



# Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

Distr.: General  
19 May 2021

Original: English

---

## Annual session of 2021

21 to 23 June 2021

Item 1 of the provisional agenda

### Organizational matters

## Report on the first regular session of 2021, 15 to 16 February 2021<sup>1</sup>

### I. Election of the Bureau

1. On 12 January 2021, the Executive Board held elections for Bureau members of the Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) for the year 2021. The Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Sierra Leone to the United Nations, H.E. Mr. Alie Kabba (representing the African States), was elected President of the Executive Board. The Vice-Presidents were elected from the following regional groups: (a) Latin American and Caribbean States: H.E. Ms. María del Carmen Squeff, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Argentina to the United Nations; (b) Western European and Other States: H.E. Mr. Günter Sautter, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations; and (c) Asia–Pacific States: H.E. Mr. Kimura Tetsuya, Ambassador, Economic, Social and United Nations Management Affairs, Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations.

2. The outgoing President, H.E. Mr. Jukka Salovaara, Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations (representing the Western European and Other States), congratulated the incoming President and Vice-Presidents and thanked the Executive Board, particularly the outgoing Vice-Presidents who served during his tenure: H.E. Mr. Enkhbold Vorshilov, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Mongolia to the United Nations (representing the Asia–Pacific States); H.E. Ms. Penelope Althea Beckles, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to the United Nations (representing the Latin American and Caribbean States); H.E. Mrs. Victoria Mangay Sulimani, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations (representing the African States); and Ms. Eka Kipiani, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Georgia to the United Nations (representing the Eastern European States).

---

<sup>1</sup> Note: The present document was processed in its entirety by UN-Women.



3. During the first regular session of the Executive Board, held virtually due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, from 15 to 16 February 2021, the Executive Board approved the continuation of Ms. Eka Kipiani, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Georgia to the United Nations, in her role of Vice-President of the Executive Board, representing the Eastern European group.

## II. Organizational matters

4. The Executive Board adopted the annotated provisional agenda and workplan for the first regular session ([UNW/2021/L.1](#)) and approved the report on its second regular session 2020 held from 15 to 16 September 2020 ([UNW/2020/8](#)). The Board approved the provisional agenda and workplan for the annual session of 2021 to be held from 21 to 23 June 2021 (see annex I), confirmed that the presentation of the meta-analysis of evaluations managed by UN-Women in 2020 would be moved to the first regular session of 2022 and adopted the annual workplan for 2021 ([UNW/2021/L.2](#)).

5. The Executive Board adopted one decision, Decision 2021/1 on Audit, contained in the annex of this report (see annex II).

## III. Opening statements

6. In her opening statement, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director thanked the outgoing President and Bureau and welcomed the newly elected President, Bureau and Board members. She expressed her condolences to all who have lost friends and family during the continuing pandemic and highlighted how COVID-19 has exacerbated existing inequalities across all aspects of life for women, girls and their communities. The head of UN-Women stressed that regressions in gender equality threaten the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and emphasized that building back better means building back greener, more equitably and in a gender-responsive and inclusive way.

7. Referring to UN-Women's COVID-19 response over the past year, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director mentioned that the Entity has provided gender-sensitive policy advice around the world and across the United Nations system while working in partnership with others. She specifically highlighted UN-Women's COVID-19 response in several countries, including Bangladesh, El Salvador, Jordan, Lebanon, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam, and noted how the Entity has amplified information on the catastrophic impact of the pandemic on women's livelihoods globally. According to the International Labour Organization, reserve banks, international financial institutions and governments, women are bearing the brunt of the economic fallout. UN-Women has been engaging with international financial institutions, including with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, on the nexus of green finance and gender. The head of UN-Women called on Member States to ensure that fiscal stimulus packages are targeted and designed for women. She also stressed that recovery efforts must encompass both short- and long-term action on the "shadow pandemic" of violence against women and girls, an issue where UN-Women has led and informed the shaping of national policy and response plans across all regions.

8. Looking ahead, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director recalled that the upcoming session of the Commission on the Status of Women presents an opportunity to make bold decisions on women's leadership and participation. The pandemic has made this even more urgent, with COVID-19 exacerbating gaps in women's participation in decision-making. An analysis of COVID-19 task forces

from 87 countries found that only 3.5 per cent had gender parity. Since the start of the pandemic, UN-Women has been working to bring women's informed voices to national and regional responses, such as the African Women Leaders Network, and has been strengthening political action for gender-responsive plans and budgets. The Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director stressed that the Commission on the Status of Women's priority theme recognizes how women and men can collectively solve the urgent challenges of our time through fast-tracked equal power-sharing in public life. She called on Member States to show ambition in bold agreed conclusions that will strengthen the global normative framework and in including civil society in delegations to the virtual session.

