principal Adviser, Organizational Culture, the respective Regional Chief of Human Resources and the respective Chairperson of the Regional Staff Association held conversations with 55 country offices (the lowest- and highest-scoring offices from each region) between November 2020 and February 2021. Good practices were documented from the highest-scoring offices and

challenges, follow-up actions and learning resources were identified and shared with the lower-scoring offices. All offices are preparing action plans to respond to their survey data.

33. Issues emerging from the above-mentioned conversations included: (a) performance management and the impact on the team of long-standing or unaddressed underperformance; (b) the importance of communications relating to accountability mechanisms and processes so that all staff understand how they work; (c) the need for the human resources function to be the third pillar in organizational culture work at the country-office level (along with the UNICEF staff association and management) and for human resources to be adequately resourced at the country-office level; and (d) the need for leaders to “walk the talk” and demonstrate values-based leadership at all levels, especially at the head-of-office level. These issues will be addressed in 2021 and subsequent years through a variety of actions.

34. In 2020, the Organizational Design and Improvement Lab, a unit under the supervision of the Deputy Executive Director, Management, provided support, guidance and coordination to various change initiatives designed to make UNICEF more agile, responsive, efficient and effective, building on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. A major result was the staff dialogues, jointly organized by the UNICEF Global Staff Association and the Lab to present preliminary ideas for organizational improvement to all staff, hear their feedback and engage them in the process of organizational change from the ideation stage. Thousands of staff participated in the dialogues, and their feedback was aggregated and shared with the relevant project teams. Organizational culture was a popular theme of discussion, with many staff wanting to better understand not only the cultural dimensions of the organizational changes being proposed, but also the overall culture change efforts in progress.

35. The Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes expanded its regional representation in Bangkok and Dakar. It also set up a capacity-building consultancy in Copenhagen. The reorganization allowed the Office to be closer to the country offices and to provide effective conflict management services to personnel wherever they are located.

C. Pillar 3: Maintaining appropriate incentives and accountabilities to promote our core values as well as deter inappropriate behaviours

36. UNICEF continued to promote the uptake of mediation and informal resolution as a less intrusive and faster way to resolve interpersonal conflicts. As of February 2021, there were 62 UNICEF-funded on-call mediators in the Office of the Ombudsman. Throughout 2020, the mediators attended information sessions managed and coordinated by the Mediation Unit and involving colleagues working in relevant areas in UNICEF and other parts of the United Nations system. In 2020, the Mediation Unit tripled the number of cases it handled as compared to the preceding three years, resolving 18 mediation cases that involved UNICEF personnel. The Office of the Ombudsman addressed other cases using shuttle diplomacy, conflict coaching and evaluation of options. The majority of these cases related to evaluative relationships between supervisors and supervisees and job and career issues. The Mediation Unit developed an e-survey to monitor the quality of its services. The surveys showed a 100 per cent success rate, and confirmed that personnel were highly satisfied with the mediation services and that respondents were willing to recommend mediation to other colleagues regardless of the outcome of their own cases.

37. To promote the use of mediation services, the Office of the Ombudsman held webinars throughout 2020 with participation by more than 450 human resources professionals across regional and country offices. It also conducted inter-agency global webinars on mediation in Arabic, English, French and Spanish, covering more than 440 UNICEF personnel. In February 2021, as part of its effort to promote mediation uptake, UNICEF signed a pledge in which it committed to considering the possibility of mediation for any disputes between UNICEF and its personnel.

38. The Mediation Unit is developing an e-learning course, to be launched in 2021, and has begun a new series entitled “A Conversation with the Mediator”, which includes training sessions and e-visits for personnel in more than 20 country offices. The Global Mediation Panel will participate in the sessions to raise awareness about mediation and offer support to personnel in managing potential conflicts.

