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Progress in the implementation of the organizational resilience management system

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to resolution [76/246](#) B, in which the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it a progress report on the implementation of the organizational resilience management system, including comprehensive information on the organizational response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic as an annex to the progress report, for consideration no later than at the first part of its resumed seventy-ninth session.

The General Assembly is requested to take note of the report.



I. Background

1. The United Nations organizational resilience management system was approved by the General Assembly in June 2013 for the United Nations Secretariat in its resolution 67/254 A. Subsequently, in November 2014, the system was endorsed by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) as the emergency management framework¹ for the member organizations of the United Nations system represented in CEB. The CEB policy on the organizational resilience management system² was revised in January 2021.
2. The present report covers the calendar years 2022 to 2024. At the request of the General Assembly in paragraph 6 of its resolution 76/246 B, it includes an annex providing comprehensive information on the organizational response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

II. Organizational resilience management system architecture

3. In paragraph 25 of its report A/76/7/Add.37, and endorsed by the General Assembly, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions recommended that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General, in his future reports on the organizational resilience management system, to 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.

4. In paragraph 17 of the organizational resilience management system policy, the governance structure is explained as follows:

The Chief Executives Board is the policy owner and can delegate the administration of the policy to any CEB member organization it sees fit. The Executive Heads of the CEB member organizations are responsible for incorporating [the] policy into their organization's respective regulatory framework, as applicable, tailoring it as may be needed and implementing it. At headquarters duty stations, they may delegate the responsibility for the implementation of this policy to any department/office they see fit, while at the regional and country levels, the application should be the responsibility of the Head of each United Nations system organization represented regionally and/or locally.

5. Paragraph 12 (b) of the organizational resilience management system policy stipulates that:

accountability for the implementation of the policy lies with Executive Heads of United Nations system organizations who, in coordination with senior management, ensure commitment, support and resource allocation for personnel mandated to apply the organizational resilience management system core elements and principles in their respective organizations. Those responsible for the core elements are in turn accountable for engaging in a holistic and harmonized approach, with integrated decision-making and coordination of activities.

¹ Not to be confused with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee emergency management framework, which is the global emergency response to save lives and protect people in humanitarian crisis.

² Available at <https://unsceb.org/policy-organizational-resilience-management-system>.

6. The core elements include:
 - (a) Crisis management;
 - (b) Safety and security of personnel (including visiting individuals), premises and assets;
 - (c) Crisis communications;
 - (d) Emergency medical support;
 - (e) Information and communications technology (ICT) resilience;
 - (f) Business continuity;
 - (g) Support to United Nations personnel and eligible family members.

7. Because disruptive events can take different forms, for example, from severe weather events to terrorist attacks to pandemics, there is typically no lead department or unit responsible for the organizational resilience management system overall but rather a multidisciplinary and multilayered governance structure that guides and monitors implementation of the system at each duty station, including crisis response and business continuity. One of the key performance indicators for the system is that a coordination structure for crisis management be defined and established at all necessary levels, with a senior-level official chairing the crisis management structure. Another indicator is the inclusion of all relevant United Nations entities present at a given duty station in the crisis management coordination and response. Each duty station is therefore expected to have a crisis management team chaired by a senior-level official, with representation from all United Nations system organizations with offices in that duty station.

8. Under the organizational resilience management system policy, the heads of all United Nations system organizations in the field are required to invest in resilience-building in their own organizations at the regional and local levels, while the coordination of the application of the policy for the entire United Nations system at the country level is carried out through the United Nations country team or through any other United Nations system-wide coordination forum at the managerial level.

9. The United Nations country team, by definition, is the main inter-agency mechanism in country for inter-agency coordination, coherence and decision-making. Even though the composition of United Nations country teams varies among duty stations as determined by the participation of United Nations system organizations in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework at the country level, most integrated political missions, regional commissions and offices away from Headquarters are members of the United Nations country teams.

10. Field missions are deployed in integrated or non-integrated settings with the United Nations country team. In integrated settings, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (or Head of Mission) serves as the designated official for security, while one of the deputy special representatives might be the resident coordinator and/or humanitarian coordinator. In non-integrated settings, or where field missions are not present, the resident coordinator is usually the designated official for security. This means that, in integrated settings, the missions play a primary role in coordinating the organizational resilience management system framework, whereas in non-integrated settings or where field missions are not present, it is the resident coordinator office.

III. Organizational resilience management system-related coordination mechanisms

11. In paragraph 5 of its resolution 76/246 B, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to provide in the present report a comprehensive list of all coordination mechanisms on the organizational resilience management system in which the United Nations Secretariat participates.

12. The United Nations Secretariat participates in the following High-level Committee on Management networks that are related to the organizational resilience management system: the Inter-Agency Security Management Network; the Human Resources Network; the Finance and Budget Network; the Digital and Technology Network; and the Procurement Network. In addition, the Secretariat is actively engaged in the following projects and initiatives of the High-level Committee on Management that have a relationship with the system: collaborative procurement; common treasury services; the field group; the Occupational Health and Safety Forum; the organizational resilience management system working group; the Risk Management Forum; the sustainability management strategy; the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy; and the Information Security Special Interest Group. The Secretariat also participates in the United Nations Medical Directors' Working Group.

IV. Costs of implementing the organizational resilience management system in the United Nations Secretariat

13. Tables 1 and 2 present the costs of implementing the organizational resilience management system in the United Nations Secretariat.

