

Annex III

Updated terms of reference of the High-level Committee on Programmes¹

In 2021, against the backdrop of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations and the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General on Our Common Agenda mandated by the General Assembly in that context,² the twentieth year (in 2020) of work of the High-level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), the decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and the United Nations system policy responses for recovering better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, HLCP reflected on its operating modalities and future work at its forty-first session.

With respect to the operating modalities of HLCP, members considered the Committee's overall character, policy coherence, think tank functions and working methods; the processes for developing HLCP products and their implementation, impact and related accountability provisions; and the role of HLCP in the United Nations system's inter-agency space, including with respect to coordination with the United Nations Sustainable Development Group,³ following the 2020 review of the working arrangements of the Group.

The below terms of reference and operating modalities have been updated in the light of the HLCP discussion and its conclusions (see [CEB/2021/4](#)). They can be reviewed by the Committee or CEB at any time, as required, and adjusted as determined by HLCP itself or by CEB.

1. HLCP is responsible to CEB for fostering coherence, cooperation and coordination on policy and programme dimensions of strategic issues for the United Nations system.

2. The HLCP Chair will be appointed by the Chair of CEB to serve a two-year term, which can be renewed. If deemed necessary by the HLCP Chair, the Chair of CEB can also appoint an HLCP Vice-Chair to support the execution of his or her responsibilities.

3. HLCP is composed of senior staff of CEB member organizations⁴ responsible for policy, programme planning and development authorized by their executive heads to take decisions on their behalf. HLCP will meet twice a year in

¹ The terms of reference ([CEB/2008/6](#), annex III) and operating modalities of the High-level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) (contained in conference room paper CEB/2008/HLCP-XV/CRP.1/Rev.1, paras. 11–31) were last updated in 2008 in the light of a 2007 review by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) of its role and functioning that led to the establishment of three pillars to support the work of HLCP, the High-level Committee on Management and the United Nations Development Group, with an overall aim of achieving an integrated approach to the challenges facing the United Nations system. The previous version of the HLCP terms of reference (see [CEB/2002/4](#), annex IV, appendix) was also referenced by the HLCP secretariat in the course of the 2021 review.

² General Assembly resolution [75/1](#), para. 20.

³ In 2017, CEB decided to delink the United Nations Development Group from the CEB machinery (see [CEB/2017/2](#), para. 25), reversing the above-noted 2007 decision by the Board to add it as a third pillar. Subsequently, the United Nations Development Group evolved into the United Nations Sustainable Development Group.

⁴ Including United Nations entities represented at CEB sessions as part of the delegation of the Secretary-General.

regular session and will hold other meetings, including through virtual means, on an as-needed basis.

4. HLCP will serve two key functions, namely:

(a) Fostering system-wide policy coherence and coordination in response to intergovernmental mandates, with a view to:

(i) Supporting coherent and coordinated programme development and implementation, and maximizing the impact of the United Nations system in support of the implementation of and follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the outcomes of other United Nations conferences and summits, as well as other intergovernmental mandates;

(ii) Supporting the integrated and coordinated preparation of major United Nations conferences and summits;

(b) Scanning for and identifying emerging programme issues requiring a system-wide response, with a view to:

(i) Developing common strategies, policy approaches, methodologies and tools to respond to demands for strengthened system-wide policy coherence and coordination, in line with intergovernmental mandates;

(ii) Advising CEB on matters that require its priority attention in the timely elaboration of strategies and policies in response to emerging issues and challenges facing the United Nations system;

(iii) Serving as a forum for collective strategic thinking, inter-agency dialogue, consultations, coordination and knowledge-sharing on policy development and programming on matters of system-wide concern to enhance transparency, develop consensus and learn and apply proven practices and policies.

5. In pursuing the above and as elaborated in the appended operating modalities, HLCP will:

(a) Seek to achieve a balance between directed think tank discussions in support of CEB and the creation of tangible products that respond to demands for strengthened system-wide policy coherence and coordination;

(b) Address cross-cutting, cross-pillar and multisectoral issues, giving special attention to policy areas not already addressed in other contexts or forums;

(c) Utilize efficient and effective working arrangements to address policy themes under a lead entity approach;

(d) Collaborate with and leverage the expertise that resides in thematic, operational and other inter-agency bodies while maintaining due regard for the respective roles and mandates of each mechanism;

(e) Engage with external stakeholders, as appropriate.

