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High Commissioner's Programme**

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*Chairperson: Dr. Katharina Stasch, Ambassador, Permanent Representative,
Germany*

Contents

2. Management, financial control, administrative oversight and human resources (resumed)
 - (b) Human resources, including staff welfare (EC/74/SC/CRP.20)
 - (c) Management
 - Oral update on integrity in UNHCR
3. Programme budgets and funding
 - (a) Update on budgets and funding (EC/74/SC/CRP.21)

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Dr. Katharina Stasch (Germany), took the Chair

The meeting was called to order at 3:06 p.m.

(b) Human resources, including staff welfare (EC/73/SC/CRP.20)

1. The **Director of the Division of Human Resources (UNHCR)** said that the number of forcibly displaced persons around the world had continued to rise and had reached 110 million that summer. As that global trend showed no sign of abating, it had become abundantly clear that all resources would need be deployed across the humanitarian sector to address the serious challenges ahead. Regardless of the complexity and urgency, the UNHCR workforce continued to find ways to respond to that growing humanitarian need. From the most remote field locations to the hallways of UNHCR's headquarters right here in Geneva, UNHCR staff remained committed to work every day for the forcibly displaced people who count on them. UNHCR staff did so with resilience, courage and conviction, even when impacted by threats or traumatic experiences and in the past year, such security situations had played out, including in Sudan (the), where UNHCR had to evacuate around 70 colleagues and their families earlier in the year. In February, UNHCR lost Myra, Faruk, Tamer and Hassan, when Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic were severely impacted by devastating earthquakes. They had dedicated their lives in service of others, and their loss was a loss not only for UNHCR, but for the humanitarian community as a whole.

2. UNHCR's mission to support a rapidly increasing number of people forcibly displaced required the full use of its resources and its processes to be fully optimized so that UNHCR could deliver as efficiently as possible. To this end, the Division of Human Resources had marked several major milestones on the transformation journey it had embarked upon nearly five years ago, centred around the key premises of People, Partnership and Technology. UNHCR had started its journey to transform its human resources function back in 2019, when Division of Human Resources had not been seen as a strong partner to the organization as too much time had been required to get people on the ground, people management had not been a priority, and it had relied on outdated human resource technology systems. UNHCR's work to transform Division of Human Resources had been intensive since then, including introducing human resource partners in all seven regions, stronger capacity for staff health and wellbeing, and new capabilities in workforce planning, people analytics, learning and new, best in class, human resource technology. In October 2022, after extensive testing and preparation, UNHCR finally left its old, outdated human resource system behind and went live with Workday, which offers a much more user-friendly system for all things related to human resources: from payroll, recruitment and strategic workforce planning to personnel administration, learning and performance management.

3. This digital transformation, however, went far beyond those everyday transactions and reviewing its processes against the Workday standard based on global best practices had allowed UNHCR to simplify and streamline 16 human resources policies and over 200 processes. New ways of promoting good people management had been introduced through Evolve, a new performance management approach with a greater emphasis on development and continuous feedback and Division of Human Resources now also had access to an incredible richness of data about its workforce, processes and opportunities for further efficiency gains. While there remained work to be done on its transformation, it was inspiring to hear feedback from other organizations about the magnitude of the change, which was more significant than others across the industry and certainly the United Nations system. Technology had been a far greater accelerator than could have been imagined for UNHCR's human resources teams, who had adopted new ways of working and mindsets as part of the process. As was the case with any change of such magnitude, the transition to Workday – and everything that had accompanied that change – had taken a lot of energy and effort, with some people catching on early to these new ways of working, and others needing more time to adapt.

4. The United Nations system and its administrative processes were unique and aligning existing external standards with deeply engrained methodologies had taken time and effort, but it had certainly been worth it. As of today, UNHCR had successfully conducted over 3 million human resources transactions within Workday, and the majority of our colleagues were seeing the benefit of this change. As several other crucial parts of the Business Transformation Programme were due to go live this fall, it was encouraging to see the stability that Workday had brought to our human resources function. But this would not have been possible without the dedicated effort of our global human resources community, who had worked tirelessly to roll out Workday on time and within budget and who continued to drive this change. Because of their support, UNHCR was moving forward in its quest to serve better, react faster, and create an environment where everyone was included. The Director expressed gratitude to everyone in UNHCR's human resource community for making this happen. The real-time data available in Workday was showing us where UNHCR was doing well and which areas it could focus on for improvement and showed that diversity, equity and inclusion were key areas of investment and development for UNHCR. It continued to make steady progress towards its gender and geographic diversity goals. UNHCR had over 160 nationalities among its staff, and welcomed different religious and cultural backgrounds; family compositions, genders and ages; educational backgrounds; physical ability, and work and life experiences. As far as possible, UNHCR was inclusive to staff needs and in turn benefitted enormously from the wealth of diversity in the perspective and experience of its workforce. It was what makes UNHCR better able to respond to the needs of a highly diverse population of displaced people.

5. Strengthened by the robust framework provided by UNHCR's existing Race Equality and Equity Action Plan, Action Plan on Disability Inclusion, and revised Recruitment and Assignments Policy, it had made significant progress towards equity and inclusion. More women were in leadership than ever before, and there had been improved geographical consideration and representation in UNHCR's recruitment, appointment and conversion processes, with more people able to benefit from workplace accommodation. UNHCR's new Parental Leave Policy had also significantly expanded the definition of what it means to be a parent and offered expanded leave entitlements following the birth or adoption of a child, including through surrogacy. Our workforce composition, however, would look different next year. As the Deputy High Commissioner had highlighted in her opening remarks, UNHCR was undertaking a proactive review of its structures and workforce needs, to remain agile and efficient in a changing humanitarian landscape. As it had already made great strides in implementing supporting technology and moving its workforce closer to the communities it served, this comprehensive effort was homing in on where UNHCR could further streamline positions and programs to ensure it had more for refugees in a period of globally declining humanitarian funding.

6. From a people point of view, it would inevitably entail some staff possibly losing their jobs, seeing their everyday work change, or requiring them to rotate prematurely. While this was not what UNHCR would like to see for its dedicated, hardworking staff, all efforts were being made to support them, through career transition services and other targeted actions. UNHCR remained in close collaboration with its staff welfare services and the ombudsperson, realizing the impact this exercise would have on the people who were directly affected, as well as the teams who were asked to do more with fewer resources. Organizationally, this would be turbulent, but this was not new for UNHCR: it was used to expanding and reducing its footprint as the humanitarian landscape changes, and she was confident UNHCR would emerge stronger from such an exercise.

7. When such ambitious transformation plans were presented four years ago, it had been a case of formulating ideas based on an unknown future but looking back at how much the environment UNHCR operated in had changed, it was now clear that such a transformation could not have been more timely. Accelerating change and rising complexities within UNHCR's overall mandate meant that it could not sit back and let its current position in the process of transformation become the status quo. It

had to continue to review how to keep up with what is yet to come for its key focus areas of people, partnership and technology. UNHCR's global staff who were on the ground working every day deserved the best tools and support UNHCR could provide and by ensuring that it had an agile, dynamic and diverse workforce that could be deployed, scaled up, and upskilled more readily in emergencies would ultimately make the Division of Human Resources a stronger partner to UNHCR's operations on the ground.

8. Every year such a platform and audience were an opportunity to emphasize how much UNHCR owed its ability to carry out its work to its people. Whether working hands-on in deep-field situations or providing vital operational support behind the scenes, working in registration, protection, resettlement, logistics, communication or human resources, or as drivers, legal advisors, technical coordinators or counsellors: every part of UNHCR played a vital role in responding to a refugee situation that continues to grow and become more complex. People were UNHCR and staff would continue to give its all to UNHCR's mandate. And the Division of Human Resources would continue to innovate, care and support for the people that made its work possible.

9. The representative of the **Republic of the Congo** said that he was delivering his statement on behalf of the African group.

10. He stated that the African group thanked UNHCR for their update on human resources, including staff welfare, and commended it on the progress made in those areas, which were particularly people-oriented.

11. In the context of ever-increasing humanitarian needs, he said that the African group noted that the sound management of UNHCR's human resources was essential to the achievement of its objectives. UNHCR must ensure the well-being of its staff, particularly in Africa, where it was often faced with complex challenges related to forced and massive population displacements.

