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Annual overview report of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination for 2021

Summary

In 2021, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and its subsidiary bodies directed their efforts to strengthening their collective capacities and engagement in the world's response to and recovery from the unprecedented impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

Programmatic work included consideration of the root causes of conflict and of the potential impact that metrics beyond gross domestic product (GDP) can have in tracking and achieving not only an equitable, inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic but also the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Board members continued to focus their attention on inequalities, as well as on the ethics of artificial intelligence, strategic foresight and related capacity-building.

The CEB members also considered ways to strengthen the United Nations system's impact on biodiversity and on sustainability management strategies, leading to the endorsement of a common approach on integrating biodiversity and nature-based solutions for sustainable development into the policy and programme planning and delivery of the United Nations; and of a framework for environmental and social sustainability for all functions of the United Nations, i.e. phase II (towards leadership in environmental and social sustainability) of the Strategy for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System, 2020–2030 ([CEB/2021/2/Add.1](#)).

In the area of institutional management coordination, the Board's work focused on business continuity and fostering a safe and inclusive working environment across the United Nations system.



Furthermore, it continued to uphold a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment, while strengthening victim-centred prevention and response efforts across organizations, including through the completion of its work on advancing a common understanding of a victim-centred approach to sexual harassment within the organizations of the United Nations and the issuance of the investigators' manual for the investigation of sexual harassment complaints.

In the report, the Board also highlights coordination activities between CEB and other jointly financed bodies.

I. Introduction

1. Pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution [2008 \(LX\)](#), the present report provides an overview of the annual work of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). It is prepared in response to the request by the General Assembly, in paragraph 4 (b) of its resolution [64/289](#) on system-wide coherence, to include information on the work of the Board in its annual overview report to the Economic and Social Council, which is also considered by the Committee for Programme and Coordination.
2. The report includes highlights of the major activities carried out in 2021 under the auspices of CEB. As a coordinating body, CEB and its subsidiary mechanisms, the High-Level Committee on Management and the High-Level Committee on Programmes, foster management and policy coherence to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of United Nations system activities. The Board's work conforms to intergovernmental mandates and supports the priorities of Member States.
3. During 2021, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continued to have an impact on both the mode of the sessions of CEB and its high-level mechanisms – changing from in-person to virtual – as well as their agendas.

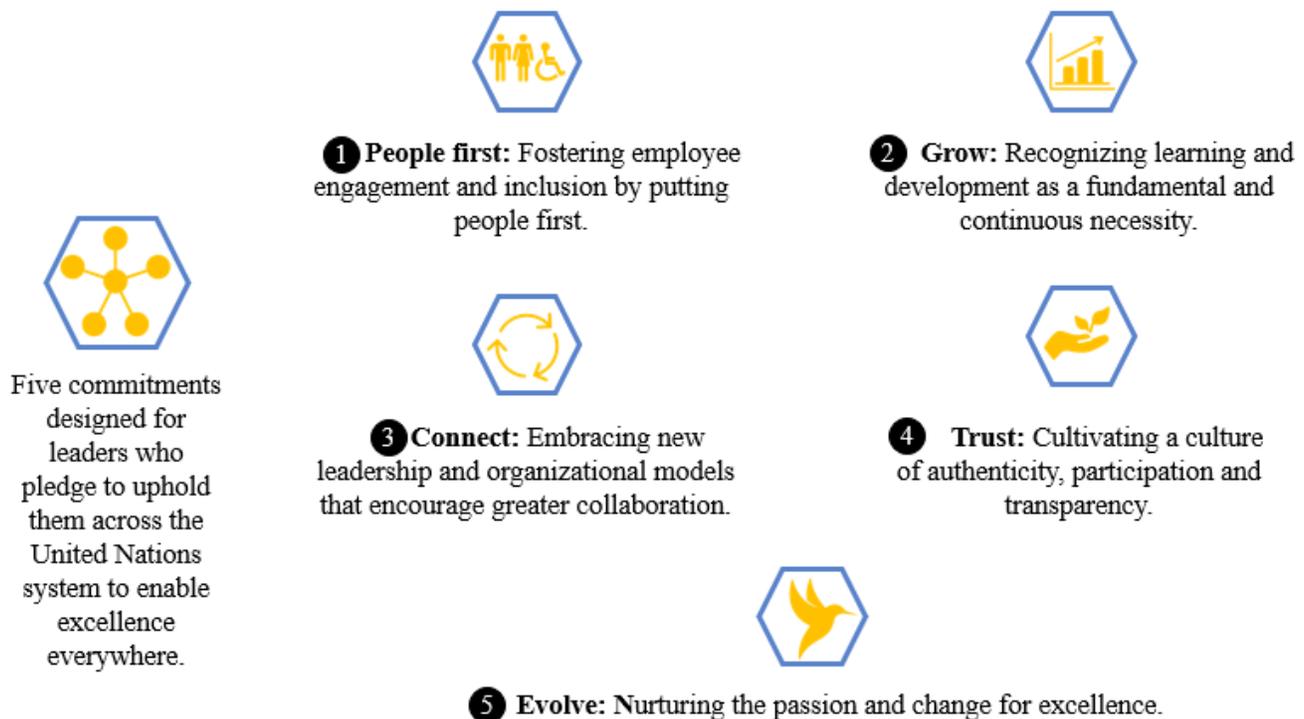
II. COVID-19 pandemic: response and recovery

