General Assembly

Progress in the implementation of the organizational resilience management system

Thirty-eighth report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the proposed programme budget for 2022

I. Introduction

1.   The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on progress in the implementation of the organizational resilience management system (A/76/607). During its consideration of the report, the Committee received additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses dated 9 February 2022.

2.   The report of the Secretary-General is submitted pursuant to section I of General Assembly resolution 73/279 B and provides an update on the implementation of the organizational resilience management system within the Secretariat and entities represented in the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) during the period 2019–2021.

II. Background and context

3.   The General Assembly, in section II of its resolution 67/254 A, approved the United Nations organizational resilience management system. Subsequently, in section III of its resolution 68/247 B, the Assembly underlined the importance of the full implementation of the organizational resilience management system in the offices away from Headquarters, regional commissions, field missions of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs of the Secretariat and the participating specialized agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system in the next step of its implementation.

4.   In November 2014, CEB approved the organizational resilience management system as the emergency management framework for the member organizations. The organizational resilience management system is defined as a management system

linking actors and activities within United Nations system organizations and across the United Nations system, at the country and regional levels and, where applicable, at the global level, to continuously improve the capacity to anticipate, prepare for and respond to threats and opportunities arising from sudden or gradual changes in internal and external contexts (CEB/2014/HLCM/17/Rev.1, para. 7).

5.   Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the principles of the organizational resilience management system were as follows: (a) risk management-based planning and practice: United Nations system organization-wide, duty station-wide and country- and territory-wide, when necessary, resiliency-related plans are based on the early detection of threats and the effective assessment of risk; (b) flexible standardization: the fundamental roles, responsibilities and practices are tailored to reflect the United Nations system organizations' unique mandates and context, and leverage existing resources and processes; (c) harmonized and integrated application: the planning, structures and behavioural change are applied in a harmonized fashion among United Nations system organizations and through coordination and collaboration with Member States, host country authorities and, where feasible, other key stakeholders; and (d) maximized organizational learning: lessons learned during the application of the organizational resilience management system are identified, assessed, recorded, applied to continuous improvement or policies and procedures, and shared with other United Nations system organizations and relevant stakeholders (see also CEB/2014/HLCM/17/Rev.1, para. 10).

III.   Progress in the implementation of the organizational resilience management system

6.   In his report, the Secretary-General outlines implementation efforts of the organizational resilience management system and provides a summary of the progress made within the Secretariat and entities represented in CEB during the period 2019–2021, with a particular emphasis on the response to challenges related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The undertaken efforts include: the revision of the organizational resilience management system policy and its key performance indicators (see para. 16 below); the refinement and activation of business continuity plans; the conduct of assessments, simulations and training; enhanced communication practices; and progress with other operational aspects, such as emergency notification systems.

7.   **The Advisory Committee notes that the organizational resilience management system, which emerged from its pilot phase stages in 2010, has been developed over the years, also building on the response to the emergencies it has faced.** The Advisory Committee recalls, in particular, the implementation of the recommendations from the after-action review of storm Sandy, and related lessons learned in terms of insurance, physical infrastructures and information and communications technology (ICT) resilience (see also A/68/780, paras. 23–49).

8.   **The Advisory Committee acknowledges the progress achieved in the progressive development and implementation of the organizational resilience management system over the years. The Committee stresses the importance of a solid organizational resilience management strategy across the system, at the global, regional, country and local levels, for a full and effective emergency preparedness and response to critical situations, ensuring business continuity in the work of the Organization, as well as preserving the health and safety of its personnel. The Committee trusts that additional progress will continue to be made, taking also into account the experience gained during the reporting period, and looks forward to an update in the next report.**

A. COVID-19 pandemic and organizational resilience

9. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that organizational resilience management systems across the United Nations were tested and strengthened as never before by the COVID-19 pandemic and that the pandemic has been the ultimate stress test and proof of concept to date for the organizational resilience management framework (A/76/607, paras. 2 and 94).