Table 1

Total costs of awareness-raising, training and coordination of the key areas

(Thousands of United States dollars)

Cost	2022			2023			2024			Total
	Headquarters	Offices away from Headquarters	Regional commissions	Headquarters	Offices away from Headquarters	Regional commissions	Headquarters	Offices away from Headquarters	Regional commissions	
Staff time (standard costs)	580	132	403	634	135	424	560	103	453	3 424
Travel cost ^a	11	7	42	12	8	64	5	2	51	201
Consultants	4	—	52	7	—	—	—	—	—	63
All other costs ^b	5	2	5	5	2	5	5	1	5	34
Total	600	140	501	658	144	493	569	106	509	3 723

^a Partially extrabudgetary funding.

^b Includes non-post resources associated with staff costs.

14. The costs shown in table 1 were incurred in the implementation of the organizational resilience management system in the United Nations Secretariat, including staff time, staff travel and consultancies to provide expert advice and facilitate emergency response learning exercises.

15. Most of the staff time spent at Headquarters was in support of the application of the organizational resilience management system in the field. That support was

provided by the programme officer responsible for the system in the Department of Peace Operations, the focal point in the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and staff of the Development Coordination Office and by the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance.

Operational costs

16. From 2022 to 2024, a total of \$264,211 was spent on staff travel (\$200,951) and consultancies (\$63,260). The travel was primarily related to training for mission staff, attendance of the organizational resilience management system focal points at an organizational resilience management system working group meeting in New York and travel by Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) staff to build capacity and support preparedness interventions in the organizational resilience management system core elements at its subregional offices. The consultancies were focused on updating and exercising the business continuity plans and related training, as well as training related to stress counselling and emergency medical response at ECA.

Table 2

Costs of information and communications technology investments in support of the organizational resilience management system

(Thousands of United States dollars)

	<i>Office of Information and Communications Technology</i>	<i>Department of Operational Support^a</i>	<i>Regional commissions</i>	<i>Offices away from Headquarters</i>	<i>Peacekeeping operations and special political missions</i>	<i>Total</i>
2022	2 567	3 932	3 008	3 634	26 877	40 018
2023	2 452	7 047	2 180	2 494	32 172	46 345
2024	5 641	3 128	2 177	1 422	20 683	33 051
Total	10 659	14 107	7 365	7 550	79 733	119 414

^a Regional Service Centre in Entebbe, Uganda, and United Nations Global Service Centre.

17. The costs shown in table 2 reflect ICT initiatives taken to ensure the availability of ICT resources and data and the effective continuation of ICT services at acceptable predefined levels following a service disruption or disruptive incident. These investments contributed to enabling the development, implementation and maintenance of disaster recovery plans, procedures and supporting systems and to business continuity.

V. Strengthening the organizational resilience management system in special political missions

18. The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs continued to support the application of the organizational resilience management system in the special political missions, including by offering, jointly with the Department of Peace Operations, annual training on the system to focal points in the field missions. The implementation of the framework advanced across special political missions despite challenges posed by difficult operating environments, variations in the geographical footprint and financial constraints imposed by the liquidity crisis, which required special political missions to prioritize allocation of funding towards the most critical activities. The system focal points continue to play an important role as liaison with key stakeholders in developing, operationalizing and maintaining contingency plans

and acting as facilitators and in-house advisers with respect to the application of the framework.

19. The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Department of Peace Operations, the Development Coordination Office and other stakeholders delivered field-focused crisis management training annually and facilitated tabletop exercises in the field. These efforts were aimed at streamlining and validating crisis management architecture at the respective duty stations.

VI. Organizational resilience management system working group

20. The United Nations system organizational resilience management system working group continued to meet regularly to share experiences, best practices and lessons learned. Discussion topics included: the COVID-19 experience; business continuity planning tools and software applications; resilience and preparedness strategies from a safety and security perspective; organizational resilience in field operations; crisis communications; ICT resilience; and an annual global risk outlook.

21. At the request of working group members, the Sustainability and Resilience Management Section of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, which coordinates the group, established a centralized online organizational resilience management system repository to consolidate and maintain relevant documentation in order to foster knowledge-sharing and collaboration among members. The repository provides access to policies, guidelines, templates, recordings and presentations of internal meetings by the working group across all elements of organizational resilience management. To date, more than 70 focal points across the United Nations system have access to more than 220 resources through the repository.

VII. Next steps in strengthening organizational resilience

22. Going forward, the organizations of the United Nations system will continue to strengthen the organizational resilience management system in their respective organizations, as well as collectively at each duty station. We will thereby strengthen our mandate delivery and support to Member States.

VIII. Action to be taken by the General Assembly

23. The General Assembly is requested to take note of the present report on progress in applying the principles of the organizational resilience management system in the United Nations system.

Annex

Organizational response to the COVID-19 pandemic

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution [76/246](#) B, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to provide comprehensive information on the organizational response to the COVID-19 pandemic as an annex to his next progress report on the organizational resilience management system. As recommended by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions in its related report ([A/76/7/Add.37](#)), and endorsed by the Assembly, the information provided in the present annex is focused on cross-cutting areas, including: conference servicing; information and communications technology (ICT); supply chain management, human resources management; occupational safety and health; United Nations system-wide initiatives and mechanisms put in place during the pandemic; and other related areas.

2. The United Nations Secretariat's response to the COVID-19 pandemic was guided by the organizational resilience management system. Starting in early 2020, crisis management teams were activated across duty stations to support cross-functional decision-making, facilitate a coherent response and develop robust return-to-work plans in full consideration of host Government policies, guidance from United Nations Headquarters and the World Health Organization (WHO), occupational safety and health policy, duty of care responsibilities and business continuity requirements. These teams were a critical success factor in crisis response, enabling quick decision-making and implementation across diverse functional areas. The teams also promoted open and regular communications, which instilled trust and confidence among the United Nations community and which has been identified as an essential lesson learned.

