

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

Distr. restricted
21 August 2020
English
Original: English and French

**Standing Committee
78th meeting**

**Report of the seventy-eighth meeting of the
Standing Committee (7-9 July 2020)**

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I. Introduction

1. The meeting was opened by the Chairperson of the Executive Committee, His Excellency Ambassador Geert Muylle (Belgium).

II. Adoption of the agenda

2. The Committee adopted the agenda of the meeting (EC/71/SC/CRP.8).

III. International protection

3. The Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) provided an overview of the protection challenges facing the organization, particularly in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The health crisis had challenged the norms of international protection, including the prohibition of returning a refugee to a place of persecution or conflict, and posed the most serious threat to refugee law and to fundamental rights in the history of UNHCR. The Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) also provided an update on durable solutions, outlined progress made with respect to UNHCR's campaign to end statelessness and highlighted new initiatives launched in the context of the Global Compact on Refugees.

A. Note on international protection

4. Recalling the seventieth anniversary of the establishment of the Office, the Director of the Division of International Protection (DIP) presented the note on international protection (CRP/71/SC/CRP.9). She noted how UNHCR had adapted to changing times and risen to contemporary challenges, reshaping its approach, while remaining committed to the principles set out in its Statute. Among the current challenges, in addition to those presented by COVID-19, she highlighted mixed movements, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and the increased use of detention, among others.

5. The discussion was dominated by the COVID-19 situation. Numerous countries paid tribute to UNHCR field workers for their commitment to "stay and deliver" throughout this health crisis and to the humanitarian imperative of saving lives. UNHCR was commended for its engagement in the global response to COVID-19, addressing the various challenges posed by the pandemic on the protection of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and stateless persons. The pandemic left persons of concern particularly vulnerable, and UNHCR's efforts to advocate inclusion in national systems were welcomed. Concern about the impact of the crisis on women and girls was also conveyed, and gender equality was highlighted as imperative to "building back better" after the pandemic.

6. Measures to contain the virus, including the closure of international borders and the impact on those who sought asylum, were regrettable. Concern was expressed that stringent border measures taken during the pandemic would take a permanent form, and States were urged to ensure that any such measures were temporary, proportional and balanced, and in accordance with international law, including the principle of non-refoulement. As one delegation put it, the securing of borders and the wellbeing of refugees and asylum-seekers should not be considered mutually exclusive priorities but rather mutually reinforcing and, indeed, beneficial. UNHCR was urged by numerous delegations to compile a list of best practices in response to refugee protection during the pandemic, which could help refine protection mechanisms in the future. One delegation highlighted that preparedness was one of the best lessons to be drawn from the pandemic.

7. Host countries highlighted that the pandemic had exacerbated the challenges they faced and stretched resources in the context of emergency measures to contain the spread of the virus. This included measures to ensure adequate reception facilities which guaranteed social distancing, which could be disinfected continuously and where medical screening and random testing could take place. Transfers from overcrowded centres and the opening of new medical centres to ensure adequate health care and treatment for those affected by COVID-19, without discrimination, also drained resources. In this context, the need for greater international support and solidarity was emphasized. Several countries also expressed concern about actions taken by some States which hampered humanitarian efforts.

8. Delegations highlighted that the pandemic should not be allowed to reverse the progress made in the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), particularly the advancements made towards self-reliance, and impose delays in the commitments made at the Global Refugee Forum (GRF). The pandemic was having a debilitating impact on some host countries and reversing development gains. In this context, the global pandemic was described as a “wake-up call” for strengthened efforts to uphold international burden-sharing. UNHCR was also encouraged to provide, in due course, detailed analysis and evaluation of the support platforms launched the GRF and their impact on protection outcomes and solutions.

9. With respect to mixed movements, appreciation was expressed for UNHCR’s role in the United Nations Network on Migration. The Office was requested to provide regular briefings on this engagement and to give an update on UNHCR’s current activities aimed at supporting operational responses to mixed movements, in line with the “10-Point plan in action”. Concern was expressed for the welfare of hundreds of Rohingya refugees who were undertaking risky journeys at sea, with calls for adequate search and rescue capacity and safe and humane disembarkation. The importance of combatting trafficking in persons and people smuggling was also highlighted, including in the context of the Khartoum Declaration and Plan of Action.