9. Discussing racial relations, the head of the Entity recalled that an important aspect of UN-Women's work is the fight for a more equal future by ensuring racial justice. She mentioned that UN-Women has appointed an official to promote the change and address racial inequality and bias and noted that all its divisions have been asked to address perception and racism concerns in their teams. The Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director requested that the Executive Board help fight racism wherever it exists.

10. On the implementation of General Assembly resolution [79/279](#), the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director recognized that UN-Women must strengthen the work on gender equality in the United Nations system at the scale that is needed. She welcomed the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR), which has emphasized gender mainstreaming and has provided excellent guidance for collaboration between agencies, while also enabling UN-Women to work with persons with disabilities and youth participation, as well as in United Nations country teams.

11. Regarding the development of UN-Women's Strategic Plan 2022–2025, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director mentioned that UN-Women is looking forward to consultations with Member States. She requested support for a rights-based strategic plan that is bold on bringing about change and protecting gains. She added that the plan should entrench UN-Women's coordination and normative mandate and be selective and strategic on operations. The head of the Entity emphasized that the success of the strategic plan cannot only depend on the efforts of UN-Women but must draw on support from across the United Nations, as well as outside partners and across the world. She underscored that this is why UN-Women sees Generation Equality as an important platform to extend participation and support for its strategic plan.

12. The Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director added that UN-Women believes the Generation Equality Forum and the Action Coalitions will make an important contribution to this vision of greatly increased alignment around work on gender equality, in line with the Entity's mandate. Partners will be able to reach areas that UN-Women cannot and expand the Entity's resource base. She stressed that Generation Equality will help UN-Women meet some of the outstanding promises from the Beijing Declaration, while also responding to the needs created by the pandemic and accelerating achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Decade of Action.

13. The Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director mentioned that the co-leadership, co-ownership and thought leadership of Generation Equality will ensure that multilateral activity is inclusive, by involving the private sector, young people, civil society and communities. She underscored that UN-Women has successfully involved over 50 million people in Generation Equality Forum preparations, consultations and events. This includes activation of Leaders for Generation Equality, an intergenerational network of over 200 women leaders from

across the world. She also mentioned that 24 governments have already joined the leadership of Generation Equality and requested that the Executive Board support this as part of the development of the strategic plan.

14. Regarding funding, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director thanked donors for their generous support in 2020. Preliminary figures indicate that UN-Women total contributions revenue will reach a high of around \$544 million, exceeding the 2019 high of \$510.5 million. Regular resources (core) have reached an all-time record for UN-Women, with a preliminary figure of around \$165 million. This represents a 15 per cent increase over 2019 but is still below the integrated budget projection of \$200 million. She expressed appreciation for those who made early Regular Resources payments in 2020, highlighting the increases from the governments of Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the United States of America. She also thanked the European Union for its support to the EU–UN Spotlight Initiative, which boosted UN-Women’s total resources with over \$70 million received in 2020. The Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director also thanked the Government of Ireland for hosting the second annual partner round table last month.

15. The head of UN-Women expressed concern about the continuing imbalance between core and non-core resources, which influences the Entity’s ability to deliver high-quality and timely support. She mentioned the importance of new funding, which UN-Women is also trying to generate through Generation Equality. She stressed that two of the three aspects of the Entity’s mandate (coordination and normative elements) remain relatively underfunded and noted the difficulties of raising funds for these outside Member States.

16. The Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director concluded her statement by paying tribute to one of the four “founding mothers” of UN-Women, Margaret Snyder, who recently passed away. She also thanked UN-Women staff for their dedication in confronting the problems of the pandemic faced by women and girls every day, while managing work and increased responsibilities at home in a time of social isolation. She added that UN-Women is offering maximum flexibility to staff so that they can also manage their work-life balance.

17. Member States taking the floor congratulated the President on his election and thanked the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director for her comprehensive remarks. Delegations commended UN-Women for its work to document and address the challenges facing women and girls in the pandemic and for placing gender equality at the heart of the COVID-19 response. Many speakers highlighted the pandemic’s disproportionate impact on women and girls everywhere, while noting that COVID-19 has threatened to stall and even reverse progress on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

18. On the repositioning of the United Nations development system, several Member States stressed the importance of the 2020 QCPR, which provides the United Nations development system with critical direction to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. In a joint statement, delegations noted that, for the first time, the QCPR text includes language on violence against women and girls, persons with disabilities, climate and biodiversity issues, digital technology and youth. The group statement called on UN-Women to support the development of a monitoring and reporting framework for the QCPR and to play its part in consolidating the reforms, including through increasing efficiencies by harmonizing business operations and aligning their activities with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. The statement also urged all agencies to define system-wide coherence as a priority objective in their strategic plans and to ensure that their policies, guidelines and regulations are aligned with the reforms.