3. The COVID-19 pandemic posed unprecedented challenges, including in terms of the special arrangements required to rapidly finance related response activities. With very short lead times, the Office of Programme Planning, Finance and Budget put in place joint funding and reporting arrangements in coordination with other United Nations system organizations, dealt – in cooperation with the Office of Legal Affairs and the Department of Operational Support – with complicated legal issues such as the extraordinary liability clauses in commercial contracts for vaccines and established an internal cost-sharing mechanism to facilitate critical investments in ICT and software to support the transition to remote working arrangements across duty stations, as well as secure virtual and hybrid intergovernmental and staff meetings. The Office of Programme Planning, Finance and Budget provided detailed information to the General Assembly on the internal cost-sharing of these unforeseen requirements and developed complex structures in Umoja to monitor and report on the various business continuity measures supported through the mechanism while still complying with system controls and delegations of authority. A lesson learned from this experience is that, in future emergencies, there must be special arrangements in place, from the earliest stages, to rapidly fund the crisis response. It is important to highlight that any such arrangements would need to be adapted to meet the nature of each specific emergency.

II. Servicing of intergovernmental meetings

4. The pandemic and its related restrictions on in-person meetings had an immediate and direct impact on the implementation of the mandate of the Department

for General Assembly and Conference Management, which is to facilitate the orderly and effective conduct of intergovernmental deliberations.

5. When the COVID-19 lockdowns were implemented in the various duty stations, in-person meetings became impossible practically overnight, and the focus shifted immediately to ensuring the uninterrupted intergovernmental processes of the United Nations through business continuity measures. Specific steps taken included the preparation of options for conducting elections without a physical plenary meeting, which the General Assembly successfully implemented in its elections in June 2020 of the non-permanent members of the Security Council, of the members of the Economic and Social Council and of the President of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly. Subsequently, the Economic and Social Council held elections for a number of its subsidiary organs. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, in cooperation with the Office of Legal Affairs, also prepared options for remote electronic voting. By a recorded vote, the Assembly, on 13 November 2020, adopted a procedure for decision-making in the Assembly in the absence of an in-person meeting and decided that this procedure should apply strictly only under exceptional circumstances, when an in-person meeting of the Assembly was not possible for a prolonged period of time owing to concrete and ongoing risks to the safety and well-being of representatives of Member States and United Nations personnel.

6. Following the onset of the pandemic and in the light of the widespread lockdowns and the impossibility of holding in-person gatherings, informal meetings under the auspices of the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council and of subsidiary bodies were convened remotely without physical presence on an exceptional basis as a means of ensuring business continuity. Thereafter, virtual and hybrid meeting formats were used based on decisions of intergovernmental and expert bodies. However, as noted by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions in its first report on the proposed programme budget for 2023 ([A/77/7](#)) and whose observations were endorsed by the Assembly (resolution [77/262](#)), the provision of hybrid and virtual meetings outside business continuity requires a mandate from the Assembly, along with approved legal parameters and technical requirements (see also paras. 10–21 in the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences ([A/78/96](#))).

7. In terms of best practices and lessons learned, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management was able to ensure uninterrupted intergovernmental processes during the pandemic thanks to its long-standing commitment to leveraging modern technologies, which included further integration of tools to provide multilingual meetings and documentation services with other enterprise software systems, such as Umoja and Inspira. These tools, which are used, for example, across the conference-servicing duty stations in document processing and workflow management and in the assignment of interpretation work, continue to be further refined and sustainably maintained by a specialized team of computational linguists and experts on multilingual conference solutions, paving the way for further innovation, the provision of better and new services for Member States and improved transparency and accountability in conference management operations. Another important lesson learned in the introduction of business continuity measures in conference servicing (i.e. to shift to partial or fully remote meeting and production modalities) is that training and advance communications with clients are crucial to ensuring smooth transition and effective use of the tools made available for remote meetings and the effective conduct of such meetings.

III. Information and communications technology

8. In a short timespan in March 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak gave rise to the implementation of alternate working arrangements to restrict physical access to United Nations premises as the pandemic continued to spread globally, while offices were kept open virtually by migrating the workforce to a digital platform. Remote work was embraced as a means to continue mandate delivery and support Member States. The Organization continues to mainstream the lessons learned and best practices concerning the importance of resilient and sustainable network connectivity and of integrating related scenarios into the business continuity planning process.

9. The experience to date has been built on strategic investments in ICT infrastructure, systems and information security. The rapid move to remote working in many duty stations owing to COVID-19 starkly highlighted the criticality of ICT to the ability of the United Nations to deliver on its mandates and to communicate to both internal and global audiences during crises. Strategic decisions, including the global deployment of cloud-based email and collaboration tools to more than 56,000 users globally, completed in September 2019, and the move to cloud computing in general, were both timely and critical to enabling the Secretariat to transition to remote work during the peak of the pandemic period.

10. United Nations Headquarters in New York transitioned to remote working on 15 March 2020, except for those functions that could not be carried out outside of the premises, for example security and facilities management. Other duty stations had preceded or subsequently followed depending on local pandemic conditions and local public health requirements. The global statistics reflected in table 1 demonstrate how quickly the United Nations Secretariat workforce transitioned to remote work during the pandemic and validate the value of Member States' proactive investments in ICT.