12. Africa was the continent with the highest number of refugees in the world and many African countries continued to face humanitarian crises, armed conflicts and massive population displacements. This called for qualified staff on the ground, working closely with Governments and local organizations.

13. With this in mind, he said that the African group strongly encouraged the recruitment of local staff in Africa to strengthen the capacities of national and regional players in the field of refugee protection.

14. The African Group believed that locally recruited staff played a key role in coordinating humanitarian activities and communicating with Governments and local partners. Furthermore, the need to recruit UNHCR staff in Africa stemmed from the organization's numerous humanitarian crises and operational needs in the region, due to the large number of refugees and displaced persons in Africa.

15. Faced with the challenges of protecting refugees, as well as displaced and stateless populations in Africa, the African group encouraged UNHCR to step up the recruitment of qualified staff in various fields, including logistics, health and education.

16. The African Group wished to place particular emphasis on the balanced recruitment of UNHCR staff in Africa. Such a balance was crucial to ensuring the organization's diversity, representativeness and effectiveness in the region. He said that Africa was a diverse continent with many different cultures, languages and contexts and UNHCR was encouraged to strengthen the recruitment of staff from different African regions to ensure a thorough understanding of local contexts. This practice would also strengthen community roots and lead to a better understanding of local realities. Local recruitment could also help strengthen the sustainability of UNHCR programs by promoting the transfer of skills and knowledge to local populations.

17. In view of all the above, the African continent wished to reiterate its call for an equitable sharing of positions on UNHCR's governing bodies.

18. He stated that this was an opportunity for the African Group to once again pay tribute to UNHCR staff around the world for their distinguished commitment, sometimes at the risk of their lives. The African Group also wished to pay a resonant tribute to the memory of those who lost their lives while working in the field to protect people of concern to UNHCR.

19. The representative of **Switzerland** commended UNHCR's considerable efforts in optimally managing its human resources as effectively as possible in the face of the many challenges they faced. Similar to financial resources, human resources were indispensable and were the determining factor for the essence, performance and perception of UNHCR.

20. He said that the multiple challenges and dangers facing UNHCR staff had been correctly identified and UNHCR support at various levels was essential. In particular, he wished to know what the relevant UNHCR staff thought of the measures taken, and which of their expectations remained to be sufficiently taken into account.

21. Switzerland welcomed the efforts made to improve the integration of staff with disabilities. He wondered whether those measures been taken after consultation with such employees, whether the approaches of other United Nations agencies had been taken into account and whether documentation was available to share such efforts with other interested organizations. He said that this also applied to the important results achieved in strengthening the equitable presence of women at all levels of the agency. He believed that the new policy on parental leave would contribute even more in this direction.

22. The introduction of the Workday Information Technology tool seemed to have brought great progress in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. He questioned how staff had been involved in the lead-in process, and how they were involved in supporting its implementation and evolving use. His view was that such active participation in the management cycle of such a tool was essential if it was to meet real needs, and if concerned staff were to make it their own.

23. The report listed the measures taken to ensure better management of staff, ongoing training and recruitment, but did not mention conflict management or the importance of mediation as a tool. However, he said that there would be a meeting on that subject tomorrow at midday, and the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee had indicated its willingness to evaluate its effectiveness. With the announced staff cuts, the prevention and management of conflict, unease, mistrust and rivalry was becoming increasingly important. He wondered how UNHCR would tackle that challenge.

24. Finally, he stated that he would have liked to know the opinion of the UNHCR Staff Association regarding this report. He said that he believed it would be useful if the Staff Association could also take the floor at the Standing Committee, to encourage discussions that were more difficult to have at the Executive Committee.

25. The representative of the **United States of America** commended UNHCR for embracing a people-centric approach to staffing and for prioritizing the welfare of its workforce.

26. He said that diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) are a major priority for the U.S. Government, and that it was pleased to hear about UNHCR's implementation of DEIA principles in its human resource processes, including greater inclusion of women, expansion of parental leave benefits, and disability inclusion efforts.

27. Along with UNHCR's efforts to increase flexibility and streamline online human resource platforms, such initiatives demonstrated the organization's commitment to a fair, transparent, efficient, and compassionate human resources service.

28. He stated that while it appreciated the frank acknowledgement of the issue in Deputy High Commissioner Kelly Clements' previous remarks, it should remain clear that the removal of "sexual orientation and gender identity" from UNHCR's update on human resources, including staff wellbeing, was unacceptable to the United States of America. As an Executive Committee member, the United States of America did not agree to removal of that language in future updates and insisted that language from prior years be reinstated. LGBTQI+ staff members must remain confident that they would be treated fairly and respected, and verbal assurances were not a substitute for enshrining a commitment in the documents and policies that govern the operations of this (or any) organization. It was particularly worrying because the change represented a removal of previously existing protections and guarantees. He said that UNHCR's long standing inclusion and diversity efforts accounted for diversity in all its forms, including gender parity, racial equality, disability, age, and well as sexual orientation and gender identity, so there was no reason that policy and practice could not be referenced in this Committee, similarly to years past.

29. Separately, he said that he wished to hear more about how the thematic distribution of UNHCR's work was being affected by reductions in funding.

30. Staff care was fundamental to the international community's collective ability to respond to humanitarian needs around the world. He stated that the United States of America supported UNHCR's moves to expand access to pay advances, emergency financial support, and trauma counselling for those serving in regions with higher security risk.

31. He said that, as in previous years, the United States of America was interested in finding out more about the impact of UNHCR's push for technological modernization and that it was also eager to hear about other measures the organization had taken to ensure staff retention and attract new talent.

32. The representative of **Israel** thanked the Deputy High Commissioner for her initial remarks in the morning and for acknowledging the concerns of a large number of Member States regarding the absence of language in the Human Resources conference room paper about UNHCR efforts to ensure they took an equitable approach to members of the UNHCR workforce regarding gender parity, racial equality, disability, and age, as well as sexual orientation and gender identity. He said that Israel had always trusted in UNHCR's leadership to uphold those same values, and that it had seen their commitment to implement them in policies, programmes, etc. It was exactly for that reason that Israel added its voice to those concerned by this situation. For Israel, the deletion of references to sexual orientation and gender identity was a pill hard to swallow.

33. As the Deputy High Commissioner had said, "only when you feel safe at work can you provide the best support to those you are meant to protect and serve. Only with a diverse workforce can we better serve a diverse clientele." He stated that it was clear that Israel was not afraid that UNHCR would adopt discriminatory practices regarding its staff. Nonetheless, it would have liked to receive clarifications on the reasons behind such changes, as never before had UNHCR shied away from acknowledging the diversity in its workforce, even in previous Country Refugee Response Plans.

34. He said that Israel once again ratified its support to the organization, to its values and its leading role in promoting diversity and wished to receive further information on the upcoming new Framework for the future: Gender Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

35. The representative of **the Russian Federation** thanked UNHCR for preparing this report and shared UNHCR's view that staff was the main asset of an organization. He said that this was the reason that they wished once again to emphasize the need for a more advanced and comprehensive approach to this subject, that would be facilitated by the development of a comprehensive staff management strategy in cooperation with Member States. He stated that in its previous report for 2022, the External Auditor had made a similar recommendation (it could be found on page 15 of

document A/77/5/Add.15). He queried the implementation status of this recommendation on the staffing strategy.

36. He said that a variety of qualitative statistical information was also needed for more meaningful discussions and appreciated the provision of some staffing data in the letter dated 6 September, but wished to see a number of other statistics. Among other things, the Russian Federation was interested in data on recruitment: how many people had been recruited, for which positions and from which countries, what was the average time taken to select candidates, and how those results had changed over time. He wondered if it were possible to describe the distribution of different types of contracts among staff and trends in the use of consultants. All such information would allow countries to make a more balanced assessment of the staffing situation at UNHCR.

37. He stated that by and large the Russian Federation wished to propose that UNHCR develop an online portal with detailed staffing statistics open to Member States. Having access to continuously updated and accessible information on UNHCR staffing would greatly improve transparency in UNHCR. He said that given the introduction of new human resources management systems, it believed that this was now more feasible than ever and noted that this practice of presenting rich online staffing statistics had already been implemented in a number of organizations of the United Nations system, in particular at the United Nations, World Health Organization, International Telecommunication Union and the Universal Postal Union. He indicated that if necessary, it was prepared to send UNHCR the links to the relevant online tools of other organizations.