Other statements similarly encouraged UN-Women to take the repositioning of the United Nations development system into account when developing its Strategic Plan 2022–2025.

19. Discussing the development of UN-Women’s next Strategic Plan 2022–2025, delegations expressed support for the Entity’s commitment to leverage its composite mandate, increase synergies and strengthen its role within the United Nations system, as well as to continue responding to emerging global issues, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Some Member States encouraged UN-Women to ensure its next strategic plan is rights-based and ambitious, takes a whole-of-society approach, builds on lessons learned and incorporates the triple nexus, while considering the national context and realities in developing countries. Several delegations encouraged the next strategic plan to be development-based and focus on capacity-building for developing countries. Several delegations also welcomed the Entity’s commitment to increase its strategic partnerships inside and outside the United Nations system to help fulfil its mandate and expand its reach. A number of speakers stressed the need for the next strategic plan to use terms and language agreed on by the entire United Nations membership.

20. Regarding Generation Equality, several speakers expressed their confidence in the Generation Equality Forum and the related Action Coalitions to help bring about transformative change in the lives of women and girls. Another delegation expressed its concern that the upcoming forum had not been formally agreed by all Executive Board members.

21. Noting the importance of multilingualism, a number of delegations expressed their regret that the virtual first regular session was held without interpretation.

#### **IV. Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS Programme Coordinating Board meeting**

22. During her opening remarks, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director highlighted UN-Women’s collaboration with UNAIDS and the significant advances made in the fight against HIV/AIDS. She underscored the importance of accelerating this effort, while stressing the need to address gender-based violence, girls’ education, women’s leadership, and community-level engagement to help win the fight against HIV/AIDS.

23. The Executive Director of UNAIDS noted that UN-Women is an important co-sponsor of the work to end HIV/AIDS, including through ensuring that the gender dimensions of HIV/AIDS are addressed. She underscored that most new people infected with HIV are young women and girls in sub-Saharan Africa. She stressed the continued need to mobilize efforts to reach the goal on ending AIDS before 2030, including the need to prioritize people at risk and end harmful norms. The Executive Director of UNAIDS noted that human rights, gender equality and community-led responses must be the bedrock of the new strategy of UNAIDS. She emphasized the need to address structural barriers that continue to fuel HIV and to tackle harmful social norms, stigma and discrimination. The Executive Director suggested four pathways to take this agenda forward: (1) uncover and confront violence against women and support the work by UN-Women and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in this area; (2) eliminate all forms of stigma and discrimination through the Unstereotype Alliance; (3) increase investment and advance women’s and girls’ leadership in the pandemic response; and (4) empower adolescent girls and young women in sub-Saharan Africa through the Education Plus Initiative. She highlighted that one of the most effective tools to combat the fact that HIV/AIDS infections remain the main cause of death among young women 15–24 years of age, is to make

sure girls go to school. Evidence has shown that this reduces the risk of infection by 50 per cent, alongside the multiple other benefits from ensuring that girls receive an education. The Executive Director concluded that UNAIDS is determined to continue working together with UN-Women, and plans to launch its support at the Generation Equality Forum in Paris in 2021.

24. After opening the floor, several delegations encouraged UNAIDS to reinstate in its draft strategic plan the dedicated results area on gender equality, which includes social norms change, through a joint statement. The joint statement encouraged UN-Women to ensure that its work on HIV is mainstreamed in its new strategic plan as an important aspect of leaving no one behind. Member States also stressed the importance of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights and the need to address the social and cultural barriers that are underlying causes of HIV/AIDS infection. The joint statement stressed the need to better integrate HIV prevention and care and sexual and reproductive health services to prevent transmission of HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancies. One delegation speaking in their national capacity expressed concern with the use of non-agreed terminology in the presentation and by Member States and reminded delegations to refrain from using controversial terms.