Table 1
Global statistics for participation in virtual platforms

	<i>2 March 2020</i>	<i>20 March 2020</i>	<i>5 June 2020</i>
Number of participants in virtual meetings	635	20 565	28 014
Number of virtual online calls	496	9 184	16 844
Number of online virtual chats	22 000	168 000	296 152

11. Staff at most locations, levels and ages adopted the new ways of working relatively seamlessly provided that their functions could be performed remotely. The new working environment created more opportunities and contributed to addressing the demand for collaboration across the extended United Nations common system. As part of the adjustments to the restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the United Nations system, Member States and other trusted partners were able to collaborate through shared applications, information services and other ICT resources. For example, early in the COVID-19 crisis, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) was able to conduct a series of virtual town hall meetings with the United Nations community in Thailand using a virtual United Nations platform. These meetings included 31 United Nations entities. ESCAP also managed its COVID-19 communications by taking advantage of collaborative tools accessible to the wider United Nations audience. The United Nations ICT community created a digital environment where these types of protected and authenticated collaborations could take place both within the Organization and with other partners, stakeholders and interlocutors. These opportunities were enabled by the rapid digitization of documentation, the adoption of new ways of working and the

clear common need for collaboration. This may now seem normal but was novel at that time.

12. At the same time that United Nations entities required better methods of virtual collaboration, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council needed ICT support to function remotely, including to address challenges such as remote simultaneous interpretation. Supporting the ability of the United Nations to communicate globally through virtual meetings required capacity enhancements that were not available in March 2020. Immediate focus was required to strengthen ICT infrastructure and systems to deal with the changed environment. The model leveraged the conference room audiovisual systems and several virtual platforms. The number of virtual platforms increased from the Unite VC system alone in March 2020 to include WebEx, Microsoft Teams, Live Events and three remote simultaneous interpretation systems. As an illustration, in March 2020, the United Nations VTC system had a maximum global capacity of 400 connections simultaneously. Using in-house expertise, out-of-the-box approaches and investment in additional infrastructure, OICT was able to expeditiously expand the capacity of its videoconferencing systems in time for the seventy-fifth General Assembly and support the simultaneous participation of up to 1,000 participants in informal meetings related to the intergovernmental work of the United Nations, in support of Member States.

13. In addition, owing to distancing requirements, General Assembly and other intergovernmental meetings convened in person needed a completely new physical approach, necessitating careful planning and design, in view of the requirements for safety, security, health standards and physical distancing and compliance with evolving risk assessments. For this new approach, it was necessary to rebuild the infrastructure supporting physical conference room locations and repurpose these to facilitate virtual and hybrid meeting participation. Such changes, in turn, necessitated innovation and the repurposing of technologies to produce results in a manner that they were neither intended nor designed to perform. As a result, Office of Information and Communications Technology personnel developed new skill sets and processes to adapt to the challenges.

14. As an organization that must provide on-the-ground support and services to Member States, the United Nations could not conduct its work fully remotely on a permanent basis. However, it is clear that some lessons learned from remote working offer advantages in certain areas such as strengthening organizational resilience and accessibility. The Organization has adjusted its approach to hybrid work in the light of evolving circumstances and operational needs in its duty stations and entities and continues to examine lessons learned and make necessary adjustments to technology, facilities and processes as the needs of mandates may require.

15. In its report for the year ended 31 December 2020 ([A/76/5 \(Vol. I\)](#)), the Board of Auditors recommended that the Administration formulate a policy for the ICT support model to support the Organization in continuing to have staff work remotely and safely during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This recommendation is under implementation as part of the ICT strategy. In the same report, the Board also reiterated its recommendation that the Administration review the capital investment plan for the remaining period, reprioritize, identify and upgrade outdated systems, and establish a timeline for its completion, considering the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This recommendation has been implemented (see [A/78/536](#)).

IV. Supply chain management

16. At the onset of the pandemic, the Organization's newly established integrated supply chain faced its first major resilience test and demonstrated its ability to effectively support its client entities in sourcing and delivering the goods and services that were needed for them to stay and deliver on their mandates. The Office of Supply Chain Management of the Department of Operational Support quickly engaged with all clients and the business community from the outset and thus effectively mitigated and responded to the challenges. A supply chain impact analysis was conducted to guide missions with planning requirements and early identification of needs and stock replenishment to mitigate the impacts caused by border closures. The Global Service Centre played a key role, in particular in the delivery of strategic deployment stocks of personal protective equipment and newly sourced medical equipment and consumables.

17. The Office of Supply Chain Management drew on its medical expertise and logistics capacity to acquire and distribute personal protective equipment, medical equipment and consumables to the field. The intensive care capacity across all peacekeeping missions was doubled, and additional medical facilities were established within troop-contributing country units in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), with 12 additional high-dependency beds at each location. The Government of India provided additional specialist personnel for each. Civilian staff facilities were created in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the United Nations Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS), the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), and the Office of Supply Chain Management stocked them with intensive care ventilators, vital sign monitors, oxygen concentrators and oxygen generation plants.

18. In its audit of the support provided by the Department of Operational Support to supply chain management during the COVID-19 pandemic (report 2022/062), the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) found that "the Department of Operational Support provided effective support to entities in obtaining requirements to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, and its strategic decisions ensured timely availability of required goods and services". In response to the two recommendations contained in that audit, the Department has improved its data accuracy for strategic decision-making and is in the process of reflecting lessons learned in its business processes and guidance in order to strengthen the agility and emergency preparedness of the supply chain.