39. Two important tools are in development to support monitoring of organizational culture and providing more appropriate responses to different employee behaviours. The first is the “Pulse Check”, an online survey consisting of eight statements that all employees will be asked to respond to, twice yearly, to monitor different aspects of an office’s culture. The data will be integrated automatically into the office scorecards (dashboards) so that office management teams can review them along with other standard office management indicators. Pulse Check is being piloted in the first quarter of 2021 and is expected to be rolled out in mid-2021.

40. The second is an interactive online tool that will include concrete examples of behaviours along a spectrum – from appropriate to questionable to prohibited – along with references to the relevant policy and examples of possible responses to the various behaviours (for example, speaking to human resources; mediation; reporting to OIAI). The tool is expected to raise awareness, especially of questionable and inappropriate behaviours, and to encourage staff to recognize that there are many ways to address them, including but not limited to an investigation.

41. In 2020, the Deputy Executive Director, Management, disposed of 55 cases where the staff members were found to have committed possible misconduct. In 18 cases involving staff in service, she found misconduct had not been established and those cases were closed. Nevertheless, in 7 of those cases, she considered there was a need for administrative measures or managerial actions to address shortcomings in behaviour. In 22 cases involving serving staff members, she found that misconduct had been established and imposed disciplinary measures. In the remaining 15 cases, the staff member had separated from UNICEF during the investigation or disciplinary process. Since UNICEF places full accountability on its staff, disciplinary action may be pursued even if the staff member has separated from the organization. For instance, a disciplinary process was conducted and misconduct was established for three former staff members.

42. As one of the institutional follow-up actions to which UNICEF committed after issuance of the report of the Independent Task Force, the administrative law function was moved from the Division of Human Resources to the Office of the Executive Director. An advisory panel to the Deputy Executive Director, Management on disciplinary measures was established in 2020, and includes two independent experts.

D. Working with other United Nations agencies on organizational culture

43. Together with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Department of Operational Support, UNICEF co-leads the new ways of working substream of the High-Level Committee on

Management task force on the future of work. In 2020, this substream reoriented its work to immediately focus on two deliverables: a draft model policy on flexible work arrangements for the United Nations system, and a set of senior leadership commitments to operationalize the United Nations system leadership framework, an integral part of the management reform efforts set out by of the Secretary-General in 2017. Both deliverables were submitted to the Committee in March 2021. The task force continues its work on the other deliverables for applicability across the United Nations system, including a mapping of organizational culture efforts, recommendations to strengthen diversity, equity and inclusion, and guidance and principles relating to remote and hybrid ways of working.

44. In the third quarter of 2020, UNICEF initiated the establishment of an informal inter-agency group to convene colleagues across the United Nations system working on anti-racism and discrimination. The group has grown to around 40 members, and meets regularly to share information and lessons and strategize around such common deliverables as learning materials and training packages, staff affinity groups and data collection. UNICEF signed on to the statement by principals of the IASC on addressing racism and racial discrimination in the humanitarian sector in September 2020, and shared examples of the organization's emerging good practices.

45. In addition, UNICEF makes active contributions to the Secretary-General's task force on LGBTQIA+ issues, established in early 2021, and to ongoing discussions led by the United Nations Secretariat on the "next normal" way of working in a COVID-19-affected world.

IV. Update on progress on implementing the UNICEF strategy to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment

46. The UNICEF strategy to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment builds on the recommendations made in the independent panel review of the UNICEF response to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. The majority (21) of its 37 recommendations are now being taken forward as ongoing work; 9 are complete; 6 are delayed; and the implementation of 1 is expected to start in 2021. UNICEF continues to pursue the areas of focus in the 2019 strategy, namely: sound organizational culture; reporting mechanisms; investigations and sanctions; survivor-centred response; and engagement of partners in the challenge. Signalling its continuing commitment to addressing sexual misconduct, UNICEF became the first United Nations entity adherent to the recommendation by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development on ending sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in development cooperation and humanitarian assistance. In 2020, UNICEF participated in the first Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network assessment addressing protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

47. UNICEF plans, tracks and reports to the Secretary-General on its initiatives on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse through annual management action plans, which are structured around current IASC standards. Country offices that receive funds dedicated to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse are required, and other offices are encouraged, to report using a prescribed monitoring framework. Offices develop related action plans or office management plans. Ninety-one country offices reported on progress on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in 2020, up from 47 in 2019.