4. In 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to upend lives, creating additional uncertainty and driving back hard-won progress made towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. While CEB and its subsidiary mechanisms remained steadfast in its commitment to support the United Nations system in the response to and recovery from the devastation caused by the pandemic on the lives of those it serves, the Board members also reflected on other challenges facing the multilateral system throughout its work in 2021.
5. The pandemic accelerated transformational change across the system and served to further underscore the urgency of the Secretary-General's call for principled and visionary United Nations leadership. Since the onset of the crisis, the Board members have continued to provide strong leadership, ensuring the United Nations system acted collectively and coherently to confront the challenges posed by the pandemic across mandates, pillars, functions and geographies. They did so in full alignment with the senior leadership commitments¹ (see figure), developed by the High-level Committee on Management in 2021 to help prepare United Nations system leaders to steer the transition of their organizations and workforces towards the future of work. These commitments build on the United Nations system leadership framework² and incorporate lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic.
6. The five senior leadership commitments are supported by three cross-cutting principles: (a) leveraging technology; (b) embracing a truly One United Nations; and (c) being ecologically conscious. Upholding and embodying the five commitments will require openness, determination, resilience and sustained support from United Nations system entities to their senior leaders, including in the form of ongoing coaching and collective reflection.

¹ Senior Leadership Commitments for the Future of Work in the United Nations System, available at https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/2021.HLCM_.6.Add_.2.Rev_.1%20-%20Senior%20Leadership%20Commitments_0.pdf.

² CEB/2017/1, annex.

Figure
Senior leadership commitments



Aligning and coordinating the United Nations system institutional response to the pandemic

7. Building on the lessons and experiences acquired over the past year relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, the High-level Committee on Management, through its networks, continued to spearhead coordinated action towards the design and implementation of new modalities in management matters and to provide strategic guidance, operational decision-making and support for monitoring the response of management to the pandemic.

8. From the outset of the pandemic, the criticality of cybersecurity has become increasingly evident to the system. The Digital and Technology Network, which continued to play an instrumental role in supporting remote working, advanced the United Nations system's digital transformation agenda by establishing a common minimum baseline for organizational cybersecurity strategies, comprising key and uniform actions for their implementation. The United Nations Information Security Special Interest Group addressed several high priority tasks, including setting up common approaches for cloud security, protecting personal identifiable information, and information and communications technology security assessments, with the collective aim of fostering increased security and trust in the sharing of information resources. New streams of work were launched around digital accessibility and knowledge-sharing on remote working and remote simultaneous interpretation.

9. The members of the CEB Human Resources Network worked closely to ensure system-wide alignment through regular ad hoc virtual meetings, addressing emerging issues in critical areas such as protective and preventive measures at the workplace, vaccination, return-to-office approaches and measures to deal with mental health and

stress issues affecting personnel. The Network also continued periodically to update the common administrative guidelines for offices on the COVID-19 pandemic.³

10. The Finance and Budget Network addressed the pandemic's impact on the remote performance of financial and budgetary functions, and in particular entities' financial positions and funding structures. The Network examined ways to provide relevant information to their users through increased disclosure in the notes to their financial statements. The Network also explored opportunities collectively to identify and experiment with innovative solutions within the financial management functions.

III. Strengthening policy coherence and coordination in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

11. Although disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Board and its subsidiary mechanisms stayed the course in its commitment to strengthen system-wide policy and programmatic coordination and coherence in support of the Sustainable Development Goals by devoting its attention to assessing the root causes of conflict and measuring people's and planetary well-being beyond GDP. Work continued on inequalities, the least developed countries, the ethics of artificial intelligence and related capacity-building, biodiversity and sustainability management strategy.

Addressing the root causes of conflict

12. In May 2021, as the world continued to witness a surge of violent and increasingly complex and protracted conflicts that threatened global peace and stability and sustainable development, CEB held a focused discussion on the evolution of the current and emerging root causes of conflict, as well as the inextricable link of conflict to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. Board members expressed their concern about how numerous factors – such as inequality and marginalization, including gender inequality and gender-based violence, as well as fragilities arising from poverty and food insecurity, grievances over land and resources, the COVID-19 pandemic and megatrends such as demographic change, digitalization and climate change – were compounding existing vulnerabilities.

13. While it was recognized that the complex nature of present-day conflicts did not fit easily into traditional analytical categories, the Board identified three broad transitions that were affecting the operations of the United Nations system across all pillars: generational, technological and geopolitical. However, further analysis of emerging and changing risks remained necessary in order to gain a deeper understanding of the needs of affected populations.

14. The Board considered how the United Nations system could work effectively across its pillars to address the interlinked challenges of the root causes of conflict and discussed the critical importance of working closely with international financial institutions and humanitarian organizations and in partnership with all stakeholders, including Member States.

15. Trust emerged as a common thematic issue throughout the discussion on root causes, as it had in previous discussions of the Board in recent years. Understanding the causes of the erosion of trust and building trust between actors were seen as critical for addressing the root causes of conflict and enabling the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

³ Available at www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/covid_19_admin_guidelines_v_5.0_final.pdf.