## V. Strategic Plan

25. The Executive Board received an update on the development of UN-Women's next Strategic Plan 2022–2025. Deputy Executive Director Anita Bhatia expressed her appreciation for the feedback received so far. The next strategic plan will build on lessons learned from the midterm review and other assessments, which identified the need for UN-Women to become more focused and deliver more effectively on its composite mandate. UN-Women continues to be guided by the QCPR and the United Nations development system reform to deliver better together with other United Nations partners, not only through pooled funds and joint programming but also through developing common approaches to strengthen results-based management and developing common methodologies for planning and reporting on common results and targets. Leveraging UN-Women's coordination mandate and working more closely with United Nations agencies at the country and global level to set a common strategic framework will be central to the next strategic plan. UN-Women also plans to continue to expand its partnerships and influence other actors, such as civil society and international financial institutions. The Deputy Executive Director Anita Bhatia stressed that UN-Women aims to become an interconnected, matrixed organization that is well-positioned in the United Nations development system.

26. Deputy Executive Director Ása Regnér added that with its next strategic plan UN-Women wishes to maximize its impact and scale up results to play its part to leave no one behind. She acknowledged the need to continue to leverage UN-Women's composite mandate and identified four thematic areas to concentrate on in the next strategic plan: (1) women's participation and leadership in public life; (2) women's economic empowerment and resilience; (3) ending violence against women and girls; and (4) women, peace and security and humanitarian action, including disaster risk reduction.

27. The floor was opened to interventions by Member States, who welcomed the update and expressed their appreciation for the consultative and inclusive process. In a joint statement, several Member States underscored the importance of delivering an ambitious, results-oriented and forward-looking strategic plan that follows a human rights-based approach and builds upon the lessons learned and achievements of the current strategic plan. Member States also underlined the need to ensure that

UN-Women's capacity and resources at the country level are adequate and encouraged UN-Women to increase its joint programmes with United Nations partners and give up small-scale individual projects and programmes. The joint statement expressed support for the Entity's work on women, peace and security. It also requested that UN-Women apply an approach that fully addresses discriminatory structures and social norms, engages men and boys, and reflects the integrated nature and interlinkages between gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and human rights. The statement also called on UN-Women to consider mainstreaming climate- and environment-responsive approaches, as well as digitalization, technology and innovation, throughout its next strategic plan.

28. Speaking in its national capacity, one delegation urged UN-Women to work on the protection and empowerment of women in fragile settings caused by emerging challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and disaster risk reduction, in its next strategic plan, in addition to long-standing conflicts. Several speakers encouraged UN-Women to address the severe socioeconomic impact on women and girls from COVID-19, especially in developing countries. Two delegations expressed their belief that all five outcomes in the current strategic plan remain valid, while one of the speakers stressed that the strategic plan should reflect the common agenda of the Executive Board membership and take into account national priorities and realities. Several delegations called on Member States and UN-Women to use intergovernmentally agreed terminology in the strategic plan.

29. In response to comments made by Member States, the Director of the Policy, Programme and Intergovernmental Division explained that UN-Women's next strategic plan builds on data, evidence and knowledge from UN-Women's 10 years of experience, as well as the lessons learned from the midterm review and Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network assessment. She added that UN-Women seeks to create a theory of change and theory of action that help identify areas where there is greatest potential for impact at scale and where UN-Women has a comparative and collaborative advantage. The Director of the Strategic Planning, Resources, and Effectiveness Division (ad interim) acknowledged that there is scope for further integrating UN-Women's composite mandate and recalled that there will be another strategic plan workshop in April. Deputy Executive Director Anita Bhatia assured all delegations that the next strategic plan will address the problems faced by women and girls, including women's economic empowerment, women's leadership and participation, and the digital gender gap, as well as the impact of COVID-19 and climate change on women and girls.

## **VI. Evaluation**

30. The Director of the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services presented the corporate evaluation of support provided by UN-Women to United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 national action plans (NAPs) on women, peace and security (UNW/2021/CRP.2). The evaluation assessed the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, organizational efficiency and sustainability of UN-Women at the global, regional and national levels to support the development and implementation of NAPs on women, peace and security and recognized UN-Women's work in this area as one of the cornerstones of the Entity. As part of its eight recommendations, the report recommended that UN-Women connect with and scale up a wider range of global normative and regional frameworks and processes to increase traction. It also suggested strengthening linkages between UN-Women's normative, coordination and operational roles in support of women, peace and security NAPs to enhance integration. The evaluation recommended that UN-Women continue to harmonize its external coordination efforts, with a focus on strengthening and linking its global,

regional and national coordination processes. The assessment emphasized that for UN-Women to be able to realize and scale up tangible change, it needs to work in an environment of sustainable and predictable resources.