48. The continuing allegations of sexual exploitation provide a reminder that grave risks of sexual exploitation and abuse remain. Internal and inter-agency reviews, such as those from UNICEF-supported IASC field support missions, have indicated that long-term work is required across the pillars of the strategy. Power inequalities drawn along gender lines and affecting children enable violence everywhere UNICEF operates. Better management of safety risks are needed across the organization's diverse range of activities and with its personnel and partners. Staff confidence in reporting requires sustained communications efforts and credible responses to incidents. Such responses depend on reports being made, and often on investigations being undertaken. Reporting channels, particularly in communities, may be unknown, inaccessible or unsafe, and local civil society organizations may have limited investigative capacity. Increased investment in victim assistance is needed to connect survivors with comprehensive support. Finally, across aid agencies, there are weaknesses in information-sharing about risks, incidents and responses that hamper coordination. Highlights of the organization's recent work tackling those challenges follow.

A. An organizational culture of zero tolerance built through accountability, prevention and gender equality

49. The centrality of organizational culture in addressing sexual misconduct is reflected in the first pillar of the UNICEF strategy. In its decision 2019/25, the Executive Board encouraged UNICEF "to ensure that action taken in response to the report of the Independent Task Force reinforces and complements action taken as part of its response to the independent panel review". In line with that request, the broader organizational culture initiatives set out above, and those focused on sexual misconduct, described below, have been coordinated to be complementary and mutually reinforcing.

50. The UNICEF zero-tolerance approach means that no allegation is ignored: all warrant careful examination and assessment of the needed response. No sexual misconduct is acceptable. Proven cases all warrant robust consequences, at UNICEF and for the perpetrator's employability in the sector. Zero cases is the goal of UNICEF prevention efforts, keeping in mind that unreported cases are harder to address than reported ones. Achieving zero cases, and not just zero reports, is a long-term goal, which is matched by equally durable resolve.

51. To fortify individual and office accountability, UNICEF is developing a safeguarding accountability framework that prescribes core office and staff expectations for creating a protective environment. The framework will permit better management of safeguarding performance. Heads of office will also be requested to provide to the Executive Director annual certifications that all known cases have been appropriately reported and addressed, similar to the certification that the Executive Director provides to the Executive Board.

52. Robust vetting and training of UNICEF personnel is vital to prevent sexual misconduct. In 2020, UNICEF continued to strengthen its staff vetting through refinements to its self-disclosure questions, reference checks and background verification through the United Nations Global Centre for Human Resources Services, including through the use of Clear Check, a tool that prevents the hiring and rehiring of individuals whose employment in the United Nations system ended because they perpetrated sexual misconduct or separated while under an investigation with which they did not cooperate. The use of such vetting and reference checks in staff recruitments is monitored holistically for compliance by the recruitment monitoring and evaluation function in the UNICEF Division of Human Resources.

53. As at 19 February 2021, 96 per cent of UNICEF staff had completed the mandatory training on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and 95 per cent the mandatory training on prevention of sexual harassment.

54. The reach and depth of training is being improved. UNICEF has translated the learning package on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse into Burmese, Turkish and Serbian. Both courses addressing sexual misconduct are now also accessible offline and publicly available under a creative commons licence. Staff surveyed staff displayed a sound knowledge of key concepts and procedures but expressed an interest in face-to-face situational learning. In 2021, UNICEF will make available a course from IASC adapted for UNICEF personnel and for COVID-19 friendly/virtual classroom learning.

55. UNICEF must manage the significant risks of sexual exploitation and abuse in its implementing partnerships. In February 2020, UNICEF released a comprehensive procedure for managing those risks, with an accompanying tool kit to help partners address them. The procedure requires offices to screen civil society organizations partnering with UNICEF, as mandated by United Nations protocol. All UNICEF civil society partners must be assessed on their capacity to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse. Partnering with a party assessed as high risk requires justification and prior approval from the head of office and triggers assurance activities. It also requires the implementation of an action plan within 12 months to avoid suspension of the partnership, except where the suspension would threaten lives. By February 2021, about half of the organization's active 4,000 civil society partners had been screened; the balance is targeted for screening by the end of the third quarter of 2021.