Beyond gross domestic product

16. In recognition of the limitations of GDP as the sole indicator of societal progress and well-being, in 2021 CEB considered the potential impact that metrics beyond GDP can have in tracking and achieving an equitable, inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

17. Board members agreed on the urgent need to develop more comprehensive and inclusive metrics for measuring societal well-being that prioritized elements currently not captured by GDP, including the economic and social value of the key natural, social and digital assets. Board members also considered the risks associated with developing and implementing policies stemming from inaccurate measurements, including on matters relating to climate change, inequalities and informal and care work.

18. While numerous reforms, alternatives and complements to GDP had been developed, the Board recognized the need for a coordinated approach to consider how such measures could be best used and discussed and how the United Nations system could support Member States in accelerating progress on implementing complementary measures.

19. In 2022, at the request of CEB, the High-level Committee on Programmes will seek to develop a United Nations system-wide contribution on moving beyond GDP, expected to include an analysis and proposed recommendations relating to data, policy coherence and capacity development in support of Member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including target 17.19.⁴

Common approach to integrating biodiversity and nature-based solutions for sustainable development into United Nations policy and programme planning and delivery

20. In May 2020 the Board discussed the urgency of addressing the implications of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation, also in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, the Board recognized the need for stronger system-wide mobilization regarding nature and for deepening the understanding of the United Nations system footprint in relation to nature and related remedial actions, and tasked⁵ the High-level Committee on Programmes to develop a common approach on integrating biodiversity and nature-based solutions for sustainable development into the United Nations' policy and programme planning and delivery.

21. Developed under the co-leadership of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Development Programme, through the Environment Management Group, the common approach on integrating biodiversity and nature-based solutions for sustainable development into the United Nations' policy and programme planning and delivery was endorsed by the Board in May 2021.⁶ Through the common approach, the United Nations system expressed a shared recognition of the urgency to act and committed to mainstreaming biodiversity through better coordinated efforts that will connect and build on strategies and programmes of work of United Nations system entities.

22. Through three impact areas – namely: (a) human rights, peaceful societies and planetary stability; (b) a green and inclusive economic recovery; and (c) strengthened institutions, accountability and justice – the common approach seeks to catalyse collective action to address the drivers of biodiversity loss, restore ecosystems and live in harmony with nature. The common approach provides the normative

⁴ By 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product, and support statistical capacity-building in developing countries.

⁵ CEB/2020/1, para. 29.

⁶ CEB/2021/1/Add.1.

framework, in a results-based structure, to organize collective action and the joint delivery of initiatives to mainstream biodiversity and nature-based solutions at the global, regional and country levels, and to provide evidence-based and integrated policy advice and programmatic support. Complementing the CEB-endorsed product, a compendium of more than 50 illustrative examples⁷ of practical interventions and resources that the United Nations system can pursue jointly in support of the common approach will remain a living document to be updated by the system as implementation advances.⁸

Sustainability strategy: towards leadership in environmental and social sustainability

23. In May 2019, at the time of its endorsement of phase I (environmental sustainability in the area of management) of the Strategy for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System, 2020–2030,⁹ the Board requested that the document be incorporated into a comprehensive sustainability strategy for the United Nations system, encompassing a broader and fuller picture of environmental and social sustainability in United Nations system policies, programming and support functions.

24. Phase II (towards leadership in environmental and social sustainability) of the Strategy for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System, 2020–2030 (CEB/2021/2/Add.1),¹⁰ responds to that request by sharing the same comprehensive vision for environmental and social sustainability as phase I, while translating the vision by means of a theory of change into a framework for environmental and social sustainability for all functions of the United Nations.

25. Developed through a time-bound task team of the Environmental Management Group, comprising over 40 entities, and with the support of the Sustainable United Nations facility,¹¹ phase II includes (a) a comprehensive set of environmental and social sustainability principles that need to be mainstreamed across all functions; (b) a theory of change to mainstream the principles in different system-level and entity-level processes; and (c) a draft scorecard to measure progress, which will evolve as the strategy matures.

26. Building on previous inter-agency commitments, the theory of change utilized in the development of phase II of the strategy was informed by existing concepts and frameworks.¹² The entity-level outputs suggested in the theory of change are intended to inform entities' sustainability management within their specific operational context and in accordance with mandates and guidance given by their respective governing bodies.

⁷ 50+ ways to integrate biodiversity and nature-based solutions – a UN system commitment to collective action for people and planet.

⁸ <https://unemg.org/our-work/emerging-issues/biodiversity>.

⁹ CEB/2019/1/Add.1.

¹⁰ CEB/2021/1/Add.1.

¹¹ A UNEP initiative, the Sustainable United Nations facility provides support to the United Nations and other organizations in measuring and reducing their greenhouse gas emissions and improving their overall sustainability performance, promoting climate neutrality and improved resource efficiency in business practices. See www.greeningtheblue.org/.

¹² The 2012 Framework and the 2014 Interim Guide are outcomes of the Consultative Process on Advancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the United Nations System and were presented to the Senior Officials of the United Nations Environment Management Group. See <https://unemg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Final-report-EMG-SOM18.pdf> and https://unemg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Final_SOM20_Report.pdf.