38. He added that the Russian Federation would be interested in receiving comments from UNHCR on how it dealt with cases of underperformance.

39. He said that the Russian Federation would like to discuss changing the order of this agenda item. As all were aware, UNHCR's governing bodies did not take any separate decision on the topic of human resources management and without the prescribed views of Member States, UNHCR was simply prevented from progressing in this area. He would appreciate UNHCR's comments on that matter and wondered whether it would be possible to introduce such a new culture of decision-making and what it would take.

40. The representative of **Uganda** said that she aligned itself with the African group statement as delivered by her brother from Congo. She stated that the circumstances behind the condolences to the people of Morocco and Libya were tragic but that these directly concerned the work of the UNHCR and its human resources and finances. She said that as concerns the agenda item, UNHCR staffing or rather human resource, that item was the most revealing of UNHCR values. UNHCR was known and judged by how it managed its human resources.

41. She stated that it was the quality and geographical representation, gender representation, integrity, and professionalism of UNHCR staff that told the true story of the UNHCR. She said that the video that had just been shown was what others saw and was how others could tell what UNHCR represented. She said that Uganda was proud of the good work carried out by UNHCR staff and that her delegation was eternally grateful to UNHCR staff who continued to selflessly, professionally and wholeheartedly serve humanity above themselves. Her delegation saluted and honoured the souls of the innocent staff that had lost their lives in the line of duty and empathised with their loved ones in hopes for a better tomorrow.

42. She stated that Uganda was concerned about the real risk of compromising on the quality of human resources as a result of underfunding. Similar to the remarks made by Deputy High Commissioner previously, who clearly said that less funding meant less UNHCR presence, the representative expressed trepidation concerning the risk of compromising the work for those most in need due to underfunding. Underfunding, she continued, should not lead to a fall in the quality of service that UNHCR provides.

43. She commended the transparent manner in which the UNHCR country office in Uganda was carrying out the ongoing streamlining exercise of its staff and was confident that the outcome of that exercise would achieve the intended purpose without compromising the localization principle of employing local nationals with the requisite expertise as a priority in advancing and transferring skills to local populations. She said that her delegation was well aware of the high quality and professionalism of international staff in UNHCR offices across the world but that she was also very confident that the national or local staff who experienced the day-to-day livelihoods of such people could also offer a cheaper alternative while demonstrating the requisite skills for the job. She said that Uganda counted on UNHCR to continue to employ local staff.

44. She said that the welfare of UNHCR staff was greatly informed by available funds but that regrettably, although UNHCR was a humanitarian body meant to serve persons in need, previously that morning the Committee had heard how UNHCR had only raised 38 per cent of its budget. She wondered how that fact could be squared with the need for welfare. She said that Uganda had only received 30 per cent of its funding for its budget and that the remainder was being shared between administrative and operational costs. She feared that such dwindling funding and staffing levels would compromise the quality of work that refugees, the stateless or internally displaced persons are entitled to.

45. Finally, she was confident that the representation of diversity had been well explained by the Deputy High Commissioner and welcomed her views, especially as she was well aware of the need for compromise language with which all states might be on board and find acceptable. She appealed for a conscious and open approach to diversity at UNHCR and for the focus to remain on those who are most in need of the services provided by human resources.

46. The representative of **Nigeria** aligned itself with the statement delivered by the Republic of the Congo on behalf of the African group.

47. She took note of the Update on Human Resources, including staff welfare and commended UNHCR, particularly those in the field, who continued to implement the mandate of the organization in risk prone circumstances. She joined UNHCR in mourning the loss of members of staff and highlighted the need to continuously prioritize the well-being of staff globally.

48. She said that her delegation's previous statements had requested that UNHCR update Member States with details of vacancies in the organization and that this request was born of the overarching need to promote transparency and fairness in the recruitment process. She stated that while her delegation was yet to receive a response, Nigeria believed that a true expression of a global organization was one that reflected equitable representation in its workforce.

49. She stated that Nigeria therefore reiterated the need to continuously ensure equitable representation of all sexes, and fair regional balance in terms of recruitment of citizens of all countries, in a manner that was not skewed in favour of a few. She believed that this fair treatment was attainable, and called on UNHCR to seize the momentum to advance equity and fairness in its workforce globally. She said that Nigeria took note of UNHCR's statements on its efforts to promote a well-balanced organization and requested an update on the implementation of its inclusion, diversity and gender equity action plans as concerns recruitment.

50. The representative of **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** thanked the Director for her presentation and wished to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the Director, and all UNHCR staff and partners for their continued commitment to helping and supporting forcibly displaced people across the world, in areas of high risk and insecurity.

51. He stated that the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland commended the ongoing prioritisation of staff safety and wellbeing as UNHCR staff

carried out vital work, and deserved their utmost support. He wished to pay tribute to all those UNHCR staff who had lost their lives in the line of duty.

52 He said that he wished to make a few specific comments on the update. He wished to note UNHCR's embrace of a people-centric approach, which in turn had led to the organization moving from a compliance-based partnership to a partnership based on trust between leaders and workforce. He stated that the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland really welcomed such a positive and collaborative approach.

53. He also noted that whilst significant progress had been made, there was further to go on achieving gender parity, and welcomed UNHCR's ongoing efforts on this issue and looked forward to further updates.

54. On the issue of diversity, he noted the reassurance provided by the Deputy High Commissioner for which she was to be thanked that UNHCR would indeed continue to prioritise the development, safety and protection of all of its staff. It was in that spirit that he wished to register the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland's firm opposition to the removal of diversity language and to quote from this year's update, around UNHCR's efforts to make "equitable consideration for gender parity, racial equality, disability and age, as well as sexual orientation and gender identity". He expected that UNHCR would revert to its longstanding recognition of such issues in future reports, and reflect in full on its internal approach and practice.

55. He said that women's rights and the rights of marginalised groups, such as people with disabilities and LGBT+ people, must be protected and promoted and that all UNCHR staff, including women and girls, and those from marginalised communities, need to feel safe at work, to feel assured that their rights in the workplace will be protected, and that they will be treated with fairness.

56. The representative of **Norway** recognized the developments towards a more modern, effective, and people-centric human resource function at UNHCR, including during the last year, which once again proved to be a turbulent and challenging year.

57. She commended the results achieved towards gender equality, with 48 per cent women among international staff and was pleased that the number of women in leadership positions had continued to increase over the past year, and had now reached 46 per cent. She encouraged UNHCR to continue its efforts towards gender equality in the organization, including at higher levels and was pleased to note that with the introduction of a revised recruitment and assignment policy, UNHCR was making progress towards improving both geographical representation and reaching gender parity in the appointment process.

58. She said that the extra emphasis on the health and wellbeing of its workforce was commendable as well as a good investment.

59. She stated that Norway wished to pay tribute to UNHCR staff for their dedication and "stay and deliver" attitude, often under highly challenging circumstances.

60. The representative of **Philippines (the)** thanked the Division of Human Resources for the report. He said that Philippines (the) recognized UNHCR's 20,500 staff, both here in Geneva and all over the globe, many of whom were at the frontlines of humanitarian work. The director's review of the growing prioritization of human resources supported by digitization and administrative reforms was encouraging. He said that as regards the reorganization of the workforce, Philippines (the) would follow the process closely and was waiting for more information from the Department of Human Resources. He asked whether UNHCR could provide some information on which areas of work such a reorganization could have impact on specifically.

61 He noted with appreciation the gains made in promoting inclusion and diversity, as well as the modest improvement in terms of gender balance, including women in leadership roles and wished to ask whether such positive gains also

extended to geographic representation and representation of persons with disabilities. He requested that, if feasible, Philippines (the) would appreciate a more detailed quantitative update on the implementation of the UNHCR's race, equality and equity action plan, as well as on disability inclusion. He said that he would also be looking forward to the detailed report on the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy during the Executive Committee as mandated by Member States.

62. Last year, and in previous meetings, he stated that Philippines (the) had raised the issue of the proficiency in a second United Nations language besides English as a requirement for entry into service and or for promotion. He had noted that the response had been that this was an administrative rule in line with United Nations Regulations but wished to continue to learn about how this requirement could be balanced with the goal of gender, regional, and racial diversity, as well as inclusion of persons with disabilities.