56. In humanitarian contexts, the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse are more acute. UNICEF recently revised its Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, incorporating survivor-centred standards. To further operationalize the Commitments, UNICEF is revising its emergency procedures to ensure that safeguarding staff, resources and processes are part of all emergency responses. In addition, during onboarding and deployment to emergency settings, guidance will be systematically provided to those on surge deployment to remind them of their safeguarding obligations.

57. In design and delivery, UNICEF programmes across sectors address risk mitigation, which is critical to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. For example, safety audits were rolled out in Bangladesh and Nigeria as well as in Somalia, where they increased from 58 sites in 2019 to 700 in 2020.

58. In 2020, UNICEF introduced a new policy on enterprise risk management and required offices to assess two distinct risks: sexual exploitation and abuse; and child safeguarding violations, to seek an overall portrait of risks facing offices and those that cannot be adequately addressed locally without assistance.

B. Reporting mechanisms that are safe and trusted

59. UNICEF invested in expanding community reporting mechanisms, with attention paid to those available during the pandemic. The integration of prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse from the outset of the organization's global COVID-19 response contributed to the rapid expansion of this work in 2020. More than 44 million children and adults now have safe and accessible channels to report sexual exploitation and abuse, a 400 per cent increase from 2019.

60. Community reporting mechanisms for sexual exploitation and abuse are often integrated with larger solutions for beneficiaries to receive information and provide

feedback on services. Communities can thereby access information, safe spaces for reporting and services in a coordinated fashion. UNICEF has supported one such solution in Bangladesh, where 90 different sites, operated by a variety of entities, coordinate support through a common protocol. All concerns are promptly logged and identified on a real-time UNICEF dashboard, and community members can receive referrals related to gender-based violence, sexual harassment, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual and reproductive health services.

61. Efforts to extend the reach of community reporting have taken different forms in other countries, with some innovations prompted by COVID-19. Ten country offices are now using digital platforms for community outreach in connection with protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. In South Sudan, radio jingles were broadcast countrywide. In other countries, UNICEF supported access to reporting through existing helplines (Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia and Zambia), information packages (Nigeria and Somalia) or dedicated community consultations (the Sudan). Sixteen country offices in the West and Central Africa region have established community reporting channels for sexual exploitation and abuse. A new handbook and tool kit on accountability to affected populations will help to engage communities in the creation of such channels. The regional offices for the Middle East and North Africa and Eastern and Southern Africa are also supporting the development of tool kits to strengthen community engagement in complaint and feedback mechanisms in their regions.

62. Reports of sexual harassment have declined since 2019 while reports of sexual exploitation and abuse have remained stable. While the trend and an internal perception survey appear to reflect increased confidence in reporting, the COVID-19 pandemic has added a barrier to reporting. UNICEF believes that underreporting remains.

63. In 2020, OIAI received and registered 308 new cases, including 144 concerning alleged misconduct by UNICEF staff members. In addition, 211 cases were carried over from 2019 to 2020, including 128 cases concerning misconduct by UNICEF staff members. Of the 308 new cases, the largest category was sexual exploitation and abuse¹ (19 per cent). The second largest category was inappropriate staff conduct, including failure to follow local laws and failure to follow the standards of conduct for the International Civil Service. In 2020, sexual harassment cases accounted for 5 per cent of all OIAI intake cases, or 15 out of a total of 308 cases, versus 10 per cent of all OIAI intake cases, or 36 of 364 cases in 2019.