Inter-agency working group on artificial intelligence

27. In 2019, the High-level Committee on Programmes endorsed the United Nations system-wide strategic approach and road map for supporting capacity development on artificial intelligence.¹³ Since then, the Committee has continued to address artificial intelligence¹⁴ through its Inter-agency Working Group on Artificial Intelligence, building on the United Nations system's contribution to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) ad hoc expert group that had been tasked in 2020 with developing the draft recommendation on the ethics of artificial intelligence. In November 2021, the draft recommendation was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference at its forty-first session.¹⁵

28. In October 2020, the Committee decided to create the working group on artificial intelligence, co-led by UNESCO and the International Telecommunication Union. Since then, the working group has developed several workstreams, including on the ethics of artificial intelligence, capacity development, procurement, education, justice, small and medium-sized enterprises and strategic foresight. It has focused on delivering concrete outcomes on artificial intelligence aimed at enhancing United Nations system-wide policy coherence and programmatic coordination, and on supporting capacity-building within the United Nations system on artificial intelligence. The approach adopted by the working group towards the development and use of artificial intelligence is underpinned by ethical principles, ensuring that it is human rights-based, trustworthy, safe and sustainable, promotes peace and contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

29. Since its launch, the working group has engaged actively with various actors, stakeholders and networks, including other mechanisms of the High-level Committee on Programmes and the High-level Committee on Management, as well as with academic institutions. It has also collaborated with the Strategic Foresight Network (see paras. 47–49 below) to organize a futures laboratory on the theme “reimagining humanity’s relationship with technology”, held in January 2022.

Strengthening the United Nations system’s impact and visibility on reducing inequalities in support of Sustainable Development Goal 10

30. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the High-level Committee on Programmes has placed a high priority on engaging the United Nations system on questions of inequalities, including to develop the United Nations system shared framework for action on equality and non-discrimination.¹⁶ In 2019, the High-level Committee on Programmes established the inequalities task team, under the leadership of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), to enhance United Nations system leadership, coordination and visibility on Sustainable Development Goal 10 and reinforce the implementation of the shared framework.

31. Since its creation, the inequalities task team has pursued a variety of activities to strengthen the United Nations system’s leadership, coordination and impact on reducing inequalities, and has become an important hub for producing, sharing and disseminating knowledge on the subject. Notably, at the 2021 High-level Political Forum, the task team held an interactive virtual side event on the theme “building

¹³ [CEB/2019/1/Add.3](#).

¹⁴ In support of, inter alia, General Assembly resolution [76/189](#), para. 33, and [75/233](#), paras. 23 and 31.

¹⁵ See <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380399>.

¹⁶ See <https://unscceb.org/un-system-framework-action-equality>.

back fairer: equality in a post-COVID-19 world”,¹⁷ at which an expert panel examined current threats to societies, economies and human rights and discussed how to create a more equal, inclusive and sustainable way forward. The aim of the event was to heighten awareness of inequalities; reflect on risks, such as austerity measures, debt crises, inequitable access to vaccines, and racial, gender and other forms of discrimination; and generate fresh perspectives for a paradigm shift to build back a more equal, inclusive and sustainable world. Furthermore, in December 2021, the task team released a policy brief entitled “Tackling inequalities in public service coverage to ‘build forward better’ for the rural poor”,¹⁸ focusing on addressing rural inequalities in public service coverage.

32. As the United Nations system seeks to play a more norm-based role in economic policy issues at the country level, the inequalities task team has also, over the course of 2021, worked to integrate the shared framework in the United Nations Sustainable Development Group guidance on economic transformation, as well as in the United Nations Sustainable Development Group guidance on common country analyses and cooperation frameworks. Members of the task team have also engaged with the new Resident Coordinator Office economists in their work to strengthen the United Nations system’s position on macroeconomic policy, to prioritize reducing inequalities within and between countries.

33. In October 2021, noting that the COVID-19 pandemic had further deepened inequalities and that this deeply entrenched and pervasive challenge has represented one of the defining issues of the current times, the High-level Committee on Programmes requested the inequalities task team to prepare a reflection paper to inform the Committee’s discussion, at its forty-third session, in March 2022, on the work of the United Nations system on inequalities in the current global context, with a view to further elevating the United Nations system engagement and ambition in supporting Goals 10 and 5.

Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020

34. Through regular reporting to its High-level Committee on Programmes, CEB has supported the coordination of and follow-up to the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020 (the Istanbul Programme of Action) on a system-wide basis, since mandated by the General Assembly in 2012.¹⁹

35. At its forty-second session, in October 2021, the Committee was provided with a progress report²⁰ on the ongoing effort to mainstream the Istanbul Programme of Action into the work programmes of organizations of the United Nations system²¹ by the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. While underscoring that, despite major advances in many areas, progress in advancing the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action has been reversed by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in many countries, the report contained a summary of actions and recommendations relating to the preparation of the Fifth United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries, as well as updates on efforts to mobilize support for

¹⁷ See <https://unsceb.org/building-back-fairer-equality-post-covid-world>.

¹⁸ Available at <https://unsceb.org/tackling-inequalities-public-service-coverage-build-forward-better-rural-poor-policy-brief-hlcp>.

¹⁹ See General Assembly resolution 67/220, para. 26.

²⁰ Available at https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/HLCP-42-LDCs-Progress_Report.pdf.

²¹ As mandated most recently by the General Assembly in its resolution 76/216, paras. 22 and 44.

investment promotion agencies of the least developed countries and on related training and advisory services.

36. The High-level Committee on Programmes was also apprised of progress in the operationalization of the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries, which, among other results, had completed an additional 16 technology needs assessments, launched a biotechnology programme in 2021 to strengthen biotechnology capacity of young researchers and research institutions in the least developed countries and continued to support the establishment of academies of sciences in several of those countries.