V. Human resources management

19. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that the Organization's regulatory framework is flexible enough to allow the Secretariat to be agile and efficient in the management of its human resources in a large-scale global crisis context. It also demonstrated that the division of responsibilities between the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance and the Department of Operational Support is working as intended in the management reform by allowing both policy and operational guidance underpinning decision-making to receive the necessary attention. The Administration leveraged the provisions contained in the applicable Staff Regulations and Rules and related policies and made temporary implementation adjustments where needed in view of the unprecedented circumstances. During the period spanning February 2020 to November 2021, the Office of Human Resources

of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, in consultation with the Office of Support Operations of the Department of Operational Support, developed and disseminated more than 50 documents throughout the Organization. These documents included administrative guidelines, guidance notes, policy guidelines, frequently asked questions and broadcast messages to support entities, managers and United Nations personnel to navigate the pandemic from a human resources perspective. Topics ranged from alternate working arrangements and flexible working arrangements, rest and recuperation, official travel, physical presence and return to work at premises to vaccination. In addition, the Department of Operational Support issued key human resources operational guidance in the areas of temporarily reducing the staffing footprint in vulnerable locations, the use of electronic signature and return to duty station or premises. These documents have been preserved in an electronic repository for future reference.

20. In view of the global nature of the crisis, coordination and collaboration within the United Nations common system was critical for an efficient and streamlined response and was enabled by several coordinating mechanisms, including the COVID-19 vaccination deployment working group (United Nations system-wide COVID-19 vaccination programme), the COVID-19 sub-working group on personnel well-being, the Human Resources Network of the High-Level Committee on Management and the New York standing committee on occupational safety and health. The Office of Human Resources of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance and the Office of Support Operations of the Department of Operational Support co-hosted coordination meetings with the broader human resources community, which met weekly in the early months of the crisis. Through these mechanisms, the United Nations Secretariat and other United Nations system organizations were able to rise to the challenge in a united and collaborative manner. The Office of Human Resources of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance had a lead role in coordinating the development and multiple revisions of the “Administrative guidelines for offices on the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak”, issued by the CEB Secretariat and applicable across the United Nations common system. These guidelines were developed to foster a harmonized approach to the most important aspects of administering staff members during the COVID-19 pandemic, while recognizing that local conditions and requirements might require further adaptations at the country level.

21. Given that the response to the pandemic required large-scale remote work, it put the Organization’s flexible working arrangements policy and practices to the test, demonstrating that they were fit for purpose to ensure business continuity during a complex and global crisis. The policy included a specific provision for alternate working arrangements, which allowed the Organization to request staff members to temporarily work from an alternate worksite, such as their homes, during the height of the pandemic and depending on the conditions at each duty station. This provision proved critical to ensuring continued mandate delivery and business continuity during the pandemic, while protecting the health and safety of United Nations personnel.

22. The experience of managing a global and complex critical crisis such as COVID-19 has prepared the Organization to respond with more agility and efficiency to future crises, in particular by testing the flexibility of the current regulatory framework, providing knowledge and tools to personnel and managers in navigating such circumstances and further enhancing internal routines for managing critical incidents. The knowledge of and experience with flexible working arrangements allowed managers to utilize telecommuting, when compatible with exigencies of service, to ensure business continuity, while protecting staff health and safety, in particular for health-sensitive groups, during this critical protracted incident. The COVID-19 pandemic galvanized greater awareness of the importance of mental

health and well-being in the workplace, a critical component of organizational resilience. From a policy perspective, mental health and well-being were safeguarded through several special measures to reduce unnecessary risks of exposure where staff members could manage symptoms of COVID-19 and other illnesses themselves without having to seek medical care, while at the same time alleviating pressure on hospitals and medical practitioners. An example was the successful negotiation with insurance providers for unlimited virtual and in-person access to licensed medical professionals around the world. This included access to mental health counselling support, in particular through increased global access to tele-counselling through insurance providers.

23. A review of survey results emphasized the mental health impact on personnel of human resources policies and practices. Key areas identified were workplace factors (e.g. flexible working conditions, job autonomy, workload, communication); the role of managers and leaders; and psychosocial support). Training was developed to support leaders and managers in creating a healthy working environment, and additional psychosocial support was made available.

24. The pandemic also required innovative approaches in the delivery of core human resources functions, and these innovations have had unforeseen and ongoing benefits. For example, the conversion of in-person to online learning has proved efficient in many cases, ensuring continuity and accessibility without compromising the quality of the training programmes. The Organization also incorporated virtual classes to deliver courses that were traditionally held in person, such as language classes. These virtual classes were successful and as a result were integrated as part of the offerings beyond the pandemic period. This shift has allowed for greater flexibility in scheduling, enabling participants to engage with the material at their own pace and convenience. It has also facilitated the incorporation of diverse multimedia resources and interactive elements, enhancing the overall learning experience and effectiveness. Moreover, the effort to deliver engaging online courses has significantly contributed to inclusion, allowing larger numbers of individuals globally to participate in programmes traditionally available only in large offices.

25. Key challenges experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic from a human resources perspective included managing a continually evolving and complex situation, striking a balance between adopting a United Nations common system approach while accounting for unique local contexts in the various duty stations and entities and accommodating diverse operational needs stemming from the various mandates. These challenges resulted in a variety of approaches depending on the conditions on the ground and the specific mandate of each organization. Such diversity of approaches was implemented intentionally as a measure that allowed the United Nations organizations to adapt dynamically.

26. There were varying degrees of knowledge and capacity to absorb and implement guidance provided during the COVID-19 response, revealing the importance of and need for continuous capacity-building and training across the Organization regarding respective policies and procedures. In this context, the Office of Human Resources of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance regularly engages with the broader human resources community on newly promulgated policies and other topical subjects, either through dedicated policy briefings or global monthly meetings co-hosted by the Office of Human Resources of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance and the Office of Support Operations of the Department of Operational Support.