10. **The Advisory Committee acknowledges the efforts and measures of the United Nations Secretariat and other entities to ensure business continuity and support the health and safety of personnel during the COVID-19 pandemic (see also A/76/722, para. 20, and A/76/7, para. 11).**

11. In paragraphs 16 to 21 of the report, the Secretary-General outlines the lessons learned and best practices from the COVID-19 pandemic. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that:

(a) Organizational resilience depended on an agile and resilient workforce, with occupational safety and health, including mental health and well-being, being a top priority. Furthermore, the Secretariat considered that a balance between on-site and off-site work would be most effective for functions that could be performed remotely, as it would lead, inter alia, to better work-life balance, staff engagement and increased morale, while also strengthening organizational resilience. **The Advisory Committee recalls that a review of work modalities, taking also into account lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, is under way and looks forward to receiving comprehensive information in the context of the next report on human resources management (see also A/76/733, para. 38).** The Committee makes related observations in its report on the Secretary-General's final report on the implementation of a flexible workplace at United Nations Headquarters;

(b) ICT played a crucial role in organizational resilience. Investments made before the pandemic, such as the roll-out of Unite Workspace and the adoption of cloud computing, enabled the smooth transition to remote working and supported business continuity. They also further highlighted the importance of maintaining ICT systems, resources and policies up to date with technological innovation and the related cybersecurity (see paras. 28 and 33 below);

(c) A multilayered crisis governance structure, ensuring that risks are managed at both operational and strategic levels, was also essential to organizational resilience (see para. 25 below).

12. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the duration and global nature of the pandemic had introduced previously unseen challenges and required the issuance and adaptation of policies, as well as complex operational responses to enable business continuity, while protecting the health and safety of personnel. The measures adopted included: the creation of the United Nations system-wide medical evacuation (medevac) mechanism and a COVID-19 vaccination programme; new procedures for the rotation of uniformed personnel; access to telehealth globally, including for mental health care; and training for managing remote teams.

13. The Advisory Committee was also informed that, with the technical and financial support from the inter-agency First Line of Defence Task Force, United Nations country teams had strengthened their respective health emergency and preparedness, including by establishing local occupational health and safety committees, upgrading United Nations clinics and signing partnerships agreements with existing private hospitals in duty stations. Such coordination mechanisms could be leveraged to strengthen and implement organizational resilience management

system strategies at the country level. The Committee was also informed that the cost-sharing mechanism first line of defence was put together quickly to deal with the emergency. The United Nations entities would be reflecting their share in their respective systems and financial statements. Since the overall management of this programme rested with the United Nations Secretariat, the related expenditures formed part of the Secretariat's finances and would be audited by the Office of Internal Oversight Services and the Board of Auditors in the course of their normal audits.

14. **The Advisory Committee acknowledges the establishment of coordination mechanisms that facilitated a system-wide, harmonized response to some of the challenges faced during the pandemic. The Committee emphasizes the importance of efforts aimed at system-wide harmonization, consolidating efficiencies and improving effectiveness. The Committee trusts that the Secretary-General will provide detailed information on the administrative and budgetary arrangements of the initiatives established during the pandemic, including related observations and recommendations of auditors, in the context of the overview report on the COVID-19 response (see para. 15 below).**

Comprehensive overview report on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and lessons learned

15. The Advisory Committee recalls that the Secretary-General presented information regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operations of the Organization and related lessons learned in the context of multiple reports submitted to the General Assembly at its seventy-fifth and seventy-sixth sessions. The Committee also recalls its recommendations that the Secretary-General provide consolidated information on lessons learned and best practices from the COVID-19 pandemic, and efficiency gains, in the context of the programme budget and peacekeeping budgets (see for instance A/76/7/Add.29, para. 63), as well as in other specific areas (see for instance A/76/722, para. 20). **The Advisory Committee notes that information on the impact of the pandemic on the Organization is being provided in different reports, but considers that, given the significant implications on current and, potentially, future activities and practices of the Organization, such an overview is warranted. Therefore, the Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to submit to it, at its seventy-eighth session, a separate report on the response to COVID-19, describing the impacts, challenges, initiatives and measures undertaken and related costs, as well as how opportunities, best practices and lessons learned from the pandemic will be leveraged in the post-pandemic environment. The report should focus on cross-cutting areas, such as ICT, occupational health and safety, human resources management, supply chain, working modalities, as well as the system-wide initiatives and mechanisms put in place during the pandemic (see para. 14 above).**