IV. Innovating working methods of the United Nations system

37. The COVID-9 pandemic further illustrated the value and accelerated the application of modern tools, techniques and skills throughout the United Nations system and reinforced the system's thinking and collaboration towards integrated responses that anticipate and respond to risks while strengthening the capacity of staff to address complex challenges and improving working methods.

V. Ensuring the reliability and timely availability of United Nations system data

38. High-quality, timely, disaggregated and readily available data and statistics are crucial to delivering accelerated action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Enhanced data analysis and storytelling capabilities enable the United Nations system to strengthen evidence-based policy, transform decision-making, communicate better the impacts and results and substantiate advocacy and fundraising efforts.

39. CEB and its subsidiary mechanisms continued to work on ensuring the reliability and availability of United Nations system data throughout 2021, in support of the Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere: With Insight, Impact and Integrity,²² and the System-wide Road Map for Innovating United Nations Data and Statistics,²³ developed by the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System through the High-level Committee on Programmes,²⁴ endorsed by CEB in 2020.

40. In 2021, the membership of the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System continued to pursue the three goals of the Road Map: (a) to create new and timely data solutions; (b) to address emerging policy needs; and (c) to provide coordinated and innovative support to Member States. The Committee provided the High-level Committee on Programmes with an update at its forty-second session, showing that the implementation of the Road Map was progressing well.

Strengthening United Nations system capacity for data collection, analysis and protection: United Nations system data cube

41. As requested by Member States in the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review, the High-level Committee on Management remains committed to strengthening the analytical quality of system-wide reporting on resources and expenditures for the United Nations activities towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

²² See www.un.org/en/content/datastrategy/index.shtml.

²³ CEB/2020/1/Add.1.

²⁴ In accordance with General Assembly resolution 75/233, paras. 23 and 32.

42. In 2021, the High-level Committee on Management actively contributed to the implementation of the CEB road map and the abovementioned Data Strategy by reinforcing and innovating the United Nations system's joint efforts to collect, produce, provide and use data and statistics. It also worked to ensure that the necessary data-related skills are built across functions and organizations.

43. The United Nations data standards for system-wide financial reporting²⁵ – also referred to as the United Nations system data cube – launched in 2018,²⁶ underpins the system-wide financial data that the United Nations system has today. In 2021, the data cube initiative advanced the implementation of the data standards under the tagline of “maximizing transparency and minimizing efforts”. The improved data quality of United Nations system reports and the continued harmonization efforts with the International Aid Transparency Initiative and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Development Assistance Committee, have led to more accessible and comparable data sets, while reducing entities' reporting burden and setting the foundation for potential future data integration.

VI. Strategic foresight

Pilot project on predictive analytics

44. The High-level Committee on Programmes supported the development of a cross-pillar, inter-agency predictive analytics exercise in the Sahel region under the leadership of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to enhance evidence-based support for sustainable development. Recognizing the importance of moving beyond siloed predictive analytics initiatives, the pilot aimed at enhancing coordination on data and strengthening preparedness for risks across development, humanitarian and peace and security pillars in the region.²⁷

45. In October 2021 the Committee received a presentation and final report from UNHCR confirming that the transition of the pilot exercise to the region was advancing under the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel and in support of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel. Although the launch of the pilot coincided with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was carried out successfully through collaborative partnerships with external academic and research institutions and led to the development of a set of predictive models. The pilot highlighted the benefits of enhancing the collection, analysis, management and sharing of data and strengthening coordination in order to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to address growing and interconnected risks.

46. Noting the achievements of the pilot exercise since its launch in 2020, the Committee encouraged the replication and scaling up of the project in other vulnerable regions in the world and drawing on the lessons learned to support the work of other relevant inter-agency mechanisms and initiatives to advance evidence-based support for sustainable development. The project is expected to continue to directly support the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel and the United Nations Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel.

²⁵ See <https://unsceb.org/data-standards-united-nations-system-wide-reporting-financial-data>.

²⁶ See CEB/2018/5, paras. 50–54.

²⁷ In support of Economic and Social Council resolution 2020/2, paras. 2 and 5, and General Assembly resolution 76/128, paras. 15, 54, 55, 57, 59 and 79.

Strategic Foresight Network

47. Since its launch in late 2019, the Strategic Foresight Network of the High-level Committee on Programmes has cultivated a growing community of practice and has become a central hub for United Nations system entities to engage on a broad variety of topics related to futures awareness and scenario planning.²⁸ Led and coordinated by UNESCO, the Network contributes to the sharing and cross-fertilization of experience, tools, best practices and lessons learned to strengthen the shared understanding of and collective capacity for applying futures and foresight approaches to efforts by the United Nations system.

48. Promoting “futures literacy” of United Nations system staff through the sharing of foresight-related information is one of the key objectives of the Strategic Foresight Network. Cognizant of this aim, the Network engaged in a variety of collective futures-thinking and joint foresight exercises in 2021, bringing together different United Nations system entities and focusing on a range of subjects, including a “post COVID-19 United Nations” and the “futures of agri-food systems”.

