General Assembly
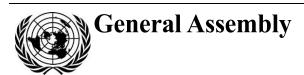
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Item 145 of the provisional agenda*
Joint Inspection Unit

Review of business continuity management in United Nations system organizations

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Business continuity management in United Nations system organizations" (JIU/REP/2021/6).

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* A/77/150.

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I. Introduction

1.   In its report entitled "Business continuity management in United Nations system organizations" (A/77/256), the Joint Inspection Unit undertakes a review with the main objective of analysing the status of the use and integration of business continuity policies, plans, processes and practices across United Nations system organizations and identifying good practices and lessons learned to guide their decisions concerning ongoing and future initiatives.

II. General comments

2.   Organizations welcome the report and find it provides a comprehensive assessment of the status of the utilization and integration of business continuity management policies, plans, processes and practices across the United Nations system organizations while identifying good practices to guide ongoing and future initiatives.

3.   Entities note that while the report contains extensive and generally useful, empirical evidence relating to sound process-related criteria, it lacks a results-based assessment of whether, in general, entities' approaches to business continuity policies have proved effective in mitigating the effects of disruptive incidents, with reasons for differences in performance. Without this top-end assessment, it is likely that the highest priorities for improvement will not receive the right degree of emphasis or may even be missed. There is also the possibility that external stakeholders will have a mistaken view of the adequacy of the United Nations system approach.

4.   Some concerns are raised about the lack of sufficient or dedicated resources that may have an impact on or impede the full operationalization and effectiveness of the review's findings.

5.   Organizations support the review's recommendations.

III. Comments on specific recommendations

Recommendation 1

The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should, by the end of 2023, review their business continuity management framework and ensure that the core elements identified in the present report are established and owned by relevant stakeholders to enable effective coordination of business continuity processes and practices, build coherence in their implementation and promote accountability at all levels.

6.   Organizations support this recommendation.

7.   Entities report having already implemented or being in the implementation phase of the proposed recommendation in the context of the United Nations organizational resilience management system and in compliance with their existing business continuity management framework policies, processes and structural arrangements.

Recommendation 2

The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should, by the end of 2023, ensure that the maintenance, exercise and review components of their business continuity plans are applied through a consistent and disciplined approach to confirm that the plans remain relevant and effective.

8.   Organizations support this recommendation.

9. As shown throughout the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, entities place renewed emphasis on the critical importance of preparedness for disruptive events and concur this is best implemented by strengthening the maintenance, testing and review of business continuity plans. Through constant review and testing of such plans, entities can identify whether the measures and actions planned continue to be relevant and effective in maintaining their organizational resilience.

Recommendation 3

The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should, by the end of 2023, strengthen their learning mechanisms to contribute to organizational resilience by requiring after-action reviews following disruptive incidents and periodic internal management reviews of their business continuity management frameworks.

10. Organizations support this recommendation and recognize the value of enhancing business continuity learning mechanisms that include after-action and periodic management reviews.

Recommendation 4

The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should, by the end of 2024, report to their legislative organs and governing bodies on progress towards the implementation of the policy on the organizational resilience management system and its revised performance indicators, and highlight good practices and lessons learned, especially in the area of business continuity management.

11. Organizations partially support this recommendation.

12. As active members of the organizational resilience management system network, entities consider that their regular input to the reports of the Secretary-General on organizational resilience management system[1] implementation meets the action required by the proposed recommendation and that additional reporting would be duplicative.

13. Others note that their reporting to the legislative organs and governing bodies is structured at a higher level of topics and suggest addressing the proposed recommendation through the actions requested in recommendation 6. This would support their argument that reporting on the organizational resilience management system does not call for a separate recommendation

Recommendation 5

In 2023, the executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should conduct an internal management assessment of the continuity of business operations during the COVID-19 pandemic to identify gaps, enablers, good practices and lessons learned and adjust policies, processes and procedures, in particular in areas such as human resources, information and communications technology management and occupational safety and health, and indicate necessary measures to better prepare for and respond to future disruptive incidents.

14. Organizations support this recommendation.

15. Entities report ongoing internal management assessment activities during the COVID-19 pandemic to identify gaps, enablers, good practices and lessons learned

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[1] A/76/607.

and adjust relevant policies, processes and procedures accordingly. Resorting to independent evaluations and oversight, and/or internal audit of business continuity management is also mentioned as a valuable tool. Some of these valuable findings and lessons have already been reflected in new strategic plans.

16.   Some suggest the review would have benefitted from having merged and streamlined recommendations 3 and 5, as they consider that they overlap.

Recommendation 6

The legislative organs and governing bodies of the United Nations system organizations should consider, at the earliest opportunity, the conclusions of the internal management assessment of the continuity of operations during the COVID-19 pandemic prepared by the executive heads of their respective organizations and, on that basis, take appropriate decisions to address the identified gaps and risks and to ensure continuity of business operations.

17.   Organizations note that this recommendation is addressed to the legislative organs and governing bodies.

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