B. Revised policy on the organizational resilience management system and key performance indicators

16. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that, in January 2021, the High-level Committee on Management of CEB approved a revision of the system-wide policy on the organizational resilience management system (A/76/607, para. 4). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the revised policy mainly: (a) strengthened the definition of the organizational resilience management system; (b) emphasized the responsibility of each organization to build its own resilience and to collaborate with the other United Nations system organizations at the same

location; and (c) updated its seven core elements, for alignment with terms adopted in other United Nations policies, and to better reflect the nature of certain elements and broaden their scope (e.g., emergency medical support instead of mass casualty incident response, and ICT resilience in lieu of the more reductive information technology disaster recovery). The revised policy also took into account the experience of participating organizations and the 2017 International Organization for Standardization standard on resilience. However, the lessons learned from the pandemic, which, according to the Secretariat, were still evolving, would be considered during the next proposed revision of the policy, expected in December 2024.

17.   The Advisory Committee was further informed that a revised set of key performance indicators accompanying the policy had been approved in December 2021 and an assessment exercise was under way. The previous key performance indicators, which had been based on a three-point classification scale of "fully", "partially" and "not" completed, and for which the Committee had previously expressed concern (see A/73/775, paras. 9–11), had been replaced by a maturity model inspired by the reference maturity model for enterprise risk management, with levels ranging from zero to five and with definitions for each level of maturity, to ensure consistency and coherence in implementation.[1]

18.   Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the revised policy and accompanying key performance indicators required each United Nations system organization to promulgate an organizational resilience management system policy, to establish a governance structure with a senior-level official chairing the crisis management structure and to implement risk management and a maintenance exercise and review regime. In addition, each organization was also responsible, inter alia, for: (a) ensuring a cooperation mechanism among the organizational management resilience system core elements within a United Nations system organization, including at the regional, country and local levels; (b) ensuring coordination of the overall risk management framework of the organization; and (c) identifying and developing essential capabilities linked to the core elements.

19.   **The Advisory Committee looks forward to an update on the implementation of the revised policy and key performance indicators in the next report of the Secretary-General.**

C.   Coordination of the organizational resilience management system

20.   In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that to avoid duplication and maximize the use of resources, entities of the United Nations system are encouraged

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[1] The maturity levels are as follows: level 0: not implemented – not implemented at all, but should be; level 1: minimal – implemented occasionally and/or informally, in a reactive and/or ad hoc manner. No, or little, structure, and no consistency over time; level 2: developing – working to implement in a structured manner, with a plan in place and basic architecture/standards/principles identified. Actions are documented and executed with the goal of being repeatable, some reporting; level 3: established – implemented in a formal, structured and documented manner, with common processes, architecture, standards and guiding principles. There is regular reporting that informs operational decision-making, and escalation procedures are defined where appropriate; level 4: advanced – applied in a managed manner that is well understood and accepted by key internal and/or external stakeholders, with structured and actionable reporting informing strategic decision-making; and level 5: optimized – applied in a manner that delivers continuous improvement, with a capacity to apply innovative/creative approaches that address future needs and that can adapt to rapidly changing circumstances in real time. Widespread understanding of the importance of its successful application, with performance towards this goal included in all key internal stakeholders' performance evaluation.

to collaborate and share resources at the duty station and/or country level. Coordination of the application of the system-wide policy at the country level occurs through the United Nations country team, where present, or through the relevant United Nations system-wide coordination forum (A/76/607, para. 8). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, in integrated field settings, the missions took a primary role in coordinating organizational resilience; and in non-integrated settings, or where field missions were not present, that role rested with the resident coordinator. Furthermore, United Nations system-wide coordination forums provided additional mechanisms for coordination in the seven core elements of the organizational resilience framework.

21. **The Advisory Committee reiterates its recommendation that the Secretary-General, as Chair of the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination, continue to strengthen organizational resilience management system coordination and planning functions across the system, in a holistic and harmonized manner and with the involvement of the host countries (see also A/73/775, para. 23).**

22. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was further informed that the United Nations Secretariat participated in the following High-level Committee on Management networks that were related to the organizational resilience management system: Inter-Agency Security Management Network; Human Resources; Finance and Budget; Digital and Technology; and Procurement. In addition, the Secretariat was actively engaged in the following projects and initiatives of the High-level Committee on Management that had a relationship with the organizational resilience management system: Azure Active Directory B2B Collaboration; collaborative procurement; common treasury services; the field group; the future of work; the occupation safety and health forum; the organizational resilience management system working group; the risk management task force; the sustainability management strategy; the United Nations disability inclusion strategy; and the United Nations information security special interest group. Moreover, the Secretariat participated in the United Nations Medical Directors' Network, the United Nations system-wide COVID-19 medevac mechanism and the First Line of Defence Task Force. **The Advisory Committee looks forward to receiving, in the context of the programme budget, a comprehensive list of all coordination mechanisms in which the Secretariat participates.**

23. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the Senior Emergency Policy Team, chaired by the Chef de Cabinet, served as the governing body of the organizational resilience management system at United Nations Headquarters and focused on the preparedness for emergencies of the United Nations system in New York. During a crisis, the Team provided leadership and strategic direction to the Crisis Operations Group, a working-level cross-disciplinary body chaired by the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security, and mobilized additional resources, as required, to expedite the crisis response. The Team was also guiding the planning of the next phase of the transition to the post-pandemic working environment.

24. In his report, the Secretary-General states that his management reform has had a positive impact on the organizational resilience management system in the Secretariat, as demonstrated by the Secretariat's response to the pandemic. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance focused on issuing and adapting policies in response to the pandemic, convening other United Nations systems organizations through CEB to ensure coherence and applying lessons learned. At the same time, the Department of Operational Support concentrated solely on the operationally intensive responses to the pandemic. The Committee requested, but did not receive, sufficiently clear and

detailed updated information on the redistribution of responsibilities between the two Departments vis-à-vis organizational resilience (see A/73/775, paras. 17–18). The Committee also notes that the information received had been previously presented to the General Assembly at its seventy-third session, and recalls that, at that time, the Assembly had requested the Secretary-General to clarify further the structure, roles and responsibilities of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance and the Department of Operational Support to ensure a full and effective response to critical situations (resolution 73/279 B, sect. I, para. 4).

25. **The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request that the Secretary-General, in his future reports, provide more comprehensive and clear information on the architecture of the organizational resilience management system, including on governance structures at different levels, division of responsibilities, reporting lines and accountability. Future reports of the Secretary-General should also include more detailed information on the various coordination mechanisms, including system-wide initiatives, related to organizational resilience, in which the United Nations Secretariat participates, including planned and undertaken activities, membership, interlinkages, expected results and any related costs.**

D. Special political missions

26. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that special political missions faced specific organizational resilience challenges. Unlike larger field settings, special political missions often had limited personnel with no dedicated or specialized expertise in organizational resilience management system and may rely on commercial providers for the security of their compounds, Internet connectivity, medical care and other services. The Committee was also informed that, in the second half of 2021, the resiliency of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, already tested by insecurity and the COVID-19 pandemic, had been further put to test owing to the severe worsening of the security situation. According to the Secretariat, that experience highlighted the importance of managing the footprint of missions under challenging security situations as well as the critical role of information technology infrastructure and United Nations cost-shared emergency health services.

27. The General Assembly, in paragraph 8 of section I of its resolution 73/279 B, requested the Secretary-General to improve the crisis management capabilities of special political missions. During the reporting period, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, in coordination with several Secretariat departments and other entities, has continued to provide policy and substantive guidance, facilitate coordination, and assist the review and update of contingency plans. Specific efforts included the establishment of a Field Support Group, in early 2020, for supporting and coordinating the crisis response in all field missions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, including special political missions, in the areas of safety and health, human resources, troop rotations, communications, supply chain and security. **The Advisory Committee stresses the need for sustained efforts, including in the post-pandemic environment, to strengthen organizational resilience in the field and improve the crisis management capabilities of special political missions. The Committee trusts that the Secretary-General will provide updated information in his next report, including on the measures taken, lessons learned and remaining challenges.**

E. Information and communications technology

28. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that, notwithstanding recent enhancements, many ICT systems continue to fall short of increased availability objectives (A/76/607, para. 62). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that several critical systems and the majority of applications with critical requirements did not meet the requisite level of operational resilience. Redundant servers, the development of disaster recovery plans, periodic disaster recovery tests and human and technical resources were needed. However, the amount of the necessary related investment remained to be determined. **The Advisory Committee is concerned that critical ICT systems and applications do not meet the required level of operational resilience and again emphasizes the importance of effective, secure and reliable ICT services, which are a critical enabler for the implementation of the Organization's mandates (see also A/75/7, para. VIII.62). The Committee reiterates its expectation that the comprehensive ICT plan to be presented to the General Assembly at its seventy-seventh session will clearly identify and justify the necessary requirements, along with costs and any anticipated efficiency gains. Furthermore, the Committee stresses the importance of providing consolidated, comprehensive, detailed, transparent and accurate information on ICT costs across all funding sources (see A/76/7, paras. VIII.62 and XI.19).**

F. Costs and global insurance

29. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that the costs of implementing the organizational resilience management system in the Secretariat amounts to $1,748,000 for the period 2019–2021, including $1,505,000 in staff costs and $212,000 in consultants (A/76/607, paras. 23–24).