10. UNHCR was encouraged to advance its efforts to ensure the participation of persons of concern in decision-making, as well as to promote the protection of children and empowerment of youth, and to better assess the protection needs of persons of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics. Support was also expressed for UNHCR’s implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy and relevant Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) guidelines, and the Office was commended for its work on mental health and psychosocial support. Support was expressed for UNHCR’s work to combat statelessness, with a call for this to remain a priority. With respect to ongoing campaigns to prevent discrimination and xenophobia, it was proposed to present the positive contributions made by migrant and refugee doctors and nurses, in response to the current health crisis, as positive contributions to their host countries.

11. Concern was expressed about the protracted situation in the camps near Tindouf, Algeria. One delegation emphasized its continued commitment to providing refugees with protection and assistance, including with the objective of addressing the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It called on UNHCR to redouble its efforts to remedy the funding gaps for this operation and meet the real needs of the Saharawi refugees, taking into account the rise in the population. It also stressed the importance of the right to voluntary return and recalled that the registration of the Saharawi refugees was in line with the United Nations peace plan. Another delegation renewed its call for UNHCR to proceed with the registration of this population, in accordance with its mandate and in line with relevant Security Council resolutions, taking into account that registration improves the integrity of the operation by reducing the risk of fraud and misappropriation.

12. In her response, the Director of DIP applauded the contributions that all States made to refugee protection, highlighting that smaller States such as Lebanon hosted large numbers

in comparison to its population. With respect to gender equality, she highlighted that this encompassed a broader range of activities than just the elimination of SGBV. In March 2020, UNHCR had launched a gender equality toolkit to provide UNHCR personnel and partners with practical guidance and resources to support the achievement of this goal. In response to numerous references to persons with disabilities, she informed the Committee that a new position had been established within DIP to focus on disability in the context of the age, gender and diversity approach.

13. Addressing a comment about regionalization, the Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) indicated that UNHCR had seen its value in the context of COVID-19. She agreed with the importance of compiling best practices in relation to the COVID-19 response and noted, as an example, how remote technology had helped connect people in need with protection services and education. With respect to the clean energy challenge, UNHCR would be engaging in this initiative through the Special Adviser to the High Commissioner on Climate Action.

B. Resettlement and complementary pathways (incl. update on the implementation of the 3-year resettlement strategy)

14. In presenting EC/71/SC/CRP.10, the Director of DIP highlighted the key milestones achieved towards increasing third-country solutions for refugees, including the launch of UNHCR's three-year strategy on resettlement and complementary pathways as well as the mobilization of pledges at the GRF. Regarding challenges faced, she noted that while resettlement departures were temporarily suspended due to the COVID-19 mitigation measures, UNHCR continued and adapted its resettlement activities, including virtual interviews and the preparation of submissions to ensure departures could resume as soon as conditions allowed. She also described efforts undertaken in collaboration with States and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to strengthen and expand third-country solutions for refugees.

15. UNHCR was commended for advancing the implementation of the three-year strategy, which was considered pivotal to enhancing international burden- and responsibility-sharing and easing pressure on host countries. Nevertheless, concern was voiced over the significant gap between needs and places available, which was becoming wider due to the impact of COVID-19. It was lamented that only a small number of pledges made at the GRF towards resettlement had been implemented and that they fell short of the requirements for achieving the objectives of the strategy. In this context, efforts made by several countries to expand their resettlement programmes were welcomed and other States were encouraged to follow suit.

16. The announcement by UNHCR and IOM to resume resettlement departures, as soon as conditions allowed, was welcomed. UNHCR was commended for adopting a flexible and pragmatic approach to maintaining its resettlement activities, despite the pandemic, and for compiling and disseminating good practices in support of State-led efforts. Several delegations outlined measures undertaken to ensure the continuity of their resettlement processes during the pandemic, such as introducing remote processing modalities and admitting emergency resettlement cases, and reaffirmed their readiness to resume resettlement activities as soon as conditions allowed. States were encouraged to consider ways in which such modalities could be mainstreamed to ensure more responsive national asylum systems and procedures in the future.