31. The Chief of Independent Evaluation and Audit Services presented the effectiveness and efficiency assessment of UN-Women Flagship Programme Initiatives (FPIs) and thematic priorities of the Strategic Plan 2018–2021 (UNW/2021/CRP.3), which assessed whether and how the FPIs have realized their stated intent. The evaluation concluded that the FPIs were a much needed and significant corporate initiative to strengthen UN-Women’s programmatic focus, thematic coherence and operational effectiveness. The assessment noted that the FPIs were highly successful in embedding a corporate mind shift towards programmatic approaches, scale impact and unified theories of change. The assessment revealed weak elements that constrained several FPIs from fulfilling their potential, such as quality assurance mechanisms, resource mobilization, financial tracking and reporting, corporate performance monitoring against FPI differentiator metrics and initiatives around structured partnerships. As the FPIs represented UN-Women’s first experiences with transformative programming, both successes and challenges hold valuable lessons in programming and change management for its next strategic plan.

32. Speaking on behalf of management, Deputy Executive Director Åsa Regnér welcomed both evaluations and indicated that the evaluation of support provided by UN-Women to United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 NAPs on women, peace and security will also be used to advance UN-Women’s work in this area. She reiterated the Entity’s intention to engage a wider range of national stakeholders in NAP processes, as well as international organizations, and use the Entity’s external coordination with development partners to mobilize funding for NAP implementation. The Deputy Executive Director also emphasized that UN-Women plans to develop strategies and tools that could be used to assess the most critical types of transformational change for delivering on the women, peace and security agenda at the country level through NAPs. UN-Women committed to advocating strengthened analysis and data to better inform NAPs in order to address conflict and humanitarian emergencies more effectively. The Deputy Executive Director also mentioned that UN-Women plans an assessment of the financial resources required to provide meaningful support to NAP implementation, which will inform the strategy to support this work.

33. Regarding the assessment of UN-Women FPIs, the Deputy Executive Director responded that UN-Women appreciates the evaluation concluding that the FPIs had an overall positive effect on the evolution of the organization’s programming. She stressed that the Entity is committed to leveraging the process of the development of the next UN-Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025 to further refine programming instruments and related oversight and accountability systems in order to implement transformative programmes for women and girls at the global, regional and national levels. She noted that the overall goal of the FPIs to create high-impact and scalable initiatives is as relevant today as it was in 2015 and reiterated that UN-Women is committed to learning from its experience.

34. In a joint statement, Member States expressed their appreciation for the management response and commitment to act on the recommendations. The statement requested more detailed information on when various measures will be implemented and how they will be followed-up. It welcomed UN-Women’s strong focus on the importance of national ownership and implementation of NAPs for long-term sustainability and underlined that it could be further strengthened through the inclusion of actors who are not directly involved. The statement underscored that an adequate level of funding and human resources is needed to provide meaningful support to NAP implementation, while adding that such funding needs to be

sustainable and long-term. It encouraged UN-Women to assess the level and type of funding required and articulate how financial resources are linked to results. It also welcomed increased allocations of Regular Resources to the women, peace and security agenda.

35. Speaking in their national capacity, one Member State expressed appreciation for UN-Women's guidance when developing its own NAP and asked how the Entity could help with the monitoring of NAPs. Another speaker commended UN-Women's vital contribution in supporting Member States in meeting women, peace and security commitments and underlined the importance of ensuring that women are meaningfully contributing to sustaining peace. The speaker also encouraged UN-Women to develop more strategic and focused programming, including by seeking to work in close partnership with others in the United Nations country team system. The delegation asked about how the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN-Women are engaged in joint programming and how to ensure that NAPs are delivering against national and global women, peace and security priorities.

36. In response to comments made by Member States, the Director of the Policy, Programme and Intergovernmental Division explained that UN-Women is developing a theory of change on women, peace and security NAPs, which will be guided by the recommendation on strengthening understanding of transformational shifts. UN-Women's Chief of Peace and Security noted that improving NAP implementation would require further resources but that most recommendations will be incorporated in annual workplans. She also mentioned another example of joint work with UNDP, namely the joint peacebuilding fund.

## VII. Audit matters

37. In her brief opening remarks, Deputy Executive Director, Ms. Anita Bhatia, welcomed the ninth unqualified audit opinion by the Board of Auditors and expressed her appreciation to the Board of Auditors. She added that UN-Women is fully committed to implementing the recommendations and highlighted that the Entity has significantly increased its recommendation implementation rate by 30 percentage points compared to 2019. She noted that in 2019 UN-Women achieved its highest total revenues since its inception.