64. UNICEF publicly reports, almost in real time, sexual exploitation and abuse allegations involving its personnel and partners implementing its programmes. In 2020, it received no reports involving its personnel and 40 allegations, involving 51 victims and 42 perpetrators, who were personnel of implementing partners. The total numbers were roughly comparable to 2019 (10 personnel and 40 partner personnel allegations), and a significant increase from 2017 and 2018. Additional information on UNICEF allegations reported since 2017 can be found on the website of the United Nations Special Coordinator on improving the United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse.

¹ Cases that the Office of Internal Audit and Investigations categorized as involving sexual exploitation and abuse were not recorded in the United Nations system-wide tracker when they were referred to another United Nations entity, fell outside the jurisdiction of UNICEF, or were otherwise determined not to meet the criteria for public reporting.

C. Investigations and sanctions that are swift and credible

65. The Office of Internal Audit and Investigations has increased its investigation capacity, including by creating a dedicated team to expand the focus on intake and assessment of new matters. It produced an easy-to-read guide to the investigation process for UNICEF staff, to help to build confidence in the process and make it more accessible. The OIAI investigative charter and manual are both under revision, with the changes intending to clarify its role in investigations concerning partners and the standards it will apply to ensure child- and victim-centred investigations.

66. UNICEF supported civil society implementing partners, who have primary responsibility to investigate cases involving their personnel, in expanding their investigative capacity. For example, in Myanmar, UNICEF commissioned training for 16 standby investigators. The Middle East and North Africa Regional Office and the Jordan Country Office led foundational investigative training for partners in seven countries. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNICEF and the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services trained a pool of persons to support children during investigative processes. Additional investigative capacity for implementing partners is a recognized need globally and will be a continued focus of UNICEF efforts in 2021.

67. Of the 40 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving implementing partner personnel reported in 2020, 20 were closed as at 12 February 2021. UNICEF closed 10 cases because the alleged perpetrators were found to have committed sexual exploitation and abuse and dismissed from the hiring entity; 7 cases where there was a finding that the allegations were unsubstantiated, or the case was closed following initial assessment; and 3 cases in which either the alleged perpetrator had separated from the hiring entity before the conclusion of the investigation, or the case was identified as not involving personnel of UNICEF or its implementing partners.

68. In 2020, OIAI closed 89 per cent of cases of sexual exploitation and abuse within nine months.

69. In 2020, the Deputy Executive Director, Management, and, prior to 1 March 2020, the UNICEF Division of Human Resources, received 13 cases of sexual harassment and 2 cases of sexual exploitation and abuse for possible disciplinary action.

D. A quality, survivor-centred response

70. UNICEF has promoted the implementation of standards for survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse to access quality, timely and confidential services in line with their needs and wishes, as set out in a United Nations protocol. Since 2018, 70 per cent more country offices have reported on application of the standards. UNICEF programming on child protection and gender-based violence in emergencies offers related services. In humanitarian settings, 98 per cent of UNICEF appeals for humanitarian action for children include 2021 targets for gender-based violence in emergencies, in line with the UNICEF commitments at the 2019 Oslo Conference on Ending Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Crises.

71. UNICEF programming on child protection and gender-based violence in emergencies includes risk mitigation, prevention and response. In 2020, this three-pronged approach reached 17.7 million people in 83 countries. This compares to more than 3.6 million children and caregivers reached with mental health and psychosocial support, and 1.3 million children and women with gender-based violence prevention and response services in 2018. The significant scale-up is attributed in part to the

increase in gender-based violence triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated containment measures. In countries with lockdown measures and resulting constraints on in-person services and safe spaces, UNICEF and partners pivoted to online or smartphone-based delivery for reporting and case management, including in Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. More than 210,000 UNICEF and partner personnel were trained on risk mitigation and safe referrals for services in 83 countries with COVID-19 response plans.

72. Around half of all victims in reported cases of sexual exploitation and abuse in 2020 received victim assistance, from either UNICEF or a partner. The remaining victims did not seek assistance, were not identified or were unreachable. UNICEF also facilitated victim assistance in other cases involving other United Nations entities or their partners. Support often included medical assistance, mental health and psychosocial support, and other material support.