17. While the establishment of the new priority situations core group was welcomed, it was emphasized that refugees in protracted displacement situations and those living in other regions should not be left behind in accessing third-country solutions. Concerns were also raised about the worrying trend of refugees with certain criteria, such as country of origin,

educational background and employment experiences, being prioritized for resettlement. In this context, it was stressed that resettlement should remain a humanitarian and a needs-based programme without any qualifications-based selection criteria. Moreover, the development and expansion of complementary pathways must be advanced in addition to and not at the expense of resettlement programmes.

18. In addressing concerns about the potentially low number of resettlements in 2020, the Director of DIP affirmed that UNHCR was encouraged by the continued commitment of resettlement States, and that the flexibility demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic by several States in granting refugees access to labour markets offered hope that complementary pathways would further expand, increasing opportunities for third-country solutions to refugees. She also noted that the pandemic had compelled the identification of solutions for reducing processing times and costs and hoped that such good practices could be carried forward while respecting security screening requirements. In response to a question about the priority situations core group, the Director explained that it was a State-led group comprised of resettlement countries and that UNHCR provided technical advice as requested by its members. Furthermore, it served as a mechanism for participating States to coordinate their country missions, to explore ways to reduce transaction costs and to increase the effectiveness of resettlement processes. In relation to the reduced availability of commercial flights, the Director indicated that UNHCR and IOM would be able to support resettlement countries in exploring the possibility of charter flights, where the number of departures and conditions allowed.

C. Update on voluntary repatriation

19. The Director of DIP presented the update on voluntary repatriation (EC/71/SC/CRP.11), noting a decrease of 46 per cent in the number of refugees who repatriated voluntarily in 2019, as compared to the previous year. She highlighted that the obstacles to voluntary return could only be overcome with political will and the help of development investment, not by humanitarian action alone. While voluntary repatriation activities had been put on hold due to the pandemic-related restrictions, the Director expressed hope that this pause would allow States to put in place measures to receive their nationals in a safe manner.

20. Numerous delegations stressed that voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity remained the preferred solution, not only for States, but for refugees. While many echoed the Director's concern about the ongoing decrease in voluntary repatriation, several countries highlighted recent small-scale refugee return movements, particularly in Africa, as encouraging examples. Many of these movements took place under a tripartite agreement, which was considered an important framework to ensure safety and dignity. Concern was expressed about refugees returning to conditions in countries of origin that did not meet these standards, something which could be accelerated by the response to COVID-19.

21. Calls were made for the international community to support voluntary returns, including by addressing the root causes of displacement and creating the conditions conducive for return as per the GCR. In this context, the importance of the support platforms launched at the GRF was underscored, with several delegations announcing their intention to join the core group of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR). The need to operationalize GRF pledges in line with the fourth objective of the GCR (to support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity) was also emphasized.

22. The Director thanked delegations for the support they expressed for tripartite agreements, describing them as a constructive and structured way to organize returns, as they contained important safeguards. At the same time, she assured the Committee that UNHCR would never block refugees from exercising their right to return, even if the organization was

not promoting or facilitating organized repatriation movements. She shared concerns raised about possible socioeconomic push factors in countries of asylum forcing refugees to go back, rather than positive pull factors in countries of origin. This could lead to refoulement. Responding to a question about voluntary return, the Director explained that once a refugee had re-availed themselves of the protection of their country of origin, their refugee status would cease. Should they return to seek asylum abroad, this would be considered a new claim. The Director acknowledged the strain this could place on countries with individual refugee status determination systems and noted it would be easier to manage in situations of prima facie refugee status recognition.