27. OIOS, in an audit of the support provided by the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance and the Department of Operational Support to human resources management during the COVID-19 pandemic (report 2023/008),

found that “overall support provided to entities during the pandemic was effective”. The single related audit recommendation – to establish an internal crisis communications plan – has been implemented.

VI. Occupational safety and health

28. The Department of Operational Support, through its Division of Healthcare Management and Occupational Safety and Health, responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by providing technical guidance and training to the United Nations health workforce on outbreak management and response. A COVID-19 pandemic risk mitigation plan was developed in collaboration with the United Nations Medical Directors Network to provide United Nations personnel and managers with the information required to reduce COVID-19 transmission in United Nations duty stations. A first-of-its-kind virtual disease outbreak investigation and management practice was implemented to ensure continued provision of technical support to the United Nations health workforce, irrespective of various movement restrictions in place.

29. To deal directly with the pandemic on the ground, 108 healthcare workers were cleared to work in United Nations-owned equipment medical facilities, and 589 private providers were cleared to enhance contracted facilities. Dedicated terms of reference for healthcare workers were developed for the dedicated COVID-19 facilities. Twenty-two new COVID-19 facilities were opened during the pandemic. Virtual assessments of these facilities were carried out through Zoom and Teams to ensure compliance with WHO standards.

30. In response to the COVID-19 outbreaks among uniformed personnel from troop-contributing countries, COVID-19 transitional measures for the prevention of COVID-19 infections among uniformed personnel in United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions were developed and implemented.

31. In its audit of the support provided by the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance and the Department of Operational Support to human resources management during the COVID-19 pandemic (report 2023/008), OIOS found that “the dedicated medical advisory and support team in the Division of Healthcare Management and Occupational Safety and Health helped strengthen field medical capacities and ensured the United Nations medical response was successful. The Division took immediate and effective actions to address challenges to respond to COVID-19 and sustain operations.”

32. Building on this success and as part of the response to lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, a public health surveillance project is currently being piloted in four peacekeeping operations to address the problems caused by a lack of access to real-time disease outbreak notifications and the trend of disease outbreaks among United Nations personnel in the duty stations and missions. In addition, several sets of disease-specific risk mitigation plans have been developed to ensure that all required outbreak response and management information is available to United Nations personnel and managers when required.

33. In addition to this centrally provided medical support and in view of the shortage of critical care beds in the East Africa region and globally, the United Nations Office at Nairobi partnered with The Nairobi Hospital in establishing a 100-bed COVID-19 field hospital, supported by the host Government, which enabled a rapid deployment from November 2020 and a reopening of Kenyan borders to COVID-19 medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) patients into the country. It provided the most-used MEDEVAC destination for the United Nations and United Nations partners locally

and globally, saving lives and contributing significantly to the ability of the United Nations to stay and operate in the field. The facility remains in a readiness mode with a skeleton staff and can be reopened in the future in case of need. The building and equipping of the COVID-19 field hospital was separately funded by the United Nations System-Wide Task Force on Medical Evacuations in Response to COVID-19.

34. In its reports for the year ended 31 December 2020 ([A/76/5 \(Vol. I\)](#)) and for the 12-month period from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020 ([A/75/5 \(Vol. II\)](#)), the Board of Auditors made four recommendations to strengthen occupational safety and health. The Administration has implemented all of them by (a) establishing the broad governance structure for occupational safety and health and testing the terms of reference and related structures; (b) establishing a technical working group on workplace accommodation and support to staff affected by a post-viral or similar syndrome; (c) optimizing health incident collection, analysis, response and reporting procedures; and (d) progressively implementing an occupational safety and health management system.

VII. Safety and security

35. The COVID-19 pandemic posed challenges to maintaining continuous security coverage at headquarters locations (New York Headquarters, offices away from Headquarters and regional commissions), as the security personnel had to adjust to the new, physically distanced modalities of operation. The pandemic also limited capacity-building opportunities for the security workforce owing to the suspension of in-person training, and it reduced operational oversight by the Department of Safety and Security by curtailing security assessment visits to field duty stations, which are critical to assessing local security needs and better understanding operational security requirements. The Department of Safety and Security successfully addressed these challenges, thereby enabling the continuation of United Nations system operations and the protection of United Nations personnel.

36. The timely establishment of crisis management teams in each duty station meant that the Department could ensure an effective response and management of pandemic-related safety issues. By promptly adopting business continuity measures, for example through virtual conferences and updated work modalities, the Department reduced the disruption to operations. Country-specific COVID-19 security risk management processes enabled the Department to assess existing security threats and any newly emerging security implications related to COVID-19. The Department also provided stress counselling sessions and related briefings to United Nations personnel. In addition, by coordinating with immigration officials and other host country authorities, the Department provided critical support to staff travelling for health and other operational reasons who encountered border controls and restrictions on movement.

37. Because the delivery of face-to-face training was initially affected by the travel restrictions resulting from the pandemic, the Department transitioned from in-person mandatory security briefings to mandatory online briefings to designated officials in order to strengthen their capacity as security decision makers to address security challenges at the field level. The Department developed pandemic-related guidance for security trainers to complement existing medical and safety guidance. The guidance enabled the trainers and their managers to review their training needs, identify risks and redesign their security training.

VIII. Support to the field

38. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic presented unique challenges to the resilience of the Secretariat, both at Headquarters locations and in United Nations field missions deployed around the world. In particular, the impact on remote locations with limited medical access, as well as the Organization's reliance on international movement of personnel and supplies, presented heightened risks to the continuity of operations and the safety of personnel and surrounding communities.