49. Given the high relevance of anticipatory approaches in responding to these and other global challenges of the twenty-first century, the Network is well positioned to contribute to the work of the High-level Committee on Programmes and is supportive of the Secretary-General’s vision on futures and foresight, as laid out – among others – in his report entitled “Our Common Agenda”.²⁹

Strategic foresight for risk management

50. In 2021, the High-level Committee on Management launched the Risk Management Forum, a multidisciplinary United Nations system-wide advisory body tasked with producing guidance and common risk methodologies. The Forum constitutes a key element in ensuring effective integration and prevention of risk, supporting the United Nations system in its aim to integrate risk management in cross-functional deliberations.

51. Throughout the reporting year, the Forum met regularly to discuss issues of relevance for its members and to learn from the experience of experts from inside and outside the system, including the impact of COVID-19 on organizational priorities, business models and working practices; climate change risk; and benchmarking of enterprise risk management informed by the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled “Enterprise risk management: approaches and uses in United Nations system organizations”.³⁰

52. In addition, the High-level Committee on Management requested the Forum to launch an analysis of emerging mid- to long-term corporate risks stemming from the ongoing pandemic. On the basis of a survey among its members, the analysis identified key mid- and long-term risks and related response options. It also highlighted interconnections among risks and across the United Nations entities.³¹

²⁸ In support of General Assembly resolution [76/213](#), para. 9, and Economic and Social Council resolution [2021/29](#), para. (a) (viii).

²⁹ [A/75/982](#).

³⁰ [JIU/REP/2020/5](#).

³¹ See [CEB/2021/5](#), paras. 46 and 54.

VII. Driving behavioural change in the work culture of the system

United Nations system model policy on flexible work

53. Within the context of its work to deliberate more comprehensively and in an integrated way on the future of the United Nations system workforce, the High-level Committee on Management and its Human Resources Network developed a system-wide model policy on flexible work,³² in consultation with relevant stakeholders. While initially catalysed by the operational needs to ensure business continuity during the first phases of the pandemic, the finalized model policy also considers other angles, including the potential of enhanced use of communication and collaboration technology, as well as the conditions for fostering personal productivity of staff. The resulting model policy, as endorsed by the Committee at its virtual meeting in October 2021,³³ provides practical guidance with the aim of balancing the operational needs and organizational productivity considerations of United Nations system organizations and the individual needs and preferences of staff members, in order to enhance engagement and individual productivity.

Addressing sexual harassment

54. Through its Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the United Nations System, CEB continued to advance a common system-wide approach to addressing sexual harassment, with the aim of fostering a safe, equal and inclusive working environment across the system. Following the priority areas laid out in its 2020/2021 workplan,³⁴ in 2021 the task force sought to further elevate existing best practices, the identification of gaps and the production of tools at the disposal of the United Nations system.

55. To bolster investigative capacity, harmonize victim-centred investigations and improve communication with survivors and other stakeholders during investigations of sexual harassment, the task force developed and published an investigators' manual for the investigation of sexual harassment complaints.³⁵ Furthermore, the task force completed its work on advancing a common understanding of a victim-centred approach to sexual harassment within the organizations of the United Nations,³⁶ which sets out seven core principles designed to assist United Nations system organizations in adopting and operationalizing a victim-centred approach in the light of their regulations, rules and policies.

56. The Task Force also organized five peer-to-peer learning dialogues that sought to strengthen openness and transparency and draw on knowledge from a variety of experts from outside the United Nations system. The dialogues included around 40 experts from Member States, civil society, academia, other international organizations and the United Nations system, and reached an audience of more than 600 people.

³² CEB/2021/HLCM/10/Add.1, available at https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/2021.HLCM_10.Add_1%20-%20Flexible%20Work%20Model%20Policy.pdf.

³³ CEB/2021/5.

³⁴ Available at <https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/Workplan%20Sexual%20Harassment%20Task%20Force%202020-2021.pdf>.

³⁵ Available at https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/Investigators%20Manual-March%202021_screen.pdf.

³⁶ Available at <https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/A%20Victim-centred%20Approach%20to%20Sexual%20Harassment%20%20.pdf>.

The key messages and recommendations from the dialogues were collected in a publication³⁷ that also contained an overview and summary of the first four dialogues.

57. In 2021, the task force further continued to administer the yearly system-wide questionnaire on improved reporting on sexual harassment in the United Nations system, with the aim of allowing the comparison of sexual harassment reporting in the system over time. The Clear Check database, which enables the sharing of information among United Nations organizations on individuals for whom there are established allegations related to sexual misconduct, was continually used across the system, and opportunities for expansion to external partners were explored, while efforts continue in 2022.

Occupational health and safety

58. The COVID-19 pandemic provided United Nations system organizations with an opportunity to stress-test their ability to safeguard the five core principles for a healthier, safer and more respectful United Nations workplace,³⁸ endorsed by the High-level Committee on Management as occupational health and safety aspirational goals, to articulate a coherent and holistic approach throughout the system on safety and security, psychosocial support, health, human resources and administrative support.

59. During 2021, the Committee formally launched the work of the Occupational Health and Safety Forum by approving its terms of reference and workplan. The Forum conducted a preparedness survey across the United Nations system organizations, showing substantial progress, as well as identifying areas for further effort. The Forum also produced documents to support entities in developing their own occupational health and safety frameworks, providing guidance for solid business case justification and standard content development guidance for organizational occupational health and safety policy statements and policies.