D. Self-reliance and inclusion

23. The Director of the Division of Resilience and Solutions (DRS) presented the paper on self-reliance and inclusion (EC/71/SC/CRP.12), updating the Committee on developments over the past year. He noted that the GCR recognized that self-reliance and inclusion in national services were important in achieving economic growth for both refugees and host communities. While significant progress had been made in this area, COVID-19 threatened to reverse the gains. Many refugees who had become self-sufficient now had their incomes disrupted. Women had been particularly affected by the pandemic's negative economic impact, while it was estimated that half of secondary-age girls would not return to school when they reopen.

24. Delegations commended the progress made by host countries in including refugees in national planning and programming, while noting the challenges presented by the COVID-19 crisis. UNHCR's efforts to boost self-reliance and inclusion were recognized, and the scaling up of cash assistance to the most vulnerable was particularly appreciated. It was noted that the new "prospects partnership" (a multi-country, multi-stakeholder initiative launched by the Netherlands) would also foster refugee self-reliance and socioeconomic inclusion and strengthen host communities. One delegation emphasized that an enabling policy environment was required for refugees to enjoy the right to education, services and jobs and, once this was in place, development interventions could be encouraged. The COVID-19 crisis demanded close cooperation between humanitarian and development actors as well as international and regional financial institutions. It was also crucial to build on the momentum of the GRF, focusing on jobs and livelihoods. Recognizing refugee qualifications would also facilitate their inclusion.

25. The Director noted that there have been substantial improvements in refugee inclusion over the years, particularly in urban areas. In some countries, refugees could open bank accounts and access microfinance and jobs, and many good inclusion examples could be found in the health sector. Regarding COVID-19, he echoed concerns about the serious socioeconomic impact on displaced persons and noted that the Office was working with partners and communities to reverse the trend. As countries hosting large refugee populations were now facing serious challenges, the solidarity and burden-sharing arrangements set forth in the GCR were more crucial than ever. Partnerships with development and financial actors, including the World Bank, were essential in this regard. The Director commended State efforts to include refugee children in national education systems and noted that UNHCR was gathering best practices to be shared with stakeholders.

E. Oral update on ExCom conclusion(s)

26. The Executive Committee (ExCom) Rapporteur briefed the Committee on progress made in advancing conclusions on international protection. She noted that the 2015 multi-year workplan had run its course, with three out of four topics proposed resulting in a

conclusion on international protection. She informed the Committee about her consultations with member States on pursuing a new workplan and looking at the possibility of negotiating a conclusion on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR. As this year's High Commissioner's Dialogue would focus on protection challenges in the context of pandemics, States had stressed that this could be an opportunity for the Executive Committee to first hear different views on the implications on protection and resilience. They also agreed with the importance of having a work programme place. The Rapporteur, therefore, proposed to start working in 2020 on a multi-year work programme for 2021-2022, including the topic of international protection in the context of public health emergencies.

27. The Rapporteur was commended for her inclusive consultations. Several delegations noted that a pandemic-related conclusion would be timely and relevant, acknowledging the importance of benefiting from the High Commissioner's Dialogue before starting to negotiate a conclusion on this topic. Many also underscored the usefulness of having a multi-year work programme and expressed support for the Rapporteur's proposal. One delegation noted that past conclusions focused more on protection and less on solutions, stressing the importance of striking a balance between protection-related and solutions-related topics in the workplan, consistent with UNHCR's mandate.

28. The Chairperson concluded that the Committee supported the Rapporteur's proposal to work this year on a multi-year workplan with possible topics for 2021-2022. This would include international protection during a public health emergency, which States indicated could be prioritized in 2021.

IV. Programme/protection policy

29. The Deputy High Commissioner provided introductory remarks related to this agenda item and those to follow, updating the Committee on UNHCR's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and outlining measures undertaken to mitigate the impact on persons of concern. UNHCR had received pledges of \$270 million against the \$745 million requested through the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP). Unearmarked funding had enabled UNHCR to respond swiftly, allocating funds to the operations most in need. She noted that a detailed analysis of the potential long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic had been conducted and described some of the factors that were expected to affect UNHCR's ability to deliver protection, assistance and solutions. Based on this analysis, the organization had begun taking steps in several areas in order to mitigate potential risks, such as making further investments in cash-based interventions, enhancing partnerships and adapting its ways of working.

