



**HIGH-LEVEL COMMITTEE ON MANAGEMENT (HLCM)**

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**United Nations System  
Programme Criticality Framework**

*Document prepared by the Programme Criticality Steering Group*

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## A. Introduction

1. The Programme Criticality Framework is a common United Nations system policy for decision-making that puts in place guiding principles and a systematic structured approach in using Programme Criticality in the United Nations Security Risk Management (SRM) process to ensure that activities involving United Nations personnel<sup>1</sup> can be balanced against security risks.
2. The current document is the second revision of the Programme Criticality Framework, incorporating decisions of the Secretary-General on Programme Criticality following a meeting of the Secretary-General's Policy Committee (2016/01).<sup>2</sup> The Programme Criticality Framework was first approved by the High Level Committee on Management (HLCM) on 17 October 2011 and subsequently endorsed by the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) in its autumn 2011 session. A revised version, building on lessons learned from the pilot roll-out phase, was approved by the HLCM at its session on 7-8 March 2013.
3. Programme Criticality<sup>3</sup> (PC) formed an important component of the United Nations Security Management System's (UNSMS) Guidelines for Determining Acceptable Risk, which were approved by the CEB in April 2009 and which were superseded by the UNSMS Policy on Security Risk Management (SRM)<sup>4</sup> in 2016. The revised SRM Manual recognizes Programme Criticality as a key component in determining acceptable risk. The Programme Criticality Framework lays out the methodology to conduct a Programme Criticality assessment. The results of this assessment serve to support informed and legitimate decision-making on the security of United Nations personnel and help to ensure that all activities involving United Nations personnel are implemented at acceptable levels of risk.

## B. Guiding Principles

### Applicability

4. The applicability of Programme Criticality is as defined in the UNSMS Policy Manual Chapter III: Applicability of United Nations Security Management System. A determination of Programme Criticality takes place through a Programme Criticality assessment. Such assessments should be conducted for all activities, consolidated at output level,<sup>5</sup> that involve United Nations personnel of all United Nations entities operating in areas of high or above-high present<sup>6</sup> security risk. The Framework does not consider outputs implemented by third parties (government, I/NGOs, private sector, etc.) as long as such activities do not require the physical presence of United Nations personnel.

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<sup>1</sup> For a definition of United Nations personnel see the glossary of terms and definitions.

<sup>2</sup> The Policy Committee reaffirmed that the Programme Criticality Framework should be implemented as a mandatory policy of the Organization in areas where present security risk levels are high or above high, and that the CEB-approved methodology, described in this Framework, should be used.

<sup>3</sup> The concept of 'criticality' is to be understood to mean the critical impact of United Nations activities on the population, not necessarily on the organisation.

<sup>4</sup> UNSMS Policy on Security Risk Management (SRM) was endorsed by the HLCM on 18 April 2016.

<sup>5</sup> For a full definition of activities and outputs, see the glossary of terms and definitions below.

<sup>6</sup> Present risk is defined as security risk based on the threats and the security measures and procedures *currently* in place (United Nations SRM Manual 2015). Residual risk, in contrast, is the security risk remaining after all approved security measures and procedures have been implemented (which may or may not be the same as under present risk).

5. Whilst the concrete timing to carry out United Nations-wide Programme Criticality assessments should be determined at country level based on context and need, they are mandatory in areas with risk levels of 'high' and 'very high,' as determined through the SRM process. A Programme Criticality assessment is also beneficial when deciding how and when to operate in areas where the present risk is determined to be 'medium', and as a preparedness measure in areas and situations of volatility where security risk levels may increase in the foreseeable future. In areas where a Programme Criticality assessment is already in place, key triggers for undertaking a new full assessment include changes in existing strategic priorities or a significant change in the strategic or programmatic context.