63. He said that Philippines (the) appreciated the People in UNHCR event held in June 2022, which gave due recognition to UNHCR staff, the organization's greatest asset, and also provided a space to discuss in greater detail issues pertaining to human resources. He believed that this event could be worth repeating in the coming months.

64. The representative of **Algeria** wished to align itself with the statement delivered by the Republic of the Congo on behalf of the Africa group. He said that he wished to thank UNHCR for its update on human resources. He stated that the world was facing an increasingly complex global situation due to the multiplication of tensions and in addition to the ongoing crises worldwide, there were increasing hubs of tension and people in need of assistance. He said that such a situation meant that UNHCR needed to strengthen its human resources to match such a challenge.

65. He stated that Algeria wished to thank the work done by humanitarian workers and extend our condolences to the families of the victims of those people who lost their lives helping people in need of assistance on the ground. He said that all countries should ensure the safety and security of those humanitarian workers and encouraged UNHCR to continue its efforts to deploy technology to better manage human resources and its response to new challenges.

66. He said that Algeria wished to highlight that the tables provided by the UNHCR in its report showed that Africa was under-represented in managerial positions in UNHCR and took the opportunity to call on the UNHCR to reflect on how it could better ensure equitable geographic distribution of staff throughout the world so that UNHCR could recruit Africans both locally and at Headquarters to match its need to deploy efforts to support refugees in Africa.

67. The representative of **Ethiopia** welcomed the introduction of Workday at UNHCR, which he hoped would enhance equity, diversity and inclusion within the workforce, and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization. Acknowledging the dedication shown by UNHCR personnel, who frequently worked in challenging environments, he stressed that the workforce should reflect the Office's international nature. Further efforts were therefore needed to ensure fair representation of Member States across all international staff positions. Ethiopia was underrepresented at all professional levels, particularly at the higher levels; its contribution as one of the largest refugee-hosting countries should be reflected in the UNHCR workforce through greater representation at all levels of the organization.

68. The representative of **Germany** commended the work performed by UNHCR staff under difficult conditions, and expressed condolences to the families and friends of those who had lost their lives in the line of duty. He welcomed the work carried out to improve human resources management, notably measures to support the physical and psychological well-being of staff, and the adoption of innovative technologies. In the context of limited funding, the provision of emergency assistance and protection should be prioritized when making staffing adjustments, although consideration should also be given to the welfare of staff and their families, particularly during separation or relocation.

69. Lastly, he welcomed the statement made by the Deputy High Commissioner concerning the removal of references to diversity, sexual orientation and gender identity from the paper on human resources, and of references to the importance of age, gender and diversity considerations in decision-making and programming in the update on budgets and funding. However, the removal of established language in that regard was regrettable; the Office's long-standing principles on the subject should be reflected in its policies and reports.

70. The representative of **Kenya** welcomed the update and said she looked forward to hearing more about the impact of the new human resources systems on the fulfilment of UNHCR's mandate. Noting that 38 per cent of staff worked in hardship duty stations, she commended their efforts and recognized the sacrifice made by those who had lost their lives in the line of duty, including following the earthquake in the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye in February 2023. It was positive that the number of women in leadership roles was increasing; efforts made in that area should be maintained, and the Secretariat should provide a detailed breakdown of women in leadership by region. Similarly, she commended the progress made in implementing UNHCR's race, equality and equity action plan, and requested specific information on how that had been achieved. Referring to the Junior Professional Officer programme, she thanked the Netherlands (Kingdom of the) for consistently opening half of their earmarked positions to candidates from developing countries. In closing, she praised the organization's focus on the health and well-being of its workforce, including by learning lessons from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic; a well-supported workforce was better able to care for others.

71. The representative of **Canada** said that UNHCR's capacity to respond was entirely dependent on the resilience of its staff, who were facing increased threats to their security and safety. The earthquake in the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye had been particularly challenging, and she expressed condolences for the staff lives lost during the response. Commending the commitment shown by UNHCR's workforce, affiliates and implementing partners, she welcomed the organization's commitment to increasing diversity and inclusion, including through implementation of the race, equality and equity action plan. The new diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility strategy should cover sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics, as well as anti-racism measures. In closing, she welcomed the ongoing efforts to improve leadership and working methods, including through the introduction of modern business techniques, to enable the workforce to adapt to changing contexts.

72. The representative of **Italy** welcomed the report, but echoed the concerns expressed by other delegations regarding the removal of language related to sexual orientation and gender identity from the paper on human resources. Although her Government recognized that UNHCR fully upheld the principles of diversity in that regard, and welcomed the statement made by the Deputy High Commissioner on the subject, it wished to see those principles reflected in the organization's documents, which should be redrafted to contain the more inclusive language previously agreed.

73. The representative of **Australia** reiterated her Government's support for UNHCR and its staff, recognizing the challenging working conditions they often faced. She welcomed the efforts to improve human resources systems and management under the business transformation programme, particularly the focus on staff health and well-being, which would be key when making difficult decisions regarding the organization's staffing profile. Her Government fully supported UNHCR's commitment to diversity and inclusion, which would strengthen the organization, and would continue to engage with efforts to implement the race, equality and equity action plan, and the five-year action plan on disability inclusion, and to improve gender parity. As the Office embarked on staffing adjustments, it should work towards more equitable geographical representation; in that regard, she requested further information on how national staff could access leadership positions. In addition, given financing gaps and the decline in the UNHCR workforce present in

the Asia-Pacific region since the previous year, what would be done to ensure that staffing levels were sufficient for operational needs in the region?

74. The representative of **Mexico** said that a robust, diverse workforce was fundamental to fulfilling the vital mandate of the Office. His Government was therefore concerned that the language referring to sexual orientation and gender identity had been removed from the document on human resources, despite it having been included in previous years. He requested for the criteria used in making that decision and more importantly, queried how would the omission affect the Office's recruitment, promotion and diversification activities. As a member of the Executive Committee, his Government attached great priority to tackling discrimination due to sexual orientation or gender identity, and promoting inclusion, equity and diversity in recruitment, promotion and well-being activities. While it was positive that progress had been made in terms of gender equality, major obstacles remained in achieving a geographically balanced workforce, particularly in relation to the global south. Increasing the recruitment of personnel from underrepresented regions, at all levels, would create a workforce more representative of the people served by the Office. He queried if UNHCR have a strategy in that regard.

75. The representative of **Sudan (the)** thanked UNHCR for its support during the crisis in Sudan (the) and reaffirmed his Government's support for the organization.

76. The representative of the **Republic of Korea** encouraged UNHCR to continue its work on the digitalization and transformation of human resources management, and to improve capacity and well-being among staff. It was positive that the value of diversity, including geographical diversity, was recognized by senior leaders; however, the report on human resources contained insufficient data on the subject. Although other documents had been provided on the composition of international professional staff, they did not provide a clear geographical breakdown. The report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions did give figures, although it was unclear what standard had been applied; those figures showed that a majority of staff in the professional and higher categories were from a single region. In future documents, specific figures should be provided regarding diversity, with reference to gender and other attributes, so that Member States could monitor the situation. In addition, UNHCR claimed to have made progress towards more balanced geographical representation; did the figures back up that claim? The representative requested that relevant data be circulated to Member States so that they could assess the trend over the past six or seven years.

77. The representative of **Costa Rica** commended the work carried out by UNHCR staff around the world, acknowledging the many challenges they faced, and welcomed the measures taken by the organization to improve working conditions. Echoing the concerns expressed by other speakers regarding the omission of specific language on age, disability and gender identity and sexual orientation, she called for those references to be reinserted in the relevant documents.

78. The representative of **Zimbabwe** noted with satisfaction the progress made regarding inclusion and flexible work modalities. She further commended UNHCR for the use of neutral language, stressing the importance of remaining united and avoiding unnecessary debate in areas where consensus had not been achieved. She welcomed the work being undertaken on the inclusion of persons with disabilities, and asked what practical measures were in place to facilitate their recruitment and participation within the organization. She also wished to know whether staff had been consulted during development of the new parental leave policy.