30. Briefing the Committee on reform efforts, the Deputy High Commissioner provided an overview of UNHCR's work as co-chair of the Business Innovations Strategic Results Group of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and an update on the decentralization and regionalization process. Feedback from UNHCR Representatives had confirmed that the repositioning of the regional bureaux, although still in the early implementation stage, had been timely, particularly in the context of the pandemic, and had helped strengthen support to operations. Elaborating on the next steps in the process, she indicated that a series of internal consultations on headquarters realignment had been carried out, which would inform a roadmap for transformation over the coming months and guide UNHCR's annual planning and resource allocation for 2021. She concluded with a note on the financial and funding situation, highlighting the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and new emergencies in 2020 on the availability of resources for UNHCR's ongoing programmes.

A. Report on UNHCR's global strategic priorities

31. The Director of the Division of Strategic Planning and Results (DSPR) introduced the report on the global strategic priorities (GSPs) (EC/71/SC/CRP.13), providing an update on the progress made against UNHCR's GSPs for 2018-2019 during the second year of the biennium. She highlighted the results obtained in a number of areas, emphasizing that the progress against GSPs was not linear and that the gains achieved would require sustained investment to be maintained. Furthermore, she noted that the lack of sufficient funds had required operations to reprioritize resources in order to address urgent and increasing needs. This, in some cases, had resulted in inadequate funding or defunding of some activities.

32. UNHCR was commended for the progress made against the operational and the support and management GSPs, as well as with regard to the "grand bargain" commitments. The latter included increasing the use of cash-based assistance, particularly in the COVID-19 response. It was hoped that the introduction of the new results-based management (RBM) system would help better capture and demonstrate the outcomes and impact of UNHCR's programmes. Appreciation was expressed for the linkages made between the GSPs, the strategic directions (2017-2021) and the GCR objectives. The progress made in the decentralization and regionalization process was welcomed, and UNHCR was requested to provide an update on its impact on the organization, including with regard to cost savings. The organization's efforts to strengthen registration and reinforce data management, including through the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement with the World Bank, were welcomed. The Committee was also pleased by the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy and encouraged UNHCR to provide updates on further efforts in this area.

33. Delegations expressed concern over the limited progress made in the areas of SGBV prevention and response, and the participation of women in leadership and management structures. UNHCR was encouraged to prioritize these efforts, particularly in the context of COVID-19. One delegation commented that the report on the GSPs did not allow for trends analysis, as the underlying data was unavailable, and that it mainly captured outputs rather than impact. Another delegation voiced concern about the persistent challenges in expanding opportunities for durable solutions and encouraged UNHCR to maintain efforts to ensure sustainable return and reintegration in safety and dignity, when conditions permit. The Office was also called upon to collaborate with other stakeholders in tracking and reporting in coherent manner on the use of flexible financial contributions provided for the COVID-19 GHRP.

34. In response to a question about the possibility of a successive strategy on ending detention, the Director indicated that UNHCR did not plan to release a new strategy at this point in time. She affirmed, however, that promoting alternatives to detention remained a priority for the organization, and that it would continue to support States in implementing such alternatives, including by reflecting good practices from pilot countries in the work of the United Nations Network on Migration. Addressing concerns about SGBV prevention and response, she assured the Committee that this was a key priority for UNHCR and that important progress had been made in strengthening these programmes, including through the deployment of experts and increasing training. She acknowledged that there was an inherent challenge in measuring the impact of SGBV prevention and response programmes, as an increase or decrease in incidents did not give a clear indication of the programme's impact. Nonetheless, the monitoring framework for UNHCR's work on SGBV prevention and response had been integrated into the new RBM framework, which would help address the challenge of impact measurement. In response to a question regarding lessons learned from the COVID-19 response, the Director highlighted three key areas: i) increasing advocacy and engagement with States regarding the impact of the pandemic on persons of concern; ii) using new methods for monitoring the impact, including remote modalities such as call centres,

phone surveys and social media; and, iii) applying new modalities for protection activities, including the use of digital means to carry out registration and asylum interviews. She added that the lessons learned were being examined to determine how they could be carried forward.