## **Accountability**

6. Primary accountability for implementing this Framework, including by conducting regular Programme Criticality assessments, lies with United Nations senior management at the country level. In non-mission settings, the Resident Coordinator (RC) is accountable for the conduct and quality of Programme Criticality assessments at country level. Where an integrated United Nations presence is in place and a peacekeeping or special political mission is deployed alongside a United Nations country team (UNCT), the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG)/Head of Mission has the final accountability.
7. The Designated Official (DO) is accountable to the Secretary-General<sup>7</sup> for the security of United Nations personnel, premises and assets throughout the country or designated area.<sup>8</sup> As part of his or her duties, the DO uses the results of the Programme Criticality assessment and endorses security risk management decisions taken at country-level, taking both the Programme Criticality and the SRM into consideration.
8. As a matter of principle, all activities involving United Nations personnel should be covered in a Programme Criticality assessment, including in areas where other United Nations, separate United Nations presences/envoys or their staff are operating in non-integrated settings, and where non-resident United Nations entities operate (such as United Nations Monitoring Groups or non-resident United Nations agencies). While all efforts should be made to ensure one common Programme Criticality assessment, in certain circumstances where it is not practical to include the activities of non-resident entities or of separate United Nations field missions in a common Programme Criticality assessment, it is acceptable that separate Programme Criticality assessments are carried out for each designated entity.
9. Heads of United Nations entities operating in country (resident and non-resident) are required to ensure that their respective entities participate in a Programme Criticality assessment at a level that is sufficiently senior to appropriately represent the spectrum of programmes and activities of the United Nations entity. Each United Nations entity should allocate the needed capacity to do so. Furthermore, Heads of United Nations entities in country are responsible to ensure that security risk management measures are taken on the basis of Programme Criticality assessments in order to balance the criticality of programme outputs with present security risks.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Through the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security (USG UNDSS)

<sup>8</sup> UNSMS Security Policy Manual Chapter II: Section B Framework of Accountability for the United Nations Security Management System.

<sup>9</sup> The roles and responsibilities of Heads of United Nations entities at country level with regards to safety and security are stipulated by the UNSMS Framework of Accountability. February 2011.