79. The representative of **Pakistan** expressed appreciation for the humanitarian relief work carried out by UNHCR staff in challenging environments. He welcomed the provision of disaggregated data concerning international professional staff, noting the progress made in addressing gender disparities, but said that further efforts were needed to improve geographical representation, especially of developing countries hosting large refugee populations. Indeed, effective measures were needed to improve gender parity and increase the involvement of underrepresented States at both

UNHCR Headquarters and in the field, and at senior levels, in line with the United Nations General Assembly call for a geographically diverse and representative workforce to reflect the international character of the Office. Lastly, he expressed concern at the attempts by some Member States to politicize what should be an apolitical forum; in the interests of diplomacy, it was best to use universally acceptable language in documents.

80. The representative of **Malawi** thanked UNHCR for its work, notably to provide support in her country following the devastating effects of Tropical Cyclone Freddy. It was vital to ensure gender parity and equitable geographical representation, and promote inclusion, especially of persons with disability, in terms of recruitment and promotion at the country, regional and Secretariat levels. She thanked the Secretariat for using universally acceptable language in its report.

81. The representative of **Japan** commended UNHCR staff for their work to assist displaced people during severe humanitarian crises worldwide. He thanked the Secretariat for the update on human resources, but said that his Government would prefer the specific reference to “gender parity, racial equality, disability and age, as well as sexual orientation and gender identity” to be retained, as in previous years. UNHCR had striven for many years to improve diversity and inclusiveness in its workforce, and there was no reason to alter the text. The primary objective of discussions at the Standing Committee was to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the Office’s activities to assist displaced people; the previously agreed wording should be retained to avoid any further political discussion.

82. The representative of the **Islamic Republic of Iran** expressed appreciation for the tireless efforts of UNHCR staff to alleviate the suffering of refugees worldwide. However, he noted the discrepancy between the representation of host country nationals among UNHCR staff, and the magnitude of the contributions made by those host countries to the work of the organization; that could have a negative impact on the sense of ownership and engagement in humanitarian work within underrepresented host countries. For example, the Islamic Republic of Iran was one of the largest refugee-hosting countries, but was represented by just 21 staff members in the professional category. He asked the Secretariat to prepare an additional staffing table illustrating the extent to which international professional staff positions were allocated to the nationals of host countries, in comparison to other countries; that information would provide a valuable insight into the distribution of resources within the Office.

83. Regarding the use of controversial language, he reiterated the importance of respecting cultural diversity as part of UNHCR’s whole-of-society approach to its work. Further discussion of that sensitive issue would only distract from the life-saving humanitarian work of the organization; his Government supported the current consensual approach, which avoided the use of terminology that did not enjoy universal support.

84. The representative of **South Africa** observed that, although Africa was a critical location for humanitarian work, the hosting of refugees on the continent had never been recognized and quantified as a contribution. The responsibility for hosting refugees should be matched with appropriate funding to ensure adequate burden- and responsibility-sharing, as per the Global Compact on Refugees. There was also an urgent need to invest in durable solutions for refugees, namely voluntary repatriation, resettlement, development of a conducive environment for returnees, and reintegration into communities; those areas currently received the least funding.

85. In terms of staffing, she encouraged UNHCR to reach out to young professionals in the African region; it was currently the case that some contracts given to South Africans were short term only, and did not allow them to build up experience in the field. Improving geographical representation would bring new perspectives when tackling challenges within the region and give a voice to the communities served by the Office.

86. Lastly, recalling that the note on international protection by the High Commissioner had made it clear that refugee rights were human rights, she expressed support for the consideration of language referring to age, gender and diversity in the Office's human resources documents.

87. The representative of the **European Union and its member States** (group statement) commended the dedicated work of UNHCR staff and partners, and expressed its condolences to the families, friends and colleagues of those who had lost their lives in the line of duty. The European Union strongly condemned attacks on humanitarian staff and assets, calling for increased monitoring and reporting of such incidents, and adequate security training for staff in high-risk areas as part of a comprehensive security risk management strategy. Strict accountability was needed to fight impunity in cases of violations of international humanitarian law in conflict settings.

88. Expressing appreciation for UNHCR's continued efforts to make its human resources function more efficient, modern and people-centred, she asked for more information about how experiences and best practices were shared with other United Nations agencies. It was particularly important to work with those agencies and other partners on security risk management. UNHCR should also continue to foster an inclusive, respectful workplace culture, and apply a zero tolerance and victim-centred approach to sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment.

89. Welcoming the fact that the vast majority of the UNHCR workforce was based in the field, she asked whether the Secretariat had set a target for the maximum percentage for Headquarters staff by the end of the business transformation. The Office had shown an ability to adapt and implement flexible work modalities to fulfil its humanitarian mandate, and its staff were its greatest asset; the organization should continue to promote the security, safety, health and well-being of staff, notably by providing mental health support. Given the deteriorating global security context, the European Union strongly supported cooperation with the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) and security monitoring non-governmental organizations to ensure that security coordination, monitoring and preparedness were included in the programming pillars for high-risk areas.

90. Acknowledging the role of UNHCR senior development officers in enhancing relations with development donors, she encouraged the Office to prioritize investment in quality human resources for reporting and external relations functions to strengthen accountability and communications.

91. Turning to gender equality and geographical diversity, she welcomed UNHCR's commitment to those issues in line with its race, equality and equity action plan, and the revised recruitment and assignments policy. However, additional information should be provided on the specific anti-racism and disability inclusion activities undertaken. Female staff should be further empowered at both the middle and senior management levels, notably to give national staff access to international careers. The introduction of Workday was a positive step forward, and her group agreed on the need to foster a healthy work environment between managers and employees.

92. Lastly, she reiterated the European Union's support for the independence of UNHCR in presenting its professional views to the membership, including on human resources, diversity and inclusion, in line with its Statute. In that regard, she acknowledged the statement by the Deputy High Commissioner and welcomed the Office's leadership of the High-Level Committee on Management. UNHCR should continue to support the development of key inter-agency deliverables that could benefit the United Nations system, notably on diversity and inclusion, and combating sexual harassment.

93. The representative of **Iraq** thanked UNHCR staff for the services they provided to refugees. Her Government wished to retain the current language used on diversity in reports.

94. The **Director of the Division of Human Resources (UNHCR)**, responding to the concerns expressed by Member States, said that the removal of the list of groups in the context of diversity and inclusion reflected trends in recent years. The organization had shifted from mentioning gender diversity only, to providing a very explicit list in 2022, when sexual orientation and gender identity had been included alongside race, age and disability. However, recent reports had not listed specific categories because the principles of fundamental human rights were enshrined in the work of the Office, as reflected in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. The omission of specific categories did not indicate any lack of commitment to the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion, which were central to the work of the Division of Human Resources. The aim was to focus more on the action taken to implement the race, equality and equity action plan, and to boost geographical representation. That work included activities undertaken through the Connected Leaders Academy and a pilot programme to identify young talent among national staff in Southern Africa and the East and Horn of Africa. Geographical targets were also reflected in the revised recruitment and assignments policy. More information would be provided on regional staff figures in a dedicated booklet and at a future session in early 2024.

95. Employee representation was considered key for all activities within the organization; in the context of disability inclusion, both employees with disabilities and caregivers were involved in guiding UNHCR's approach to the issue. Employees were able to provide information about any additional needs through the fitness to work mechanism to ensure that suitable workplace adaptations could be made, while candidates could request support for interviews where necessary. The new Workday tool had also been designed to be disability inclusive, as would all new platforms going forward. In addition, careers fairs featured colleagues living with disabilities to show potential candidates what it was like to work for the organization. More broadly, the Office had a good relationship with its staff representative bodies and appreciated their input, notably regarding new policies.

96. It was vital to support staff during the realignment and rationalization process, whether they were continuing in their functions, leaving the organization or in a transitional phase. That support included career transition coaching and psychosocial support, with proactive measures taken to address any tensions that might arise. It was indeed challenging to maintain the quality of human resources in the context of funding constraints, but the aim was to use resources more efficiently and effectively, and adjust roles accordingly. Transparency continued to be an important consideration; through Workday, vacancies would be accessible both internally and externally. Underperformance was also being addressed as part of the wider culture change, with the aim of improving feedback and enabling quick action to be taken where necessary.

97. In conclusion, she reiterated her commitment to ensuring that UNHCR was truly representative of the populations it served. Although changing the composition of the workforce would take time, given the high staff retention rate, there was a positive trend towards gender parity, particularly at the senior national professional officer level, which should gradually be reflected in international positions over time. She thanked Member States for their comments; the Secretariat would continue to engage with them on all the issues raised.