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

35. The Director of DRS provided the oral update on UNHCR’s coordination efforts to measure the impact of hosting, assisting and protecting refugees, as per General Assembly resolution 72/150, drawing attention to the recent [progress report](#) published on UNHCR’s web site.

36. The Committee welcomed the partnership between UNHCR and the World Bank, and recognized the complexity of efforts to measure the impact of hosting, protecting and assisting refugees. While many delegations underlined the importance of measuring the social and economic costs borne by host communities, others noted that the possible benefits, economic or other, should not be overlooked and that a more nuanced approach was needed in this regard. One delegation called for aligning the process with regional and national initiatives, and another noted the importance of a “one refugee approach”, including those who were not registered. There was also a call for member States to keep the exercise technical in nature and avoid politicization.

37. The Director thanked delegations for their support and indicated that it was UNHCR’s intention to maintain the momentum created by the three technical workshops that had been held. He agreed with the need for more detailed, nuanced and evidence-based cost analysis, as well as more information on the additional costs in the health and education sectors due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional workshops, including with the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement, would facilitate this. He noted that several studies on the impact of COVID-19 were already underway.

V. Regional activities and global programmes

Oral update on internal displacement

38. The Principal Advisor on Internal Displacement presented the oral update, providing an overview of the progress made against the four main objectives set out in “UNHCR’s initiative on internal displacement 2020-2021”. As a good practice, she highlighted the increase in the number of IDP operations now using cash, with \$15 million distributed over the past three months. In the context of COVID-19, cash had proven effective in its ability to provide choice and to empower. Regarding visibility and advocacy, she described improvements in UNHCR’s inter-agency coordination leadership commitments and stressed the importance of including IDPs in national response plans, including in the COVID-19 response. With respect to the need to better inform resource mobilization strategies and equitable resource allocation, the Principal Advisor pointed to efforts aimed at improving the link between analysis and UNHCR’s revised results monitoring framework. She noted that unmet needs for 2020 in pillar IV for IDPs were estimated to be in the range of \$700 million (representing a 54 per cent shortfall). In relation to the nine IDP-initiative target operations, the Principal Advisor recognized the importance of cooperation with development partners in driving solutions, noting a number of initiatives being implemented in the field to strengthen resilience and solutions, including in Ethiopia and Somalia.

39. The Committee welcomed UNHCR's initiative on internal displacement, including the four key objectives and nine target operations. UNHCR was urged to give primacy to building national capacities with a view to effectively linking humanitarian assistance with the sustainable development goals (SDGs), advancing durable solutions through the humanitarian-development nexus. While the initiative was seen as essential in drawing much needed visibility to the situation of IDPs, it was also noted that the needs appeared to be growing exponentially as a result of violence and conflict on the one hand and climate change on the other. Delegations looked forward to seeing improvements in IDP protection and assistance, encouraging UNHCR to report on progress in a transparent and predictable manner. However, concern was expressed over the 54 per cent funding gap for IDP projects under pillar IV, with calls for increased financial support. UNHCR was commended for its efforts to address IDP situations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, including under the global protection cluster.

40. Delegations welcomed the emphasis placed on data gathering and analysis, including through the UNHCR-World Bank Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement. The initiative's focus on inter-agency leadership was also appreciated in bringing coherence to the overall response and towards addressing internal displacement in a manner respectful of mandates and cluster responsibilities.

41. UNHCR's contribution to the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement and the Panel's activities were widely appreciated. Delegations looked forward to the Panel generating actionable recommendations to improve protection and solutions for IDPs, including by strengthening legal regimes and frameworks for this population and fostering socio-economic inclusion. The Committee expressed overwhelming support for the extension of the Panel's mandate and additional funding to ensure the required level of consultation with all stakeholders, including IDPs.