## Roles and accountabilities in Programme Criticality

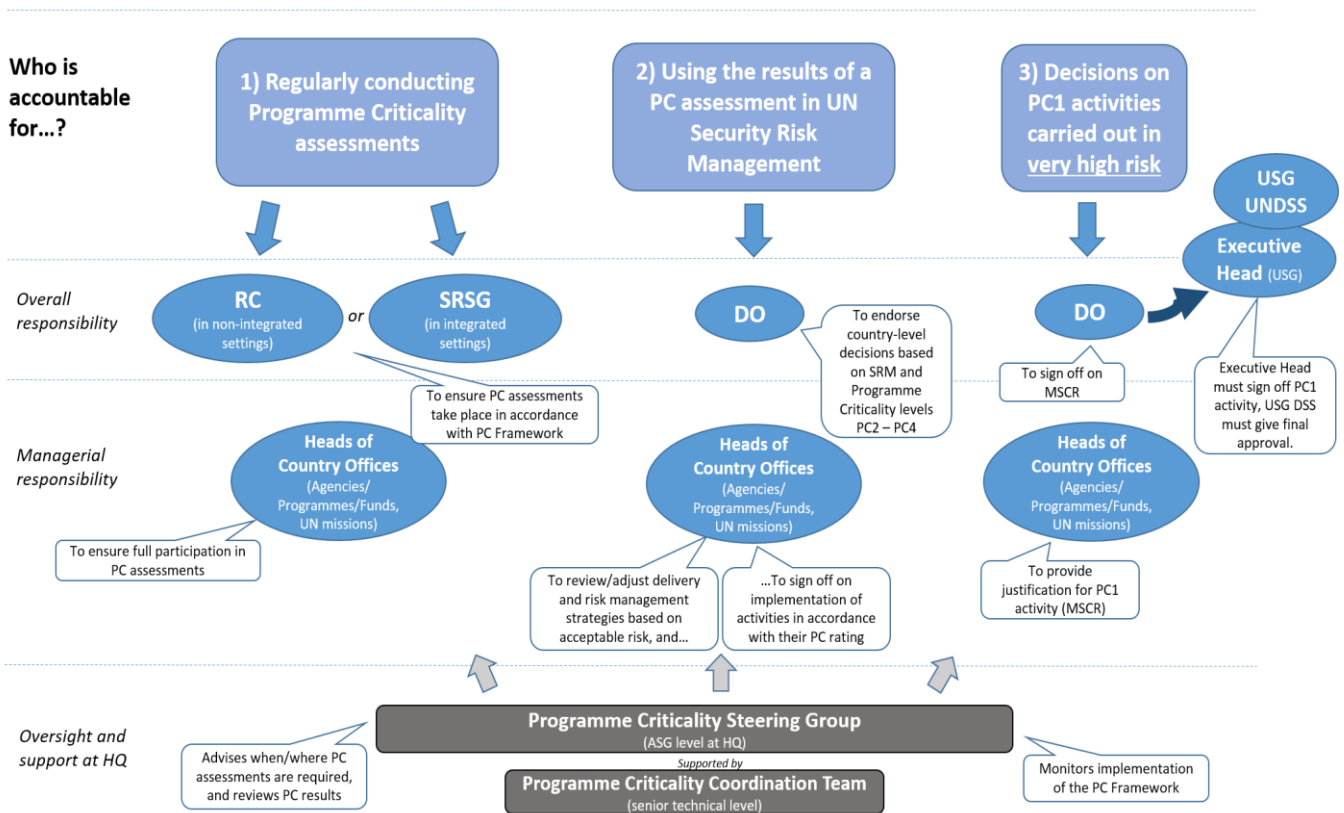


Figure 1: Roles and accountabilities in Programme Criticality

### Quality assurance, oversight and support

10. The quality of a specific Programme Criticality assessment in accordance with this Framework is the responsibility of the United Nations leadership in country.
11. The Programme Criticality Steering Group (PCSG) at HQ level, chaired at Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) level, exercises strategic oversight of the implementation of the Programme Criticality Framework and ensures that support is provided to United Nations country presences in conducting Programme Criticality assessments.<sup>10</sup> The PCSG is supported by the Programme Criticality Coordination Team (PCCT)<sup>11</sup> and the Programme Criticality Secretariat (PC Sec) at technical level (see Section E of this Framework).

<sup>10</sup> The PCSG was created based on decision 2016/1 of the Secretary-General on Programme Criticality, following the meeting of the Policy Committee on 12 January 2016. See Terms of Reference for PCSG (annex I). Further details on the PCSG can be found in Section E below.

<sup>11</sup> See the PCCT Terms of Reference in annex II.

### **The Programme Criticality process**

12. The determination of the Programme Criticality level for specific United Nations activities within a given geographic location and timeframe is termed a Programme Criticality assessment.
13. With the help of the Programme Criticality methodology and tool (described in detail below), the United Nations team in country<sup>12</sup> rates which of its outputs are PC2, PC3, PC4, and – in a separate step – which outputs are designated as PC1. It is crucial that Programme Criticality assessments are done jointly by the entire United Nations team in the area of operation, and not by individual United Nations entities, in order to ensure credibility and coherence of the process and to arrive at a realistic appraisal of outputs through the engagement of experienced peer reviewers from the United Nations presence in country.
14. In identifying PC levels, the Programme Criticality assessment process draws on strategic results that are derived from existing United Nations planning frameworks at country level. It is therefore not a planning exercise in itself. However, in order to obtain credible Programme Criticality results it is crucial that the set of strategic results is balanced and reflective of the actual collective priorities of the United Nations for the duration and the geographical area covered by the Programme Criticality assessment (see further explanation in steps 1 & 2 of the methodology below).
15. The key result of the Programme Criticality assessment is a list of rated outputs. Along with a statement of present risk generated on an ongoing basis through the SRM process in the corresponding geographic location, it assists country level decision makers in determining which outputs can be implemented within the agreed level of acceptable risk, and which ones would require additional security risk management measures or different delivery modalities to balance Programme Criticality with present security risk. This helps to ensure that United Nations personnel do not have to take unnecessary risk while working on those outputs that are likely to contribute most to existing United Nations strategic results.