60. In October 2021, at its forty-first session, the High-level Committee on Management discussed lessons learned and best practices to protect United Nations system personnel's mental health and well-being in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the contribution of experts, members explored ways of preventing and addressing mental health issues in the workplace. That effort continued throughout the year, through collaboration between the Occupational Health and Safety Forum and key stakeholders – such as the mental health and well-being implementation board – to reduce fragmentation and overlapping and ensure mental health was an integral part of all United Nations initiatives.

61. Finally, the Committee worked towards redefining the governance, system-wide coordination and support of safety-related action. It recommended that occupational health and safety governance be carefully assessed to ensure consistent action by all relevant groups (Inter-Agency Security Management Network, United Nations Department for Safety and Security, High-level Committee on Management networks, United Nations Medical Directors, etc.) towards reducing coordination layers, building on and complementing existing systems and methodologies.

³⁷ Available at https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/Making%20zero%20tolerance%20a%20reality%20-%20peer-to-peer%20learning%20to%20prevent%20and%20eliminate%20sexual%20harassment%20in%20the%20UN%20system%20and%20beyond_0.pdf.

³⁸ Available at <https://unsceb.org/occupational-health-safety-overview-deliverables>.

VIII. Innovation and digital transformation of United Nations system organizations

62. The Finance and Budget Network of the High-level Committee on Management maintained its focus on innovative approaches to leverage digitalization and automation in the area of financial management. The Network worked to identify possible collaboration modalities and innovative pilots that could be brought to scale. At the same time, the biannual meetings of the Network offered an information sharing platform to enable United Nations system organizations to share in real time their experience with digital innovative solutions.

63. Building on the Network's 2018 conference on the future of finance and money, in 2021 the Network explored examples of innovative approaches to financial processes and presented new technologies and tools with the potential to simplify workflows. These include chatbots powered by artificial intelligence, robotic process automation and new payment methods such as blockchain. The Network coordinated its members' response to challenges that emerged in the use of these new technologies and tools, such as additional oversight layers or the demand for specialized technical skills to deal with complex financial instruments.

64. The Procurement Network of the High-level Committee on Management continued to strengthen the efficiency of the United Nations system's supply chain. In 2021, the Network launched a joint procurement project for information technology systems, equipment and services, establishing a long-term agreement with four consolidators. The Network also increased its efforts towards disability inclusion in the United Nations global marketplace, both making the portal more accessible and inclusive and adding the possibility for vendors to indicate if they are disability-inclusive, as defined in the guidelines for the implementation of indicator 8.³⁹ Finally, it continued to mainstream the common procurement templates and the Procurement Practitioner's Handbook by translating them into other United Nations languages.

65. In 2021, the High-level Committee on Management launched the UN Digital ID project, a transformative United Nations solution to provide its workforce with a universal, system-wide identity. The project will provide employees with ownership of their personal data and enable reliable, scalable and dependable human resources data interaction, interoperable between organizations. In 2021, five organizations participated in the pilot phase of the project, which is planned to expand in 2022 to an enterprise-scale solution for the whole United Nations system by developing and launching critical use cases.

66. Addressing the challenges of providing financial assistance in relation to the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan was one of the top priorities of the Working Group on Common Treasury Services in 2021. The Working Group has continued to assess and review strategic collaboration, coordination and harmonization opportunities for best practices and increased for efficiencies in treasury and risk management. In 2021, it conducted workstreams to establish standardized approaches when dealing with restricted and sanctioned monetary systems, developed guidelines for investing criteria to strengthen environmental, social and governance compliance, and updated the United Nations roster and measurement framework to include all external investment managers and custodians, harnessing digitalization using treasury robotic process automation. The Working Group has also initiated the digital hub of treasury solutions project to standardize and scale global banking connectivity to gain direct access to worldwide financial ecosystems.

³⁹ Available at www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2020_un_disability_inclusion_strategy_guidelines_indicator_8.pdf.

XIX. Multilingualism: a core value of the United Nations

67. In its role as facilitator, the CEB secretariat continued to reinforce the Secretary-General's commitment to fostering multilingualism throughout the United Nations system, provided support the Coordinator for Multilingualism – the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management – and encouraged a coordinated approach to multilingualism across CEB member organizations. The CEB secretariat offered support, through the High-level Committee on Management and its mechanisms, to the work of the network of focal points for multilingualism, under the leadership of the Coordinator on Multilingualism, including through system-wide consultations and by developing recommendations on the most appropriate and effective approach to incorporate multilingualism as a core value of United Nations system organizations.

68. The CEB secretariat also contributed to the Joint Inspection Unit review of the status of implementation of multilingualism across the United Nations system, providing technical background on the system-wide dimensions of multilingualism. The CEB secretariat furthermore facilitated extensive knowledge and experience exchange among United Nations system organizations on viable ways to ensure high-quality and readily available interpretation services in the recent business continuity environment and the related predominance of virtual and hybrid meeting formats.

X. Improving transparency and accountability

69. Throughout the reporting period, the CEB secretariat continued to improve the quality of data collected through its annual statistics exercises. Considerable work was invested in the technological solution to provide a centralized, consolidated and user-friendly data collection platform by migrating the data management platform to a new and more secure hosting environment.

70. Simultaneously, new functionalities in support of the data integration, visualization and analytical features of CEB data sets were prototyped, resulting in improved access to and the availability of the data. The introduction of new reporting functionality and optimization of supported processes, as well as bug fixing, resulted in better overall performance and information security. The integration of geospatial data enhanced the efficiency and accuracy of geographic information and data analysis.