(c) **Management**

Oral update on integrity in UNHCR

98. The **Deputy High Commissioner (UNHCR)** presented an oral update on integrity in UNHCR, noting that transforming the culture of the Organization was the final phase of its transformation process, following the initial structural regionalization and the updating of systems and processes under the Business Transformation Programme. It was perhaps the most challenging step, as it involved the people of UNHCR in all their diversity and complexity. The Organization's

culture was linked to its values and involved emotions, teamwork and sometimes conflict. Transforming that culture required the courage to have uncomfortable conversations and the conviction to make difficult decisions. It also required integrity and accountability.

99. Much work had been done over the past year to make UNHCR a healthy and safe workplace, free of discrimination, abuse and harm, by first working to prevent conflict or actions verging on misconduct, through strengthening the ability to identify risks and take mitigating action pre-emptively, by learning to recognize early signs of friction and having the skills and confidence to de-escalate conflict before it arose. Another aspect of prevention was helping personnel to understand and apply the Organization's Code of Conduct, as well as to know where to seek answers when they did not know how to properly do so. When colleagues were inevitably faced with ethical quandaries, some would make the wrong decisions. That was where integrity met accountability. Colleagues needed to know both where to report any misconduct that they witnessed and that they could do so without fear of retaliation. In that regard, the work of the Organization's administration of justice entities was critical.

100. UNHCR's integrity response system was handling the greatest number of complaints in the United Nations system by some margin, including the greatest number of sexual misconduct complaints. That was due to a number of factors, not least of which was that UNHCR personnel and their partners worked in complex and challenging environments, close to the people they served, where inherent power differentials posed a heightened risk. In that context, the volume of complaints reflected confidence in the improved capability of the integrity and accountability system. The whole of system approach to integrity only worked because the UNHCR management team and independent oversight entities were pulling in the same direction. They worked together closely, while ensuring appropriate confidentiality and respecting each other's mandates, ensuring a collective effort to find the best approach to each challenge.

101. In closing, she paid homage to the dedicated work of the outgoing Director of Ethics, who would be leaving a strong legacy for the Organization.

102. The representative of **Switzerland** welcomed the progress that had been made since the launch of the Risk Management Strategy. Strengthening the Organization's risk management and integrity processes was all the more important in the increasingly volatile context in which it operated. It had also been well-timed alongside the transformation process, which as well as generating opportunities, also entailed new risks for the Organization. The efforts to instil a culture of integrity at all levels was particularly welcome, leading to the Organization's recognition as having a "high level of maturity" by the Board of Auditors. However, as their recommendations also stated, it was important to ensure greater consistency and a more systematic approach. Although it was good that UNHCR had strengthened its coordination with other United Nations agencies, it was crucial to also step up its support for its implementing partners, particularly at the local level. In that regard, more information would be appreciated on what measures would be taken to advance the matter of risk sharing, in the context of localization efforts and the Grand Bargain 3.0, as well as how refugees themselves would be involved in actions relating to integrity, participation and accountability. In terms of the external factors that had been identified, it would be interesting to hear more about mitigation measures taken with regard to the reduction in the asylum space and questions surrounding the right to asylum in a number of contexts; and effective operational prioritization in the face of the reduction of available resources.

103. The representative of **the United States of America** said that strengthening risk management was a top priority. UNHCR operations must continue to improve its reputational risk management, particularly in complex or sensitive environments; the targeted training sessions that had been held with senior leaders and experts were a step in the right direction. Given the important role of implementing partners in risk mitigation, it was good to see the increased quantity of remote support and virtual trainings that had been provided in 2022. The United States of America supported the

decision for the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator to establish a presence in Nairobi in order to better support UNHCR staff in Africa, in line with decentralization efforts. The recent launch of the “NotOnlyMe” tool was also welcome, and it would be interesting to know whether staff were using it to report harassment and seek support. The updated 2023-2025 Strategy and Action Plan for Tackling Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment was also welcome.

104. The representative of **Canada** welcomed the measures taken to enhance UNHCR’s organizational and workplace culture and to ensure adequate protection for persons of concern as well as for personnel. However, efforts should be redoubled to further prevent and respond to abuse, discrimination, exploitation and harassment. In that regard, the measures taken to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment were welcome, including the victim-centred approach, and UNHCR’s continued efforts towards inter-agency progress in that regard were appreciated. However, there needed to be continued vigilance against integrity risks, and more could be done to tackle misconduct in the ever-changing, challenging operational environment.

105. The representative of the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** expressed appreciation for the effort taken to present a comprehensive overview of the various different integrity-related activities across multiple years and applauded the progress towards making UNHCR more accountable and more effective. In particular, he welcomed the risk management initiatives that had been established to build capacity across the Organization. In due course, further updates on how the “NotOnlyMe” initiative was being used would be appreciated, as well as information on how its impact would be measured. The focus on strengthening capacity at the field level in the 2023-2025 Strategy and Action Plan for Tackling Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment was also welcome, as was UNHCR’s work with partners and other agencies. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland continued to support the joint UNHCR-International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) Community Outreach and Communication Fund for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, including with a further £350,000 of funding in 2022, which helped raise awareness and advanced the goal of localization.

106. The representative of **Denmark** welcomed the update and UNHCR’s steady focus and commitment to integrity. The ongoing effort to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, as well as the implementation of a victim-centred approach, were welcome, along with the launch of the “NotOnlyMe” tool. Further information would be appreciated about how efforts would be further strengthened in that area. The continued focus on capacity building among partners and UNHCR’s role in strengthening interagency efforts was also to be commended. As UNHCR worked in notoriously risk-prone environments, it was very important to have solid mechanisms to prevent, mitigate and respond to risks relating to any kind of misconduct. With regard to human resources, the efforts to promote gender equality and women’s leadership, including through targeted capacity building were welcome. It was important to continue to focus on encouraging inclusivity and diversity.

107. The representative of **Germany** expressed concern about the recent reports of aid diversion in the context of humanitarian aid delivery and urged UNHCR to look into the causes and consequences of recent cases in Ethiopia and Somalia. Appropriate steps needed to be taken to strengthen existing fraud prevention and risk management measures, in closer collaboration with other United Nations entities, towards a unified approach to defining, reporting and investigating fraud and corruption comparable to the existing system for managing allegations and incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

108. The representative of **Philippines (the)** noted the initiatives listed in the report, which were a testament to the willingness to address challenges relating to risk management and integrity. He also supported the efforts to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, as well as incidents of

corruption, fraud and other misconduct. Certain policies that had been instituted had allowed the Organization to cultivate a culture of speaking up to report misconduct, which accounted for the increase in the number of cases received. It would be interesting to know whether there had been a corresponding increase in the number of serious and critical cases, as a percentage of the total cases received.

109. Having previously raised the need for due diligence and rigorous assessment of how external partners met UNHCR's integrity standards, he noted that non-governmental organization partners were being assessed based on their capacity to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse. Sufficient re-training and even penalties or blacklisting should be strictly implemented. Although it was a broader management question and UNHCR's operational nature carried risks, it would be useful to know if there were clear guidelines in that regard.

110. The representative of **the Kingdom of the Netherlands** noted the strides that had been taken on the issue and that UNHCR continued to be a front-runner in the United Nations system in that regard. The continued, transparent debate with all stakeholders was appreciated. More details about the updated Strategy and Action Plan for Tackling Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment would be appreciated, including how it was being integrated into other initiatives, how it was funded, how it was being monitored, and whether any gaps had thus far been identified.

111. The **Chief Risk Officer (UNHCR)** said that it had been a difficult year for risk management in the Organization, but it was also a great opportunity to get feedback on how well they were doing, what needed to be done better and what progress had been achieved. Since the Risk Management 2.0 initiative had been introduced, they had been working very closely with the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) team and the Board of Auditors, in close collaboration with the whole team. Working with implementing partners was indeed a focus of their efforts, in particular with risk management colleagues in the Central African Republic who were delivering training to partners, for example. A dedicated package of training had been piloted in June in Uganda, which could be rolled out more broadly, and they had a pool of colleagues with whom to discuss risk sharing. They were also working closely with colleagues from the Implementation Management and Assurance Section and the Division of Strategic Planning and Results. Grand Bargain localization was very much at the forefront of all those discussions, and was being implemented systematically as part of everything that they did, rather than just as one initiative. The risk appetite discussions that had been launched were an excellent way to move forward, both with Member States and sister agencies, as well as with implementing partners at different levels.