### **Approval of Programme Criticality levels**

16. Final approval of levels PC1 – PC4 is given by the SRSG/Head of Mission in integrated mission settings and by the RC in non-mission settings, in line with the accountabilities outlined above, and following validation of the results of a Programme Criticality assessment by all heads of United Nations entities in country (see step 7 of the methodology outlined below). In day-to-day decision-making on SRM, the final decision on which activities are enabled based on the acceptable risk at a given time under the prevailing conditions in an area rests with the DO.
17. In situations where an output involving United Nations personnel is determined to be PC1 and its implementation is associated with very high levels of present risk, the Executive Head or Under-Secretary-General (USG) of the relevant United Nations entity must certify that the activity is PC1 and that it can be implemented in situations with very high risk. In such cases the final approval to enable implementation of any particular activity in a situation of very high risk is given by the USG UNDSS.

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<sup>12</sup> This includes UNDSS, but its role in this step is a programmatic one. UNDSS should list its outputs that it sees as important, and should not be viewing any outputs listed in this step from a threat and/or risk perspective.

## C. Programme Criticality as part of the SRM

18. The result of a Programme Criticality assessment sits within the United Nations Security Management System as a core input to decision making on acceptable security risk. It is one side of the balance when making decisions on United Nations programme delivery and mandate implementation. The other side of the balance is the statement of the present risk in a specific location where the programme is being delivered.
19. Two key principles must be adhered to in order for the process to be completed correctly:
  - a. Security risk has no impact on Programme Criticality. There must be no consideration of security risk when determining Programme Criticality.
  - b. Programme Criticality has no impact on security risk. There must be no consideration of Programme Criticality when determining security risk.
20. A Programme Criticality assessment is undertaken by the United Nations system at country level when there is a change in existing strategic plans or a significant change in the programmatic conditions, specific to a geographical location. The Programme Criticality methodology and tool will be used to assign one of the four Programme Criticality levels (PC1, PC2, PC3 or PC4) to each output. The SRM process provides risk levels and advises risk mitigation measures to lower risk. These steps form the Security Risk Management process.
21. This process will allow the United Nations team to establish the maximum level of risk that is acceptable for a specific output. Accordingly, it is permissible to implement:
  - PC1 activities only in **very high** present risk environments;
  - PC1 - PC2 in **high** present risk environments;
  - PC1 - PC2 - PC3 in **medium** present risk environments;
  - PC1 - PC2 - PC3 - PC4 in **low** present risk environments.

Of course, it is possible (and often preferable) to conduct an activity in lower present risk, but it is not permitted to accept more risk than assigned in the Acceptable Risk Model.