71. In 2021, human resources statistics and financial statistics exercises were executed simultaneously. The process of deep cleaning of data resulted in a more consistent and reliable source of trusted data, which was augmented with a direct link to a new analytical platform for administrators. Data cleaning is considered an ongoing process requiring iterative consultations with data providers and remains a priority for 2022.

72. Lastly, the CEB secretariat successfully implemented the change from biennial to annual data collection of the field census headcount used to determine the applicable cost-sharing formula for the jointly financed budget of the United Nations security management system. This shift will contribute to using more recent data sets when making important financial decisions going forward.

XI. Coordination between CEB and other jointly financed bodies

73. Through its subsidiary bodies, CEB continued its well-established work of coordinating and contributing to the programmes of work of both the International Civil Service Commission and the Joint Inspection Unit.

74. The Human Resources Network continued its long-established participation in the sessions and working groups of the International Civil Service Commission. In addition to its collaborative efforts on reviewing the post adjustment system and launching the new round of place-to-place surveys, as well as the methodology for setting salaries for locally recruited staff, the Network, through its Field Group and direct participation in working groups of the Commission, collaborated on matters such as the review of the contractual framework and the current parental leave provisions. The Network also collaborated closely with the Commission on matters related to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., the amendment of danger pay provisions) and other emergency situations (e.g., the immediate response to the situation in Afghanistan in September 2021).

75. Throughout 2021, the secretariats of CEB and the Joint Inspection Unit remained in continuous and constructive dialogue, mostly in a virtual format owing to the COVID-19-related limitations to travel, including in the context of the biennial meeting of Joint Inspection Unit focal points convened virtually on 15 and 16 September by the Unit. The exchanges with representatives of the Unit and the Inspectors provided for constructive discussions about current and future collaboration.

76. The CEB secretariat, in consultation with CEB-related technical and issue-driven networks, provided comments to several draft reports being prepared by the Unit and, whenever possible, met in person with the Inspectors and the Unit's secretariat staff to discuss issues about ongoing and future reports. The CEB secretariat: (a) contributed to the preparation of the Joint Inspection Unit annual programme of work, by supplying substantive inputs regarding specific proposals; (b) continued to facilitate the collection of comments and views from the United Nations system on the Unit's reports of a system-wide nature; and (c) issued in a timely fashion the notes of the Secretary-General⁴⁰ on behalf of CEB members related to those Joint Inspection Unit reviews.

77. Lastly, the Chair of CEB, in consultation with members of the Board and in accordance with procedures set out in chapter II, article 3, of the statute of the Joint Inspection Unit,⁴¹ reviewed the qualifications of four inspectors proposed for appointment in 2022.

XII. Sustaining compliance with International Public Sector Accounting Standards

78. In its resolution [60/283](#), the General Assembly approved the adoption of International Public Sector Accounting Standards for presentation of the financial statements of the United Nations system. All 26 member and 8 observer organizations of the United Nations system have adopted and implemented the Standards and receive unqualified audit opinions, bearing testimony to the commitment and ability of the United Nations system to sustain compliance with evolving Standards for improved quality of financial reporting, enhanced transparency and accountability.

⁴⁰ Available at www.unjiu.org/content/reports (see "Comments").

⁴¹ General Assembly resolution [31/192](#), annex, chap. II, art. 3.

79. The High-level Committee on Management established the Task Force on Accounting Standards initially to implement and then maintain compliance with International Public Sector Accounting Standards. It has continued its work to ensure ongoing compliance with new and existing such Standards, and one of the aims of the Task Force is to promote greater comparability of financial reporting policies and practices across the United Nations system.

80. The International Public Sector Accounting Standards Board updates Standards and issues guidance in response to changing user needs and environments. Representatives from the Task Force attended the meetings of the Board throughout the year, keeping abreast of new pronouncements and upcoming projects, and providing feedback to the Board on behalf of the United Nations system. Several workshops were held during 2021 with the Board staff and United Nations system organizations, primarily on the revenue and expenses pronouncements being developed. The Task Force collated information and shared guidance on the common disclosures required in respect of the impact of pandemic on financial statements and reporting of United Nations system organizations.

81. The Task Force held its annual meeting virtually in October 2021 and considered a range of issues, including an update by and exchange of views with International Public Sector Accounting Standards Board staff regarding the development of the pending new Standard on accounting for revenue and transfer expenses. The meeting also included interaction with the Board of Auditors on key audit observations, outcomes and emerging audit issues arising from its work. The Task Force considered other items during the meeting, including donor financial reporting, innovations around physical inventory remote audit and accruing expenses of projects in the absence of reports from implementing partners. The aim of the discussions was to encourage information- and experience-sharing among the system organizations to ensure consistent interpretation, application and sustainability of the Standards in financial reporting.

XIII. Conclusion

82. In 2021, CEB served as a driver of integration and coherence in the United Nations system across a wide range of programmatic and management issues in support of intergovernmental mandates and priorities. While the international community continued to face complex challenges, including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the United Nations system stayed committed to providing support and policy advice to Member States to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

83. The Board sustained its commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals and to providing system-wide preparation for and follow-up to United Nations conferences and summits and improving and innovating the administrative and management functions of the United Nations system, guided by the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the well-being of the people whom it serves.