39. To ensure a coordinated response to the crisis generated by the pandemic, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Operational Support established the Field Support Group, which was widely seen as a necessary mechanism to coordinate support for the COVID-19 response across the lead departments, accelerating problem-solving and responsiveness to concerns and challenges as they emerged in field missions. The co-facilitation of the Field Support Group by the Department of Operational Support, the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, with input from integrated sub-working groups, and the committed engagement of the relevant Under-Secretaries-General in interactions with field missions, were important enablers not only in providing coordinated support but also in sending a strong signal that the response was coordinated across operational priorities and available support mechanisms.

40. Bringing together the support expertise of the Department of Operational Support and the mandate and operations expertise of the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs proved an effective model for addressing priority and time-sensitive support challenges. The inclusion of medical and other operational support functions from the Department of Operational Support ensured that the response was informed and guided by operations imperatives. This included the integration of medical considerations and guidance from WHO into support and guidance to field missions and direct engagement between senior civilian and uniformed mission leadership and the medical and other support capacities in the Department of Operational Support.

41. A significant lesson learned from the COVID-19 response was the need to limit emergency guidance to field missions to key requirements that can be effectively implemented. At times, it was found that guidance was not being effectively implemented owing to information overload and confusion about how to respond to the pandemic as it rapidly evolved. As a result, it was concluded that short and concise checklists and frequently asked questions were found most useful, especially when accompanied by cross-mission exchanges and direct engagement with subject matter experts at Headquarters.

42. Another lesson and good practice was the response to challenges facing uniformed personnel through the Secretary-General's transitional measures for uniformed personnel rotations in a COVID-19 environment, developed by the cross-departmental troop and police rotations sub-group to address the need for quarantine and other special measures to minimize the risk of infection among and by rotating personnel to and from field missions. Targeted COVID-19 guidance, such as the emergency rotation guidance and predeployment checklists, allowed troop- and police-contributing countries to better prepare uniformed personnel for the specific requirements for deployment during the pandemic. Troop- and police-contributing countries equally appreciated the opportunity to engage in learning opportunities, such as through a midterm review of the partial resumption of uniformed rotations.

43. A particularly important outcome of the work of the Field Support Group was the role of shared situational data in ensuring a coordinated, integrated and informed

response. The establishment of an integrated data hub within the Field Support Group allowed for a more integrated and data-driven crisis response and for the Field Support Group to play a strong role in monitoring the impact of COVID-19 and identifying support requirements across missions. The hub collected and analysed data regarding mission risk profiles, vaccination progress, medical facilities and troop rotations. These efforts highlighted the need to put in place information-sharing agreements and mechanisms at the outset, to allow the crisis cell to leverage all available information and minimize any additional workload for field missions.

IX. Role of the Development Coordination Office and resident coordinator system

44. The COVID-19 response highlighted the importance of the Development Coordination Office, including in streamlining the information flow to the field and strengthening the provision of support to resident coordinators. Since its establishment in 2019, the Development Coordination Office, with the role of supporting all 132 resident coordinator offices, has advanced in the implementation of the organizational resilience management system within the resident coordinator system and created opportunities for synergies between the United Nations Secretariat and United Nations country teams. These efforts proved beneficial during the COVID-19 pandemic.

45. The Development Coordination Office maintains a central repository of resident coordinator office contingency plans and provides support to ensure that they are up to date and in line with the organizational resilience management system policy. Throughout most of 2020 and 2021, the Development Coordination Office facilitated information flow on relevant COVID-19 preparedness and response initiatives with impact on the organizational resilience management system implementation across the United Nations system. In addition, relevant communication practices were developed in response to the pandemic and other emergencies, emphasizing the importance of timely, clear and consistent communications with personnel.

46. To provide emergency support during the pandemic, the Development Coordination Office established a crisis management team comprising senior Development Coordination Office crisis managers who were deployed in each Development Coordination Office region to address specific and urgent operational requirements.

47. In partnership with the Department of Operational Support, resident coordinator offices in select locations facilitated negotiations with Governments and hospitals to create agreements on regional MEDEVAC hubs to receive COVID-19 patients from across the United Nations system, as part of the United Nations MEDEVAC Task Force (see paras. 53 and 54 and table 2.)

48. The Development Coordination Office continues to provide direct support and advice to operations management teams at the country level to develop business operations strategies aligned with core elements of the organizational resilience management system, including the creation of inter-agency contingency plans encompassing components such as ICT resilience, support to staff members and dependants, crisis management and collaboration on medical support.

X. United Nations system-wide initiatives and mechanisms put in place during the pandemic

49. The following large-scale, complex initiatives were developed and implemented in response to the pandemic and were instrumental to the ability of the United Nations system to protect its staff and deliver on its mandates throughout the crisis.

A. Medical evacuation mechanism, first line of defence, vaccination programme and surge capacity

50. To ensure that personnel and all dependants deemed eligible by the Organization had access to high-quality and reliable health services during the pandemic in situations where healthcare systems were at risk of being overwhelmed, expenditure for medical evacuations, support through United Nations system clinics (first line of defence) and COVID-19 vaccinations was cost-shared with other United Nations system organizations. Temporary surge capacity was also facilitated to alleviate additional workload associated with COVID-19 funded by the Secretariat.

51. For medical evacuation, the United Nations Secretariat's contribution was apportioned on the basis of a total population of 224,515, recovering approximately 30 per cent from regular budget entities and 70 per cent from peacekeeping missions. However, for the first line of defence (treatment at clinics, testing, etc.), the United Nations contribution was cost-shared among the regular budget entities only, as generally peacekeeping missions have existing medical capacity to provide first-line-of-defence services within the mission.