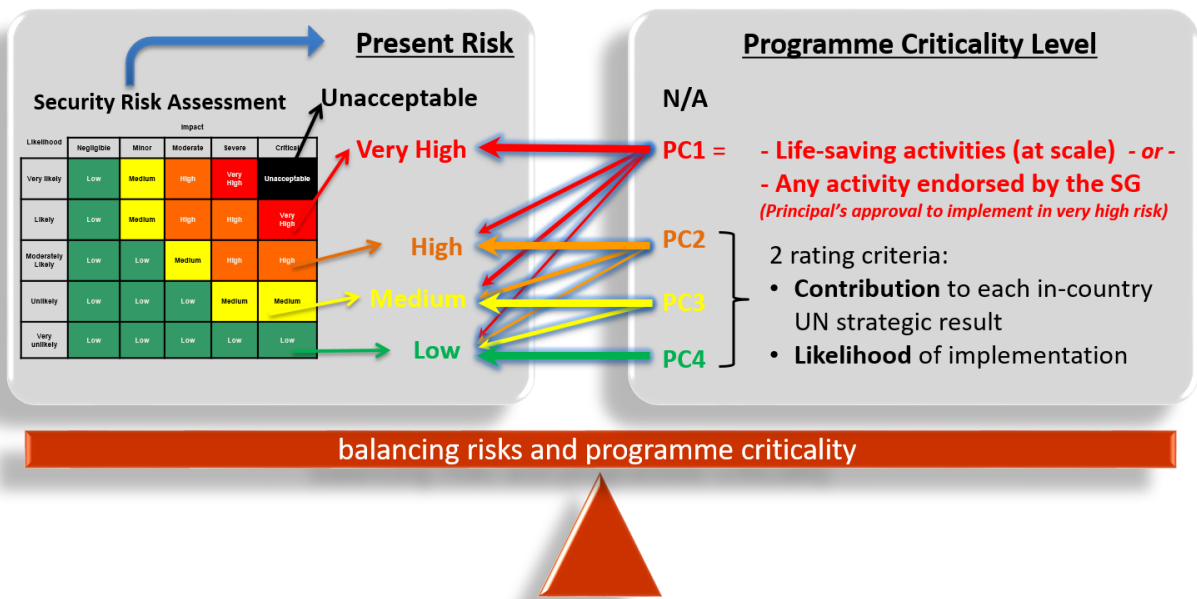


Figure 2: Balancing security risk with Programme Criticality

## D. Overview of Programme Criticality methodology and criteria for assessment

22. The methodology described in this Framework provides a structured approach to determine Programme Criticality. An Excel-based Programme Criticality tool assists in applying this structured approach and completing the steps of the assessment. Subsidiary guidance resources are available that provide further assistance and useful pointers in conducting a Programme Criticality assessment.
23. A Programme Criticality assessment has eight steps:
1. Establish geographical scope and timeframe
  2. List strategic results (SRs)
  3. List United Nations outputs (involving United Nations personnel)
  4. Assess contribution to strategic results (in peer review format)
  5. Assess likelihood of implementation (in peer review format)
  6. Evaluate outputs with PC1 criteria (in peer review format)
  7. View PC level results, form consensus within the United Nations system and approve the final results
  8. Manage and implement the results of the Programme Criticality assessment
24. Each step is described in further detail below. Steps 1 – 3 are critical preparatory steps that must be completed before the actual Programme Criticality assessment can commence. Steps 4 – 6 are completed in a group peer review format at which representatives of all United Nations entities operating in the country should be present and have sufficient decision making authority. The criteria being used to assess outputs in steps 4 and 5 are: (1) Contribution to each of the strategic results and (2) likelihood of implementation. In the Excel-based tool, the contribution scores are averaged and multiplied by the likelihood of implementation score. The result determines the PC2-PC4 level for each of the considered outputs. PC1 ratings, if any, are established in a separate step thereafter.

### Step 1 – Establish geographical scope and timeframe

25. The first step establishes the geographical scope/area and timeframe for the Programme Criticality assessment.
- The geographical scope/area of a Programme Criticality assessment should be the same as the geographical area of coverage in the SRM, where possible, since this will make it easier to compare the result of the assessment to the present security risk in that area. Any differences in the areas should be noted and changes to either the PC area or SRM area should be reflected in the next regular Programme Criticality assessment.
  - If the portfolio of United Nations outputs varies considerably between different geographic areas in a given country, then separate Programme Criticality assessments should be carried out for these areas.<sup>13</sup>
  - A Programme Criticality assessment can be valid for up to 12 months before it must be reviewed and possibly revised. If the operating environment and programmatic context are volatile and fast-changing, then a shorter timeframe for the Programme Criticality assessment should be envisaged. Likewise, a shorter timeframe may be warranted for the duration of a special event of country-wide magnitude, for example an election. (see Step 8 below on the review of a Programme Criticality assessment)

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<sup>13</sup> For example, if the United Nations activities in one part of the country are predominantly humanitarian while in other parts of the country they are focused on development, then this would warrant separate assessments for these areas.