73. Given the limited availability of legal aid, UNICEF has worked with the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to improve legal assistance available to victims. Individual country offices, such as Myanmar, developed guidance on navigating local legal systems. As part of an inter-agency approach and to better support victims who report, UNICEF developed information for prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse network focal points on the rights of victims under local law and within court proceedings. To promote a victim-centred approach in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNICEF has worked closely with the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services to develop guidelines on support to victims during investigations, with partners trained to accompany victims throughout the process. In Zambia, UNICEF and its inter-agency partners established a small fund for civil society organizations to address gaps and expand access to legal aid and other services for victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.

74. UNICEF continues to offer staff who have experienced sexual misconduct access to in-house psychosocial, medical and human resource support. Legal and dispute resolution services are available through the Office of Staff Legal Assistance and the Office of the Ombudsman.

E. Engaging partners in the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment

75. UNICEF continues to engage within the United Nations system and in IASC forums to improve coordination, address challenges and share lessons learned. With UNHCR, UNICEF co-leads an IASC group focused on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. UNICEF also provided personnel to support the creation of an IASC field support team for prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. UNICEF remotely supports more than 50 inter-agency prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse coordinators. It supported IASC in developing a global technical note and checklist on the integration of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse from the outset of the COVID-19 response, which led to more requests for support from United Nations resident coordinators and country teams.

76. UNICEF supports staffing, or chairs prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse networks or task forces for coordination among United Nations entities and civil society organizations in several countries, including Ethiopia, Lebanon, Libya, the Philippines, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Sudan, Uganda, Yemen, Zambia and the State of Palestine.

77. Following the launch of the UNICEF procedure to assess risks of sexual exploitation and abuse associated with civil society partnerships, UNICEF worked with other United Nations entities to convert the assessment to a set of inter-agency standards. As a result, assessments of civil society organizations partnering with multiple entities will be shared among relevant United Nations entities.

78. Building on collaborative work with other United Nations entities on the United Nations protocol on the provision of assistance to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, UNICEF is leading the development of a technical note to inform its application.

79. In 2020, UNICEF collaborated with IASC in developing and launching a new IASC website on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and in creating a global dashboard to track progress.

80. With the World Food Programme, UNICEF co-chairs a sub-working group on improved reporting of sexual harassment, as part of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board task force on addressing sexual harassment within the organizations of the United Nations system. The group is responsible for administering a system-wide questionnaire on the reporting of sexual harassment in the United Nations system and analysing the data to inform system changes. In 2020, the group administered the questionnaire to 28 entities.

V. Next steps

81. UNICEF will give priority to implementing the remaining recommendations from the Independent Task Force report, as well as those in the action plan prepared by the Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination. Efforts will focus on institutionalizing and sustaining the changes and progress made, through stronger monitoring and accountability systems such as the Pulse Check and the behavioural spectrum tool previously discussed. A strong focus will be maintained on further improving communications and staff engagement, especially to encourage staff to consider various responses, including management recourse, mediation, guidance from the Ethics Office and reporting to OIAI when dealing with possible misconduct or inappropriate behaviour. Collaboration and sharing with the broader United Nations community and other partners remain key priorities.

82. The 2019 strategy will continue to structure the organization's priorities in addressing sexual misconduct. At the country level, UNICEF will commit resources to strengthen victim assistance and community reporting mechanisms. Activities to raise awareness among staff at all levels and to set clear expectations for setting safeguards and managing risk will be a global focus in 2021. Work will continue, in cooperation with other agencies, to engage all implementing partners, civil society and Governments in addressing sexual exploitation and abuse.

83. Strengthening organizational culture and safeguards are critical, long-term objectives for UNICEF. Sustaining and institutionalizing progress in both areas is essential and mutually reinforcing. The quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system calls upon United Nations development system entities, such as UNICEF, to continue their efforts and focus on addressing sexual misconduct. UNICEF will propose organizational culture and safeguarding as "enablers" in the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025; both areas of work offer opportunities to maintain the momentum.