   (a) The staff costs relate to staff time for awareness-raising, training and coordination of key elements of the organizational resilience management system. Most of the staff time spent at Headquarters was in support of the application of the resilience framework in the field (ibid., paras. 25–26). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, at Headquarters, 12 staff were working on coordination, training and awareness-raising activities, compared with between one and five staff with such roles in the offices away from Headquarters and the regional commissions. The Committee was also informed that some entities had raised the need to increase staff resources dedicated to necessary organizational resilience functions;

   (b) The amount of $212,000 was spent on consultancies focused on updating and exercising business continuity plans and training, including for mission staff (ibid., para. 27). Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that consultants were employed to provide highly specialized advice on specific elements of the organizational resilience management system.

30. **The Advisory Committee recalls the importance of relying, as much as possible, on internal expertise, and of building in-house capacity, including through sharing lessons learned and prioritizing training on organizational resilience matters from within existing resources (see for instance A/73/775, para. 12).**

31. The Advisory Committee requested, but did not receive, a table showing, by budget section, the Secretariat staff and non-staff resources dedicated to the organizational resilience management system. The Committee was instead informed that the costs of the contributions of various specialists (e.g., security, communications facilities and human resources), beyond coordination, training and staff-awareness activities, were charged to the respective entities and were not tracked. Similarly, the Committee requested, but did not receive, information on the

costs of ICT investments aimed at strengthening the organizational resilience of the system during the pandemic.

32. With respect to global insurance, the Secretary-General indicates in his report that, as requested by the General Assembly, the Secretary-General continued his efforts to secure sufficient property insurance coverage at a reasonable cost for all United Nations locations and risk exposures (A/76/607, para. 63). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, following the conclusion of eight requests for proposals, the Organization presently had contracts with four of the five major insurance brokers with the capability and global reach required by the United Nations scale and risk profile. The recently concluded request for proposal had also led to reductions in commissions, with decreases in the range of 2.0 to 9.25 per cent. The Committee requested, but did not receive, more detailed information on the amount of actual costs and savings.

33. **The Advisory Committee recalls that the General Assembly repeatedly requested a detailed accounting of the actual costs of the organizational resilience management system (see for instance resolutions 70/248 B, sect. II and 68/247 B, sect. III). The Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to present, in his future reports, a detailed accounting of the full costs of the activities that support the organizational resilience management system, including staff costs, ICT investments, training, exercises, consultancies and insurance, with a view to providing to the Assembly a consolidated overview of the overall cost of the system and any efficiencies achieved (see also A/73/775, para. 20, A/70/7/Add.41, para. 16; A/68/780, paras. 17–19, A/67/608, para. 23).**

G. Next steps

34. In his report, the Secretary-General states that, in the future, each organization and the United Nations system community at each duty station should mainstream the lessons learned and best practices into their management frameworks and reflect them in their post-pandemic planning to better anticipate and prepare for large-scale global crises (A/76/607, paras. 95 and 97). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the mainstreaming of lessons learned would fall under the responsibility of each Executive Head of the CEB member organizations as part of their process to incorporate, tailor and implement the organizational resilience policy into their organization's respective regulatory framework. The organizational resilience management system working group, which served as an interagency forum for exchanging information and best practices, could provide support in this endeavour. **The Advisory Committee stresses the importance of consolidating and applying the lessons learned during the pandemic, with a view to strengthening preparedness and organizational resilience for future emergencies and crises. The Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chair of CEB, to make further efforts towards a harmonized and prompt mainstreaming of those lessons learned across the United Nations system, and to provide an update thereon in the next report.**

IV. Conclusion

35. The action requested of the General Assembly is contained in paragraph 98 of the Secretary-General's report. **Subject to its observations and recommendations above, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly take note of the report of the Secretary-General.**

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