- Scope and timeframe must be agreed before the next steps of the Programme Criticality assessment are initiated.

### **Step 2 – List strategic results**

26. The second step is to confirm and list the strategic results (SR) that the United Nations will collectively work towards in the geographical area and in the agreed timeframe.
- The SR are derived from the various existing planning documents that the United Nations system uses, such as the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), the Integrated Strategic Framework (ISF), the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) or other strategic planning documents. The methodology allows for entering up to six (6) SR by geographical area.
  - It is of critical importance that the set of agreed strategic results reflects an accurate balance of the United Nations' collective priorities for the geographic area and specified timeframe.
  - Additional, situation-specific SRs may be devised in certain situations that are of high importance for the timeframe of the assessment which are not captured in multi-year plans, such as upcoming elections or peace negotiations. Such a Strategic Result could capture, for example, the United Nations' short term measures for support to the local population and actors.
  - In order to allow for a smooth assessment process, SR should be formulated clearly and concisely. Results should be described in 'change' language, which describes a change in the situation of an affected population, the performance of a service, the allocation of national resources, the existence of needed policies or any other observable change.<sup>14</sup>

### **Step 3 – List outputs involving United Nations personnel**

27. The third step is to enter a list of all the outputs the United Nations system wishes to implement in the said geographical area and timeframe, using United Nations personnel.
- Outputs are, in most cases, an aggregate of individual activities by one or several United Nations entities. It is strongly recommended that the United Nations team in country ensures a consistent listing at output level.<sup>15</sup> Supplementary guidance is available from the PC Secretariat on how to best develop a list of outputs for the purposes of a Programme Criticality assessment.
  - To ensure consistent rating in a Programme Criticality assessment, similar and overlapping outputs carried out by separate United Nations entities should, wherever possible, be consolidated into joint outputs.
  - If the outputs do not require the presence of United Nations personnel to be implemented, they fall outside the scope of a Programme Criticality assessment and should not be listed.

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<sup>14</sup> Supplementary guidance is available on the formulation of strategic results for a Programme Criticality assessment.

<sup>15</sup> Key individual activities can be included in an output to illustrate UN personnel involvement, but they should be formulated in a concise manner. Activities that are similar can be grouped together under one output and entered once in the tool.



#### Step 4 – Assess contribution to strategic results

28. The fourth step, undertaken in peer review format, is to assess how each of the outputs contributes to each of the strategic results.
- This assessment is on a 0-5 scale. Final agreement on the rating scale is at the discretion of the United Nations country presence.<sup>16</sup>
  - The scores for an output's contribution to each strategic result are averaged in the Excel-based tool to get a score for that output's total contribution to all the strategic results.
  - It is critical that this step is undertaken by working groups representing a cross-section of the United Nations country presence to ensure peer review. The scoring is relative, and without having a common understanding among United Nations entities of the scoring level, comparison becomes futile.
  - Before embarking on scoring all activities, a number of outputs should be jointly rated in plenary by the peer review group to set benchmarks for the scoring and establish a common understanding.
  - "Enablers" and support outputs: It is advisable that the United Nations country presence jointly agrees on how to score outputs that can be termed as 'enablers' to programme and mandate implementation, such as: Coordination and assessments, management, logistics, common services, operations support, etc. It is permissible that the criticality rating of such an enabler remains open in order to be linked, on a case by case basis, to the PC score of the respective programme or mandate outputs that they support.
  - While rating the outputs, the agreed timeframe and geographic scope should always be kept in consideration as critical factors: What is the contribution of this output to the SRs during the timeframe and in the geographic area of this assessment?
  - The Framework does not consider United Nations outputs implemented by third parties (government, I/NGOs, private sector, third party-contractors, etc.) as long as such activities do not require the physical presence of United Nations personnel. However, even if temporary exposure of United Nations personnel to high or very high risk is being considered, for example through sporadic in-person monitoring visits, then a Programme Criticality rating is required for the given output.