42. Responding to requests for updates on the implementation of the initiative, the Principal Advisor pointed delegations to UNHCR's first [quarterly update](#) which was available on Global Focus. Echoing a number of calls for increased support in favour of Africa, including for the domestication of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), the Principal Advisor referred to the five focus operations located in this geographical region alone. Nonetheless, she recalled that UNHCR's interventions spanned over 33 IDP country operations. In response to calls for solutions to remain at the centre of the response, she explained that this priority constituted one of the main reasons for UNHCR's engagement in the High-Level Panel. She also insisted upon the importance of solutions being part of the entire displacement spectrum, from prevention to resilience. On the comments relating to data, the Principal Advisor emphasized the need to collect a greater breadth of information, including through collaboration with a wide variety of data collection entities. In response to queries relating to the impact of COVID-19 on cash distribution, the Principal Advisor expressed satisfaction with the results to date, especially considering the short timeframe available for assessment. She noted that the Sahel region had proved challenging, owing to limitations on mobility which had hindered UNHCR's ability to expand the use of cash.

VI. Programme budgets and funding

A. Update on budgets and funding (2019, 2020-2021)

43. The Director of DSPR presented the update on budgets and funding (2019, 2020-2021) (EC/71/SC/CRP.14) noting that all figures in the report were as of 31 May. The final annual programme budget for 2019 stood at \$8.6 billion, while some \$4.2 billion was received in contributions. This left a funding gap of 44 per cent, slightly higher than the

previous year, showing that needs were still growing faster than income. She noted that in 2019, UNHCR recorded the highest expenditure to date, demonstrating the organization's capacity to increase implementation rate when more funding becomes available. Regarding 2020, in June, after the cut-off date for data used in this report, two supplementary budgets brought the annual budget to \$9.1 billion, which would be presented in the next update at the seventy-ninth meeting of the Standing Committee in September. The 2021 budget remained at \$8.6 billion, as approved by ExCom at its seventieth session.

44. The Director of the Division of External Relations (DER) gave an overview of the income received in 2019. She noted that a big share of the contributions had been received early in the year and underlined that the timeliness of contributions was crucial to the organization's ability to "stay and deliver". The Director thanked the donors for their generosity, in particular those who provided unearmarked funding, which is critical to the management of UNHCR operations. She said that current estimations of funds available for 2020 would cover 33 per cent of needs. The Director informed the Committee about \$40 million increase in contributions from the private sector, mostly for the COVID-19 response.

45. The Committee expressed concern about the funding gap of 44 per cent in 2019 and expressed appreciation for UNHCR's efforts to diversify the donor base. The investments made in private sector fundraising were noted in this context. UNHCR was commended for the increase in expenditure by field operations in 2019 and was encouraged to strengthen multi-year planning and pass on multi-year funding to partners. More information was requested about how funds were allocated and how the Office prioritized activities and beneficiaries. UNHCR was also asked to provide more information about cost savings and reprioritization, including due to regionalization and COVID-19. One delegation announced its intention to increase its contribution, to avoid a deviation of funding from existing programmes to the COVID-19 response, and encouraged others to do the same. Other delegations expressed concern about the long-term impact of the COVID-19 emergency, including on UNHCR's funding situation and asked what UNHCR's long-term strategy was to mitigate such risks. Many delegations acknowledged the importance of timely and flexible funding, including for the COVID-19 response.

46. The Director of DSPR thanked delegations for their support and explained the dynamic resource allocation and prioritization process, based on needs assessments, emerging needs and vulnerabilities, but also earmarking that continues throughout the year. With regard to savings, she noted that UNHCR's commitment to "stay and deliver" meant that no large amounts of unspent balance, which could be reallocated, were expected, and that some of the existing activities (in particular health, water and sanitation, and protection) had been stepped up. With regard to savings due to regionalization and the realignment of headquarters, she noted that it was too early to tell, as 2020 was a transition year. The aim remained for the transformation to be cost neutral. The Director of DER provided an overview of the diversification of its donor base as well as reinforced partnerships with resident and humanitarian coordinators at the country level to ensure the inclusion of persons of concern and host populations in their work in response to COVID-19. She also referred delegates to "[UNHCR's report on flexible funding in 2019](#)" and suggested to gather a group of partners to support this type of funding.