38. The United Nations Board of Auditors Representative and Director of External Audit (Chile) presented the report of the Board of Auditors on the financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2019 ([A/75/5/Add.12](#)). In the opinion of the Board of Auditors, the financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of UN-Women as at 31 December 2019 and its financial performance and cash flows for the year ended on that date, in accordance with the International Public Sector Accounting Standards. In its overall conclusion, the Board of Auditors did not identify significant errors or omissions from the review of the financial records of UN-Women for the year ended 31 December 2019. The Board of Auditors concluded that UN-Women has and applies controls that allow reasonable mitigation of the risks present. However, the Board of Auditors identified scope for improvement in areas such as governance, information and communications technology, procurement management, project management, human resources and travel management. It issued 11 recommendations, all of which were accepted by management. The Board noted that there were 22 recommendations outstanding up to 2018, with 15 of these fully implemented, while six were still under implementation and one had been overtaken by events. The Board of Auditors expressed satisfaction that UN-Women had implemented 68 of its recommendations from previous reports.

39. The Deputy Director of Financial Management introduced the financial report and audited financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2019 (A/75/5/Add.12), noting that annual revenue reached a record high in 2019, with total assets of \$527.4 million. Total expenses were \$420.9 million. The Entity recorded a surplus of \$106.5 million for the year ended 31 December 2019, compared to a surplus of \$24.5 million in 2018. The surplus was mainly due to increased revenue from other resources (non-core), which will be spent on programme expenditure in future years. The delivery rate for 2019 programme expenditure from other resources was 84.4 per cent, against a target of 85 per cent. In outlining revenue and expenditure by funding source, it was noted that the increase in voluntary contributions from donors in 2019 of \$116.1 million was represented by an increase in other resources (non-core) of \$122.2 million and a decrease in Regular Resources (core) of \$6.1 million. The Entity's total assets of \$657.5 million exceeded total liabilities of \$143.3 million, resulting in total net assets/equity of \$514.2 million.

40. The Director of the Strategy, Planning, Resources and Effectiveness Division (ad interim) gave an update on the implementation of the recommendations of the Board of Auditors. As of January 2021, actions had been completed for eight out of 11 of the 2019 audit recommendations (73 per cent). The Board of Auditors assessed five of 11 audit recommendations as implemented, with three recommendations pending Board of Auditors assessments. UN-Women is on track to implement the remaining three recommendations that are in progress. The Entity noted that it has increased the 2018 implementation rate for recommendations by 30 percentage points (from 36 per cent in 2018 to 68 per cent in 2019). The Entity highlighted significant progress across governance, risk management, internal controls and accountability, as requested in Executive Board decision 2020/2. Regarding the implementation status of audit recommendations from 2018, as of January 2021, actions had been completed for 11 out of 12 recommendations (92 per cent), with the remaining one recommendation on track to be completed in 2021.

41. Delegations commended UN-Women for its high implementation rate and improvements on internal governance and control, risk management, and strengthened procurement plan monitoring. One speaker noted with concern the significant decline in core resources as a percentage of total resources and asked how this impacted programme delivery and how UN-Women plans to address the continuing trend in declining Regular Resources. The Entity was also requested to re-evaluate its budget estimates in light of the significant gaps between budgeted revenue and actual core resources and to consider formulating budget requests based on historical growth in revenues. Another delegation noted that the Board of Auditors report mentions that UN-Women has facilitated the creation of national curricula on gender and violence against women in 13 countries and expressed disappointment that language and terminology that is not intergovernmentally agreed has been used.

## **VIII. Briefing on the operational response at the regional level**

42. UN-Women's Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia presented UN-Women's results and priorities in the Europe and Central Asia region. The Regional Director highlighted key points from consultations with more than 20,000 partners and stakeholders, noting that, although progress has been made, addressing structural drivers of gender inequalities, which are further exacerbated by the pandemic, remains crucial. She highlighted that gender pay gaps, unpaid care work and the prevalence of violence against women and girls remain a concern in the region. She added that there were significant gaps in leveraging innovation in technology for gender equality and advancing women's leadership in decision-making and reiterated the need to look at the intersection between gender and

environmental sustainability, while also noting that financing for gender equality is critical. The Regional Director shared how COVID-19 has compounded gender inequalities in the Europe and Central Asia region, highlighting the gendered impact of the crisis in the region. She showcased UN-Women projects in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Turkey as good practices to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women in the region. She concluded her presentation by stressing the importance of continued partnerships with regional bodies (including with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Institute for Gender Equality, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) and ensuring better youth engagement. Deputy Executive Director, Ms. Åsa Regnér, also made remarks, with a focus on programming for women, peace and security in the region.