6. In the exercise of these functions, HLCP will operate within the framework of the constituent instruments of member organizations and the relationship agreements between the United Nations and the specialized agencies and Bretton Woods institutions.

Appendix

Operating modalities of the High-level Committee on Programmes

I. Membership

1. As noted in its terms of reference, the High-level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) is composed of senior staff of United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) member organizations¹ responsible for policy, programme planning and development authorized by their executive heads to take decisions on their behalf. Such individuals will be called “members”. In addition, the HLCP Chair may wish to confer “participant” status on representatives of other United Nations system entities. Normally, there should be one representative from each member or participant organization; representatives may be accompanied by an organizational expert on an as-needed basis for substantive presentation and discussion. The HLCP Chair may also choose to invite “guests” to engage on a specific agenda item or items at a given meeting.

2. Representatives will maintain a strong system-wide perspective when engaging in HLCP, brief their senior leadership and contribute to the preparation of their entity’s principal for the subsequent CEB session, facilitate the engagement of technical experts from their organizations in HLCP workstreams and promote the visibility and uptake of HLCP products within their entities.

II. Agenda-setting

3. HLCP will be strategic in addressing issues for which it is the appropriate inter-agency coordination mechanism. In consideration of this, HLCP should focus on the results it is best placed to achieve, given its mandate. Policy issues most appropriate for the agenda of HLCP are those that are relevant across the United Nations system, demand-driven, forward-looking, not duplicative of existing initiatives and responsive to feedback from the United Nations system, including at the country level.

4. Prior to each Committee meeting and bearing in mind the need to maintain agility to absorb new and emerging issues, the HLCP secretariat, under the guidance of the HLCP Chair (and Vice-Chair) and in consultation with the Committee, will prepare a provisional agenda taking into account the following:

(a) CEB and HLCP conclusions and decisions, including on specific items referred to the Committee, bearing in mind the role of HLCP in preparing for and following up on CEB discussions and decisions on programme and policy matters;

(b) Issues emerging as a result of intergovernmental mandates directed to CEB and its mechanisms;

(c) Priorities established by the Chair of CEB;

(d) Proposals from HLCP members and participants;

(e) Referral of policy dimensions of issues under consideration by other inter-agency coordination bodies (including the United Nations Sustainable Development Group);

¹ Including United Nations entities represented at United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination sessions as part of the delegation of the Secretary-General.

(f) Identification of issues to be addressed in tandem with the High-level Committee on Management (HLCM).

5. The HLCP secretariat will ensure alignment and coordination of work priorities and processes with HLCM to ensure proper sequencing of issues and maximize complementarities and synergy between the CEB structures in support of greater system-wide coherence in realizing intergovernmental mandates. In order to ensure that products developed by HLCP aid country-level operations, as appropriate, the HLCP secretariat will also support coordination between HLCP and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, in line with their respective mandates, including through collaboration with the Development Coordination Office. Further, to bring broader policy perspectives, the HLCP secretariat will identify opportunities to take up the policy dimensions of issues under consideration by thematic, operational and other inter-agency bodies in a mutually beneficial manner, while maintaining due regard for the respective roles and mandates of each mechanism.

III. Workstream management

6. Most agenda items will typically be addressed through a dedicated workstream. As indicated in the terms of reference, HLCP will utilize efficient and effective working arrangements such as task forces, working groups and other ad hoc mechanisms that engage HLCP members, as well as technical experts from across the system, to address policy themes. These mechanisms will be inclusive, time-bound and output-oriented. Moreover, HLCP may identify opportunities to incubate less structured thematic communities of practice among United Nations system practitioners.

7. Virtual communication methods (e.g. videoconferencing, online collaboration platforms and email) will generally be used to advance individual workstreams between sessions.