112. With regard to the reduction in the asylum space, she noted that that was at the heart of UNHCR's mandate and being addressed on an everyday basis in dealing with Governments in different parts of the world. Advocacy was key and happened at all levels of the Organization. With regard to the prioritization of mitigation measures, she noted that the realignment exercise had focussed discussions on where they needed to be delivering, where they brought the best added value, where other actors needed to be brought on board and how to reshape the structure of the Organization. It was an ongoing discussion.

113. The reputation risk management and crisis communications training had been extremely useful, particularly since social media had totally changed the way people communicated. Integrity risks were central to the risk management approach, and it was interesting to note that mitigating risks linked to accountability, integrity and ethical conduct was much higher on the agenda than in previous years. In that regard she was very proud of the progress made by the whole Organization.

114. With regard to the aid diversion in Ethiopia and Somalia, she said that she had been working closely with the Legal Affairs section to define what aid diversion meant and working to raise awareness of it and how it could be addressed. UNHCR

was working closely with the World Food Programme in Ethiopia to examine the root cause of the aid diversion in food distribution and identify where it was able to happen, in order to close those gaps. There were now new standard operating procedures for food distribution, which would be implemented as soon as possible.

115. The **Director of the Ethics Office (UNHCR)** said that a new Administrative Instruction on Protection against Retaliation had been issued in August 2022, which promoted a culture of speaking up and provided an avenue for staff to report suspected retaliation to the Ethics Office so that they could take action, in coordination with the Inspector General's Office. If there was found to be retaliation, the Ethics Office worked closely with management to find interim protective measures for affected staff, and disciplinary measures were taken in order to stamp out that form of misconduct.

116. The **Ombudsman and Mediator (UNHCR)** said that his role had two functions: the mediator function addressed disputes between people; and the ombudsman function addressed support for the Organization. There would be further discussion of their role in conflict resolution at the upcoming side event, but in general the goal was to prevent escalation. UNHCR personnel were unique: very exposed and often overwhelmed, which meant conflict could be escalated very easily. The focus would therefore be on increasing usage of the service, with a view towards early intervention and de-escalation.

117. The **Senior Policy Adviser (UNHCR)** said that colleagues were indeed using the "NotOnlyMe" tool, which showed great promise. Colleagues were also engaging with the victim care officer, as envisaged in the original conception of the platform, reaching out for confidential support, guidance and information on the options available to them. Use of the tool was being monitored and data gathered, with a view to strengthening the system and the overall approach to sexual harassment and abuse. The Strategy and Action Plan was the guiding roadmap for the coming years, as it reflected the recent lessons learned and the progress that had already been made. It also further consolidated engagement with staff, with affected communities, partners, Governments and other key actors moving forward. Greater emphasis was being placed on strengthening capacity in operations and taking a more nuanced approach.

118. With regard to monitoring progress, a number of tools had been developed, including an organizational marker on the prevention of sexual abuse and sexual harassment. Good practice indicators had also been updated, which operations could use to monitor progress. There was a well-developed network of focal points in Bureaux and operations, providing regular checks on progress and any challenges that arose, in order to gauge what worked and what didn't, and where there needed to be a more coordinated response.

3. Programme budgets and funding

(a) Update on budgets and funding (EC/74/SC/CRP.21)

119. The **Director of the Division of Strategic Planning and Results (UNHCR)**, accompanied by a slide presentation, provided an update on budgets and funding as at 31 July 2023. At the previous session of the Standing Committee, the budget had included four supplementary budgets in the amount of \$548.8 million for earthquake emergency response, the Pakistan floods, the Somalia drought and the Ukraine situation. Subsequently, an additional supplementary budget of \$162.8 million had been established for the Sudan situation, supporting responses in Chad, Egypt, South Sudan and other countries in the region, bringing the total supplementary budget to \$711.6 million and the total budget to \$10.8 billion, as of 31 July 2023. Since 31 July, an additional \$105.9 million had been issued for the Sudan situation, bringing the total budget to \$10.92 as of 13 September.

120. A significant amount of projected contributions had been recorded since April, for which the Organization was very grateful, as those enabled it to continue its work on the ground providing crucial assistance and protection to forcibly displaced and

stateless people. Nonetheless, the funding situation remained a concern as there were still sizeable gaps between needs and resources, forcing them to make difficult prioritization decisions. The operations in Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Sudan (the), Uganda and Yemen, among others, faced significant needs. Additional funds would enable them to provide winterization support to 279,000 additional vulnerable families, to expand the reach of gender-based violence services and targeted empowerment efforts for women and girls in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to more than 75,000 additional women and girls, and to continue health and education services for refugees and host communities in Uganda past the end of September. Without additional resources, those services would be facing significant reductions.

121. The **Director of External Relations (UNHCR)** provided an update on UNHCR's 2023 funding. After noting the strong support provided from donors in 2022, she explained that the agency was in a more challenging place in 2023, with total contributions down from \$5.85 billion to \$4.16 billion, based on projections as of the end of August 2023. However, at the same time, despite this anticipated budgetary shortfall, global humanitarian needs and, therefore, UNHCR's funding requirements had been increasing, driven most notably by the humanitarian emergencies in Africa in 2023. She stressed that while this widespread need highlighted the critical nature of UNHCR's work, the underfunding of its efforts was a sobering reality that needed to be addressed.

122. She gave thanks to the organization's public and private donors, particularly those who had increased their funding from 2022, including the Governments of the Kuwait, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Saudi Arabia and Türkiye. There had also been two or threefold increases in the numbers of individual donors from several countries since 2018, such as Italy, Japan and Sweden which demonstrated a greater awareness of the agency, larger support for it and, most importantly, deeper sympathy towards refugees. As a result, there was clear evidence that additional value could be delivered by growing the supporter base and raising the profile of issues affecting refugees. She then paid tribute to the top hosting refugee countries for 2022, which were Colombia, Germany, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Türkiye, and Uganda. These hard-pressed States were thanked for their hosting efforts, but it was noted that they would struggle to maintain this long term without sustained meaningful support.

123. Regrettably, there had been no progress in addressing the underfunding in 12 of UNHCR's operations since the previous Standard Committee meeting, which posed a major obstacle to the agency's work to protect forcibly displaced and stateless individuals. Therefore, urgent and decisive action would be required to overcome this challenge in order to ensure that the most vulnerable get the support that they required. She concluded by introducing the Hope Away from Home campaign, which called for urgent, global solidarity and action to help to protect the right for people forced to flee to seek asylum.

124. The representative of **Uganda speaking on behalf of the Africa Group** stressed that Africa's contribution to refugee-support efforts in the form of hosting should be recognized in parity with financial contributions from donors, while also expressing appreciation for their tireless efforts to respond to appeals for aid. Nevertheless, with only 30 per cent of the 2023 budget raised by the end of August, the Group was apprehensive about the increasing budget deficits against the backdrop of growing humanitarian needs, as Africa would be hit hardest by this underfunding, with 9 out of 14 of the most underfunded refugee programmes located in Africa.

125. Nevertheless, even with the socioeconomic challenges triggered by the lack of funding available for these countries facing rapidly growing refugee numbers, donors had continued to favour earmarked funding, in stark contrast with the Africa Group countries' approach of opening their borders to all that need shelter. The Group felt that the increasingly prevalent use of this type of funding was stifling their

humanitarian response and therefore thanked donor partners who had already been contributing flexible and unearmarked funds. With this in mind, she re-echoed the urgent need to fund durable solutions, imploring the budget team to ensure that Impact Area 4 measures are sufficiently funded, as this area accounted for just 10.8 per cent of UNHCR's budget as of 31 July 2023. She concluded by reiterating Africa's commitment to humanitarian needs by providing a safe haven for all displaced individuals and called on all donor partners to match the Africa Group's generosity of spirit.