43. In response, one Member State thanked UN-Women for its outstanding work at the national level through its regional and country offices in Europe and Central Asia. The speaker highlighted how the Entity has supported national strengthening of human rights machinery, both through governments and parliaments, as well as with human rights organizations. UN-Women has provided valuable technical support in the areas of ending violence against women, economic empowerment, and women, peace and security. The delegate thanked the Regional Director for the national study conducted by UN-Women on sexual harassment and noted that Georgia has recently made a legal amendment on this issue.

## **IX. Address by the Chair of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS and UN-Women Staff Council and management action**

44. The UN-Women Staff Council representative presented a statement on behalf of the Chair and conveyed her condolences to colleagues who had lost loved ones to COVID-19. The Staff Council expressed its appreciation for the progressive measures and “maximum flexibility” approaches backed by UN-Women leadership but expressed concerns about the increased workload and challenges to work-life balance. The Staff Council stressed that more needed to be done to ensure consistent implementation of these measures across UN-Women at all levels. The Staff Council highlighted how it has worked with management throughout this difficult time to raise concerns and put forward recommendations. The Staff Council noted concerns about the future of work and return to work modalities, as well as access to vaccines for colleagues in duty stations with weak health systems. The Staff Council expressed support for UN-Women’s commitment to creating a workplace that promotes the dignity and respect of all and for the ongoing work on anti-racism and discrimination, commending the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director’s “Let’s Talk About Race” series, the Young Women Leaders initiative, and the recent appointment of a Diversity, Inclusion and Shared Leadership Adviser. The Staff Council called on UN-Women to collect, publish and track over time hard data that can reveal the gaps in its workforce regarding the groups that are not represented or under-represented and to collect soft, qualitative data to help determine the steps needed to create a nurturing and respectful environment for all. The Staff Council requested that management address negative perceptions of recruitment processes to truly build an inclusive workplace and urged the harmonization of contract types in the United Nations.

45. The Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director responded, thanking the Staff Council for its support during this difficult year. The Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director also commended the Staff Council for sending periodic updates on COVID-19 to all colleagues, including resources on mental health and well-being, and expressed thanks for the Staff Council’s recognition of the

commitment of the UN-Women leadership team to the well-being of personnel and for its support in this regard. On the issue of heavy workloads, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director noted that management is aware and mentioned it has asked Human Resources to revisit the guidelines put in place. Regarding addressing race and discrimination to foster a workplace that promotes dignity and respect, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director noted the call of the Secretary-General and referred to active internal discussions on racism and discrimination against different groups, while addressing the intersection of gender and race. On the issue of vaccinations, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director expressed hope regarding the comprehensive and robust United Nations system-wide implementation plan led by the Department of Operational Support, in collaboration with key partners and the Member States, to ensure adequate distribution and access for United Nations personnel, while also supporting a fair and equitable global distribution process. Regarding the harmonization of contract types, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director also expressed commitment to continuing to follow and participate in ongoing discussions at the High-Level Committee on Management on the future of work and at the International Civil Service Commission, which will also review the contractual framework.

46. In a cross-regional joint statement, delegations expressed their appreciation for the steps taken by management to meet personnel needs and encouraged UN-Women to continue the dialogue with staff and the Staff Council. It noted to take into account staff affected by the current rise in domestic violence and called on UN-Women to continue implementing measures against sexual exploitation and abuse. Delegations encouraged management to take steps to reform and restructure with good judgement in view of proportionality and to ensure that all staff members are involved in a transparent and inclusive manner.

47. UN-Women's Director of Human Resources (ad interim) responded by highlighting specific guidance and measures put in place for personnel experiencing abuse or other forms of gender-based violence. He also highlighted work-life balance measures that have been put in place and noted that the Department of Operational Support is in charge of identifying alternative arrangements in places where United Nations personnel are not included in national vaccination programmes.

## **X. Closing**

48. The Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director thanked the President and Vice-President for their efficient leadership of the session, as well as the other Bureau members for their assistance and contributions. The head of the Entity commended the large number and wide range of Member States that contributed during the session. She expressed her appreciation for the trust and confidence that has been built over the years between the Executive Board and UN-Women. She thanked the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of UNAIDS and the delegations that participated in the HIV/AIDS deliberations.

49. In response to statements mentioning the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director emphasized the importance of building back better, while focusing on building back greener, more equitably and in a gender-responsive and inclusive manner. She requested that the Executive Board advocate for the inclusion of women in the pandemic response so that they are not forgotten. The Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director requested that the Executive Board make sure that international financial institutions also consider women and girls when discussing pandemic relief packages.