8. Lead entities will be identified to manage each workstream. Their responsibility vis-à-vis individual workstreams includes, but is not restricted to, the mapping of activities undertaken by organizations of the system, the holding of consultations under their aegis to develop system-wide approaches and recommendations and the preparation of documentation for meetings of HLCP and, as required, for CEB. The lead entities are expected to support the workstream for which they are responsible throughout its life cycle, including by guiding and shepherding implementation by the United Nations system after the conclusion of the HLCP process, where applicable, and marshalling – individually and collectively – adequate support, including capacity and resources, to ensure its success.

9. Lead entities and members contributing to HLCP workstreams are expected to conduct inclusive and effective preparatory processes, integrating features that increase the likelihood of implementation and the impact of the final products, including by delineating responsibilities among entities when feasible. The HLCP secretariat will help to guide each individual process, as appropriate, in accordance with the product's unique purpose and nature.

10. HLCP may engage external (non-United Nations system) actors and outside experts, including representatives of government, civil society, academia, youth and the private sector, as well as traditionally marginalized and vulnerable groups, as appropriate, on an ad hoc basis when members deem it useful to advance particular workstreams.

11. HLCP may receive periodic updates on and review the status of implementation of products produced by workstreams under its auspices, focusing primarily on

solutions to unblock bottlenecks. Such updates may, but are not required to, be associated with a regular session. The HLCP secretariat will facilitate light follow-up processes upon the request of the lead entities. For purely informational updates, lead entities are encouraged to utilize the Committee's online collaboration platform.

IV. Organization of meetings

12. HLCP will hold two regular sessions per year, with dates agreed at the conclusion of the prior session. Dates should be established in tandem with the setting of dates for CEB sessions, with HLCP meeting no less than four weeks prior to CEB sessions.

13. If and when needed, HLCP may hold ad hoc meetings between sessions to address specific, time-sensitive issues. Virtual meeting modalities (e.g. videoconference, teleconference or online meeting platforms) may be utilized. Where a face-to-face intersessional meeting is required, it should be organized around other meetings (such as meetings of the General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council) during which a large number of members will be on site.

14. HLCP meetings will proceed according to the annotated agenda (see sect. V). The Chair (or Vice-Chair) will normally moderate the discussion for each item, with support from the HLCP Secretary, but arrangements may be made for guest moderators.

15. For each item, the lead entities will present the related documentation, in an intervention limited to five minutes. It is customary to hold an open discussion among members before concluding an item. Speakers taking the floor during the discussion should address topics from a system-wide perspective and avoid extensive accounts of their organization's activities.

16. In concluding each item, the Chair (or Vice-Chair) should summarize the discussion, making clear which decisions have been taken and which are being referred to CEB, as well as the process for taking forward and implementing the decisions.

17. The Committee should exercise strict discipline in keeping to a minimum information items and "other matters" that could be addressed through other means, including email and online collaboration platforms.

18. After each regular session, the HLCP secretariat will prepare a concise report summarizing the discussion and conclusions for each agenda item for review by the Committee and onward transmission to CEB for endorsement.

V. Meeting documentation

19. In consultation with the lead entities concerned, the HLCP secretariat will prepare a concise and precise annotated agenda for each meeting. Actions proposed for the consideration of HLCP will be highlighted under each agenda item.

20. Documentation supporting the agenda items is generally prepared under the lead entity arrangement. All documents should be succinct and tailored for United Nations system senior managers. Documents should contain an executive summary (of up to three paragraphs), clearly identify the issues for discussion and present specific recommendations for the consideration of HLCP. Charts, infographics and other visualizations may be used in the body of the document to convey detailed or complex information. Lead entities must ensure that draft documents are prepared in full consultation with all relevant organizations prior to their finalization.

21. Documentation prepared for meetings of HLCP should adhere to length guidelines. Documents for decision or action (e.g. concept notes, background papers and progress reports) should be no more than five pages in length (not counting any annexes). Products for endorsement by CEB should be as succinct as possible, but are not subject to specific restrictions.

22. The HLCP secretariat will circulate all documentation to HLCP members and participants no later than two weeks before the meeting. To facilitate their timely dissemination, drafts of meeting documents should ideally be submitted to the HLCP secretariat four weeks before the meeting for processing and to inform the finalization of the annotated agenda. If required, reference information may also be submitted for circulation.