47. The draft decision on budgets and funding for 2019 and 2020-2021 was adopted.

B. Global Report 2019

48. The Director of DER presented UNHCR's Global Report on activities in 2019, highlighting the key achievements and challenges faced by UNHCR to protect and assist tens of millions of refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees, IDPs and stateless persons. She noted the contributions of host countries, donors and other partners, and described efforts to provide

life-saving assistance, safeguard fundamental rights and build better futures for persons of concern.

49. Appreciation was expressed for UNHCR's detailed report on programmes and activities. Delegations underscored the importance of the Global Report in demonstrating the achievements and results over the last year, indicating that it served as a valuable advocacy tool. The report's in-depth analysis was appreciated, as were the key results per region, though it was suggested to include original targets in order to have a point of comparison. More reporting on the measurable impact of protection and assistance, as well as the amount of budget allocated to partners per region, was requested. The Office's reform efforts were appreciated, including regionalization, risk management and measures to address sexual exploitation and abuse, among others. States highlighted the usefulness of the data provided in the report as well as the detailed information on funding, while expressing concern about the chronic underfunding of some programmes noted in the report.

50. The Director thanked the Committee, indicating that she had taken note of the suggestions made for next year's Global Report. Regarding one delegation's query about emerging trends linked to COVID-19, she highlighted that the negative economic impact on governments would affect humanitarian funding next year.

VII. Governance

51. The Chairperson reminded the Committee that the High Commissioner's opening statement at the seventieth 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.

52. It was proposed that the High Commissioner share his views on the importance of mental health and psychosocial support for persons of concern. In addition, the High Commissioner could discuss localization and, specifically, UNHCR's efforts to increase funding to local organizations, design equitable partnerships and include affected populations in planning and implementation at different levels.

VIII. Any other business

53. The Chair informed the Committee that its approval was sought to add an agenda item to the programme of work for 2020, in relation to the seventy-ninth meeting in September. Falling under programme budgets and funding, the Committee would be asked to consider an additional item on: "UNHCR's new planning, budgeting and monitoring system", which would include a conference room paper and a draft decision on a proposed revision to UNHCR's financial rules. The Committee agreed, and the Chairperson indicated that the Standing Committee programme of work would be revised as EC/71/SC/CRP.2/Rev.1 to reflect this.

54. 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 seventy-eighth meeting would be prepared by the Secretariat and circulated for comments by 24 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 2019 and 2020-2021

The Standing Committee,

Recalling the Executive Committee's decisions, at its sixty-eighth and sixty-ninth sessions on administrative, financial and programme matters (A/AC.96/1176, para. 14 and A/AC.96/1187, para. 13), as well as its discussions under the programme budgets and funding item at the seventy-seventh meeting of the Standing Committee in March 2020,

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

Recalls that the Executive Committee, at its sixty-eighth session, approved original programmes and budgets for regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters under UNHCR's 2018-2019 biennial programme budget, amounting to \$7,508.4 million and \$7,352.3 million for 2018 and 2019, respectively,

Recalls that the Executive Committee, at its sixty-ninth session, approved revised programmes and budgets for regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters under UNHCR's 2018-2019 biennial programme budget (revised), amounting to \$8,275.3 million and \$8,591.1 million for 2018 and 2019 respectively,

Takes note of the increase in UNHCR's annual budget for 2019 to a final total of \$8,635.9 million, representing the sum of the revised budget of \$8,591.1 million and the final supplementary budgets of \$107.4 million and taking into account a budget reduction of \$62.6 million,

Takes note of the financial and budgetary performance in 2019,

Recalls that the Executive Committee, at its seventieth session in October 2019, 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 (A/AC.96/1198, para. 13 (c)),

Takes note of the UNHCR's annual budgets for 2020 and 2021 as of 30 April 2020, which have remained unchanged from the amounts originally approved by the Executive Committee,

Recognizes that emergencies and unforeseen activities unfolding in 2020 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 2020.