50. The Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director noted that the new QCPR resolution provided good language on how to work in a coordinated manner in the United Nations system. She thanked delegations for their comments regarding Generation Equality and clarified that UN-Women works with a wide range of partners dedicated to service to women and girls. She expressed her appreciation that so many Member States have decided to work with UN-Women, support Generation Equality and seize this opportunity to address and improve the lives of women and girls. The Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director stressed that UN-Women highly values intergovernmental processes and wants Generation Equality to benefit from and enrich them.

51. The Vice-President concluded by conveying his appreciation for the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of UN-Women, the contributions from the Secretariat and the active participation of all delegations. He noted that he looked forward to future constructive discussions on the strategic plan in order to improve the lives of women and girls on the ground who have been affected by the pandemic.

52. The session was then adjourned.

## Annex I

### Proposed provisional agenda and workplan for the annual session, 21 to 23 June 2021

#### Note by the Executive Board secretariat

##### Provisional agenda

1. Organizational matters
2. Annual Report of the Executive Director
3. Strategic Plan
4. Financial, budgetary and administrative matters
5. Evaluation
6. Audit and investigation matters
7. Policy and programme matters
8. Other matters

##### Provisional workplan

<i>Day</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Subject</i>
<b>Monday, 21 June</b>	10 a.m. – 1 p.m.		<b>Opening of the session</b>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statements by the President of the Executive Board and the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of UN-Women</li> </ul>
		1	<b>Organizational matters</b>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adoption of the annotated provisional agenda and workplan for the annual session of 2021</li> <li>• Adoption of the report of the first regular session of 2021</li> </ul>
		2	<b>Annual report of the Executive Director</b>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report of the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of UN-Women on the implementation of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021</li> </ul>
	1.15 p.m. – 2.30 p.m.		<i>Informal consultations on draft decisions, if any</i>
	3 p.m. – 6 p.m.	2	<b>Annual report of the Executive Director (<i>continued</i>)</b>
	<i>Post meeting</i>		<i>Informal consultations on draft decisions, if any</i>
<b>Tuesday, 22 June</b>	10 a.m. – 1 p.m.	3	<b>Strategic plan</b>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft UN-Women Strategic Plan, 2022–2025</li> </ul>
		4	<b>Financial, budgetary and administrative matters</b>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft integrated budget of UN-Women for the biennium 2022–2023</li> </ul>

---

		5	<p><b>Evaluation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report on the evaluation function of UN-Women in 2020</li> <li>• Corporate evaluation on the contribution of UN-Women to ending violence against women</li> <li>• Management perspective and response</li> </ul> <p><i>Informal consultations on draft decisions, if any</i></p>
	1:15 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.		
	3 p.m. – 6 p.m.	6	<p><b>Audit and investigation matters</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report of the internal audit and investigation activities for the period of 1 January to 31 December 2020</li> <li>• Report of the Advisory Committee on Oversight for the period of 1 January to 31 December 2020</li> <li>• Management responses</li> </ul> <p><i>Informal consultations on draft decisions, if any</i></p>
	<i>Post meeting</i>		
<b>Wednesday, 23 June</b>	10 a.m. – 1 p.m.	7	<p><b>Policy and programme matters</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update on the implementation of recommendations in the independent victim-centred review of UN-Women’s policies and processes on tackling sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, as noted in the related management response</li> <li>• Update on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 72/279</li> <li>• Briefing on the operational response of UN-Women at the regional level</li> </ul>
		8	<p><b>Other matters</b></p> <p><i>Adoption of draft decisions</i></p>
		1	<p><b>Organizational matters</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approval of the provisional agenda and workplan for the second regular session 2021</li> </ul> <p>Closing of the session</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statements by the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of UN-Women and the President of the Executive Board</li> </ul>

---

## Annex II

### Decision adopted at the first regular session of 2021

2021/1

**Financial report and audited financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2019 and report of the Board of Auditors**

*The Executive Board,*

1. *Takes note of* the report of the United Nations Board of Auditors for the financial period that ended on 31 December 2019;
2. *Takes note of* the ninth unqualified audit opinion issued by the Board of Auditors on the financial statements of UN-Women for the year ended 31 December 2019; (para. 2 of [UNW/2020/2](#));
3. *Takes note of* the management response of UN-Women to the report of the United Nations Board of Auditors for the financial period that ended on 31 December 2019, including the actions taken so far and further measures planned by UN-Women to implement the recommendations of the Board of Auditors for the financial period ended on 31 December 2019, and *requests* UN-Women to continue implementing the recommendations of the Board of Auditors from prior years for closure by the Board of Auditors.

*16 February 2021*

---