52. As part of the United Nations system-wide COVID-19 response, the Secretariat also made provisions for cost-sharing with United Nations system organizations the costs of vaccines for personnel where local vaccination programmes would not be available. As with MEDEVAC and the first line of defence, the apportionment of the cost of the vaccination programme to the individual United Nations system organizations was calculated on the basis of a per capita charge and by adopting an insurance scheme approach of upfront charging without reference to the actual usage, which would be extremely difficult to anticipate in a highly volatile situation.

B. Medical evacuation mechanism

53. The success of the MEDEVAC mechanism in enabling the United Nations system and partner personnel to stay and deliver on its mandates by providing assurance that they would receive a high level of treatment for COVID-19 not available in their duty locations serves as a unique example of a One UN approach. The United Nations system came together under the auspices of a task force coordinated by the Department of Operational Support, taking collective, concerted action during a time of global border closures and limited availability of intensive care treatment for COVID-19 patients. A critical enabler for the successful evacuation of 356 critically ill patients from more than 60 countries lay in leveraging the competitive advantages of the three key implementing partners, namely the United Nations Secretariat, WHO and the World Food Programme (WFP). The mechanism could not have been activated and operationalized without the expeditious agreement by the largest United Nations organizations to fund it on a cost-share basis. Table 2 provides a breakdown of final MEDEVAC expenditures by cost-share participant.

54. The MEDEVAC mechanism was successfully downsized and closed in line with receding need for the support that it provided. The experience and lessons identified by the Organization should be drawn upon to inform responses to any similar future emergency.

Table 2
Breakdown of final medical evacuation expenditures by cost-share participant

<i>Entity</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Final expenditure (United States dollars)</i>
United Nations Secretariat	47.78	42 878 437
World Food Programme	12.36	11 093 223
United Nations Children's Fund	8.03	7 206 346
United Nations Development Programme	5.52	4 952 369
World Bank	5.13	4 604 017
World Health Organization	4.93	4 426 212
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	3.98	3 574 812
International Organization for Migration	3.57	3 204 497
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	2.35	2 109 594
United Nations Office for Project Services	2.22	1 995 386
United Nations Population Fund	1.54	1 379 467
International Finance Corporation	1.17	1 052 505
International Labour Organization	0.74	665 192
United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)	0.66	596 439
Subtotal	100.00	89 738 496
Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19		42 502 938
Total		132 241 434

C. First line of defence

55. In September 2020, an inter-agency first line of defence task force, chaired by the Development Coordination Office, was established. This mechanism coordinated the technical review and decision-making of United Nations organizations to strengthen the COVID-19 testing of United Nations personnel and completed first line of defence risk assessments for United Nations presences in 151 countries and territories. It also provided tailored technical advice to countries rated with higher first line of defence risks. The task force comprised the Development Coordination Office (chair), the Department of Operational Support, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Organization for Migration, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme, UNHCR, the United Nations Office for Project Services, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Bank, WFP and WHO. The members met on a weekly basis to discuss and approve, through the United Nations Medical Directors Network, the allocation of COVID-19 home care packages to the United Nations country teams.

D. Vaccination programme

56. At the beginning of 2021, when the first vaccines received WHO emergency use listing for protection against severe illness and death from COVID-19, a mechanism was required to coordinate sourcing, distribution and administration of the vaccine to United Nations personnel in those locations where national vaccination programmes

were unable to assist. The Office of Supply Chain Management established and led the United Nations system-wide COVID-19 Vaccination Programme, which brought together 32 United Nations system entities to support their respective staff, dependants and partners. The Programme leveraged the resident coordinator system, the Office's deep procurement expertise and the United Nations Medical Directors Network to source, transport and administer vaccines to United Nations country teams throughout the world. The Office established logistics, warehousing and vaccine contracts with vendors under intense timelines and competition. Overall, the programme distributed more than 470,000 doses of vaccine along with needles and syringes to United Nations uniformed and civilian personnel in 73 countries. For vaccinations of uniformed personnel, the Office of Supply Chain Management supported an informal group of friends convened in January 2021 to establish the way forward in permissible vaccines, in-theatre vaccinations, predeployment vaccinations and applicable legislative processes. A total of 38 Member States participated in the group of friends effort.

57. Supporting this system-wide approach, the Office of Supply Chain Management was able to lead the development, training and support for a system-wide vaccination platform. The platform provided a transparent mechanism for scheduling appointments, prioritizing vaccine candidates, maintaining the confidentiality and sequestration of vaccination records across the 32 participating entities and documented the administration of vaccine doses and certificates issued. The programme remained in effect until mid-2023, when supply of vaccines through the programme was no longer needed, as general availability was sufficient for those who needed vaccines. Although the mechanism has since been closed down, the standard operating procedures, eligibility determinations, priority criteria, funding models and legal arrangements could all serve as templates in future emergencies.

58. The vaccination programme was financed within the initial envelope of \$6 million, which was funded through a cost-share among the 14 United Nations system organizations with the largest personnel footprints. Funding for the vaccination programme was a balance from the first line of defence task force.

59. A lesson learned from the COVID-19 experience, which informed a recommendation by the Board of Auditors in its report for the fiscal year ended 31 December 2021 ([A/77/5 \(Vol. I\)](#)), was to use a needs-based modality for the allocation and shipment of vaccines rather than centrally estimating demand, in order to avoid waste or failure to cover the eligible United Nations personnel. The Administration implemented this recommendation during the pandemic and is currently finalizing a report for participating entities that includes a final accounting for all vaccines through the vaccination programme, as recommended by the Board of Auditors.