126. The representative of **Israel** thanked UNHCR for the budget updates but also wished to echo other delegations' concerns about the removal of explicit references to "age", "gender" and "diversity" as drivers influencing the agency's budget planning and programming. While Israel was assured that the organization would not adopt discriminatory policies towards the individuals that it serves and felt certain in UNHCR's leadership to uphold diversity as a key value, it was disconcerted by the removal of these inclusive terms from the 2024 budget proposals. Therefore, he asked for more information about UNHCR's rationale for doing this, as it would project the image of an organization that did not value inclusivity. While he reiterated Israel's support for the organization and its roles in promoting diversity, he urged UNHCR to continue to refer to "age", "gender" and "diversity" freely in its documents in future in order to stay true to its values and remain a leading organization within the United Nations system.

127. The representative of **Kenya** applauded the Africa Group's statement and was grateful to host Member States for providing support and resources for refugees and to financial donors for their contributions that will ensure that UNHCR can continue to deliver life-saving assistance and protection for millions of people. However, she regretted to note that the underfunding of the agency's humanitarian operations had not improved, which had hit her region hard, with 5 out of the 12 countries highlighted in UNHCR's September 2022 Underfunded Report located in the Eastern Horn of Africa. This was particularly difficult during a time of rising vulnerabilities and forced displacement. She therefore urged UNHCR to clarify what was being done to address this funding gap, in light of the tough decisions around prioritising funding that would need to be made should this money not arrive. On this basis, she reasserted that no-one should be forced to choose between equally lifesaving priorities and that humanity and impartiality needed to be embedded in the humanitarian support process more strongly than ever to ensure that it is guided by need and that forcibly displaced persons receive the support and protection that they require.

128. Despite expressing gratitude for the support that UNHCR had delivered to support the humanitarian emergencies in Eastern Africa in 2023, she was worried that the 47 per cent funding gap for 2023 would simply increase the vulnerability of forcibly displaced persons and escalate their needs. The chronic underfunding of measures under Impact Area 4 was a cause for concern and the agency was urged to find innovative financial solutions to address this issue, as underinvestment in this area had been hampering return and resettling schemes. She also asked for clarification on the measures undertaken by UNHCR to support conditions in countries of origin for safe and dignified return, and on whether the 2 per cent proposed budget for 2024 for children suitably reflected the needs of child refugees under the UNHCR mandate.

129. The representative of **Egypt** thanked UNHCR for its detailed budget updates and expressed his condolences to the people of Morocco and Libya following the natural disasters in these countries in early September 2023. While Egypt was doing a great deal to support the refugees and displaced individuals that it was hosting, the insufficient international support was placing great strain on the country's basic services for the Egyptian people. At the same time, the country had also been redoubling efforts to tackle illegal migration to Europe through the Mediterranean and had been searching for separate funding streams for these programmes. On the hosting side, it wanted more financial support to get refugees from third countries into work in Egypt and stressed that the Middle East and North Africa region funding for 2023

should be reinstated to its levels from previous years in order to bolster measures underpinning Impact Area 4. This should be reinforced by funding from UNHCR for registering refugees from other countries and determining their situation, as a token of acknowledgement of Egypt's efforts to support refugees and forcibly displaced people.

130. The representative of **Ethiopia** endorsed the statement delivered by the Africa Group and lamented the cuts in the country's basic services to refugees in 2022, such as education-related activities and healthcare, as a result of a combination of a surging refugee population and chronic international underfunding. This situation could have an enduring negative effect on the country. Therefore, he appealed to donors to provide urgent financial assistance so that the country could continue to provide education and health services to displaced persons hosted there. This crisis was being further intensified by the extremely low level of emergency funding provided to the country, which was being stretched further by humanitarian emergencies in neighbouring countries, such as Somalia and Sudan (the), and the resulting new wave of refugees, making it difficult to process refugee caseloads.

131. At the same time, the wider funding from UNHCR had not been keeping pace with the country's needs on the ground, as a result of rising refugee numbers, inflation and prices, and was far lower in 2023 than in previous years. This was curbing the provision of food, shelter, health and education to refugees in the country as a result, due to the sheer pressure placed on the resources in host communities. Therefore, predictable, timely and flexible funding was needed from donors in order to reinforce its service provision both to Ethiopian nationals and refugees. He concluded by stating that the country was preparing potential pledging areas for the Global Refugee Forum and was intending to engage with partners around possible pledge-matching.

132. The representative of **Malawi** aligned with the Africa Group's statement and thanked the donors for making funding available to UNHCR in order to deliver its mandate, despite the economic challenges being faced. Chronic underfunding to Africa and the major challenge of earmarked funding to specific countries or programmes, which had prevented UNHCR from assigning funding for emergencies or the continent's needs, were significant causes of concern. In order to resolve this issue, increased flexible funding for host Member States would be required, as well as an option for these countries to use earmarked contributions to address emergency humanitarian challenges on the ground in the form of accommodation, healthcare and education. This would place Malawi in a position to determine its most urgent priorities on the ground and allocate resources accordingly as a result. To conclude, she reiterated the country's commitment to keeping its borders open to any forcibly displaced citizens seeking shelter and emphasized the importance of finding the root causes behind humanitarian crises and assisting refugees in returning to their countries of origin and resettlement.

133. The representative of **Uganda** commended the Africa Group's statement and thanked the Directors for their presentations. She asked all delegates to share the burden and responsibility of supporting refugees as a matter of urgency and stressed that all contributions to humanitarian aid, whether as a refugee host country or as a financial donor, should carry equal weight. She bemoaned the 70 per cent shortfall in funding for the country's humanitarian budget from UNHCR and felt that its generosity was being taken for granted. In light of this growing funding deficit, despite the country's commitment to keeping a door open to displaced persons for shelter, hosting refugees at the current level sustainably seemed unrealistic.

134. The noticeable rise in the use of earmarked funding in government donations was also a blow, despite the recognition that these donors were free to choose how and where to allocate their money. Nevertheless, she stressed that the humanitarian causes supported by UNHCR should transcend national and political relations, and should be guided by the needs of the vulnerable most of all. By contrast, earmarked funding was stifling the collective aid effort and would prevent vital aid programmes from being funded in future, such as the struggles anticipated by Uganda in providing basic necessities to forcibly displaced persons in its country beyond September 2023

without additional funding. Therefore, she urged all delegates to prioritize humanity over sovereign relationships in order to ensure that UNHCR's purpose of responding to people most in need in a timely manner could be fulfilled.

135. The representative of **Switzerland** thanked the UNHCR for its efforts to deliver collaborative solutions to the escalating humanitarian crises and to try to find a long-term solution to the chronic underfunding for assistance, as reflected in the 2023 and 2024 budgets. With this in mind, the introduction of COMPASS into the budgetary system was a welcome achievement, as it was illuminating the agency's resources and management strategy more clearly and was providing a platform to mobilize potential further financial support from private donors, NGOs and international aid agencies.

136. Nevertheless, despite UNHCR doubling its budget since 2013, the needs of Member States had continued to increase over this time, resulting in an enormous structural deficit that had been forcing the agency to make some painful prioritization choices. Therefore, he implored the UNHCR to take action to address this funding gap and asked for clarification on how it intended to ensure that its resource allocations reflected the current needs of its Member States, as well as on its planned approach to reinforcing the prioritization measures for its budget.

137. As the organization's major donors were already giving \$4 million per year, there were no expectations that they would increase their funding significantly over the coming years in the present economic climate. Therefore, he called on UNHCR to use the Global Refugee Forum to harness more unearmarked funding, mobilize its innovative financing mechanism and look to continue to reduce its operating expenses and find efficiencies. In addition, the joint United Nations Fleet project between UNHCR and the World Food Programme was praised as good example of collaborative initiatives across United Nations bodies that will drastically cut organizational costs and it was hoped that these types of projects would continue to be rolled out.

138. Finally, he urged UNHCR to step up its commitment to local actors in order to improve the quality of its response and increase efficiencies, as well as to adopt and share a more panoramic view of how the response to the needs of refugees and other persons of concern would be financed with its Member States in time for the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023. The publication of an indicator assessing the global refugee situation was viewed as positive step as part of efforts to assess the contributions of host Member States and its bilateral support, which were viewed as vital. To conclude, he expressed concern about references to inclusive language being removed from budget documents three months prior to the Global Refugee Forum and argued that they should be reinstated across UNHCR's documents.

139. The **Chairperson** thanked the delegations for their contributions and the interpreters for being willing to provide their service for an additional ten minutes. She reiterated that speakers should talk slowly and clearly for the interpreters' benefit.

The meeting rose at 6.11 p.m.