#### Step 5 – Assess likelihood of implementation

29. The fifth step requires the assessment of each output according to its likelihood of implementation within the timeframe of the assessment and in its geographic area.
- This assessment is conducted using a 1-5 scale identical to the likelihood scale used in the Security Risk Assessment (1: very unlikely, 2: unlikely, 3: moderately likely, 4: likely and 5: very likely).
  - What is being assessed is whether the resources and capacity are available to implement the outputs listed in the established timeframe. It is not assessing whether the activities themselves will be successful or completed. The question 'how do you know you can do this?' is a useful pointer in this step.
  - It is suggested that the assessment should be guided by such variables as acceptance (government, local community), capacity and availability of personnel, partner implementing capacity, availability of funding, logistics, physical access (roads, air strips, seasonal climatic conditions, etc.).
  - This step is meant to provide a critical reality check of the ability to implement. United Nations entities should be able to justify the likelihood of implementation, and it is therefore recommended that the criteria used be as verifiable as possible. Past implementation performance and current funding levels may be used as criteria.

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<sup>16</sup> It is suggested that the rating scale is defined as: '0' representing 'no contribution', '1' or '2' meaning an indirect contribution, '3' or '4' representing a notable or a high contribution, and '5' representing an essential contribution to success of the strategic result.

- All outputs must be assessed against the same set of variables and these must be agreed ahead of scoring.
- One variable that is **not** considered in judging likelihood of implementation is the security environment, because this variable is already taken into consideration in the SRM process.

30. Following the completion of steps 4 and 5, the Excel-based tool generates preliminary ratings of either PC2, PC3 or PC4 for each assessed output.

#### **Step 6 – Evaluate activities with PC1 criteria**

31. The sixth step is to evaluate each output to see if it meets the criteria for PC1.
- There are two possible criteria for an output to be considered PC1:
    - a. Either the output, and individual activities thereunder, are assessed as lifesaving (humanitarian or non-humanitarian) at scale (defined as any activity to support processes or services, including needs assessments), and would have an immediate and significant impact on mortality; or
    - b. The output or individual activity is directed by, or receives the endorsement of the Secretary-General for this particular situation.<sup>17</sup>
  - If an activity meets either of these two criteria, it could be considered a PC1 activity and can be (but does not have to be) conducted in very high present risk, if endorsed by the Executive Head of the United Nations entity / Head of the United Nations department and authorized by the Under-Secretary-General of UNSS.
  - Care should be taken to keep outputs identified as PC1 only to those that as so critical that exposing United Nations personnel to very high risk<sup>18</sup> would be acceptable to United Nations entity Representatives and the SRSG or RC.

#### **Step 7 – View Programme Criticality level results, form consensus within the United Nations system and approve final results**

32. The seventh step is to view the PC levels of the various outputs, form consensus within the United Nations country presence that this is the final rating agreed, and finally approve the agreed results.
- Once agreed by the programme managers/peer reviewers, the final results must be validated by the United Nations team in country at the level of Country Director and approved by the SRSG/Head of Mission or RC, as applicable.
  - In the unlikely event that agreement is not reached at country level, the Programme Criticality Steering Group (PCSG)<sup>19</sup>, chaired at ASG level, can intervene to mediate and/or ultimately decide.

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<sup>17</sup> United Nations field mission mandates in their entirety, usually derived from Security Council resolutions, cannot be considered to be automatically at PC1 level and are not covered as a whole by this criterion as it can only be applied in specific, time-bound situations. Mission mandates, while expressing a range of strategic priorities, do not prescribe specific outputs or mandate delivery strategies. *Specific outputs* covered under mission mandates, however, can be considered to fall under this criterion, if so assessed in a Programme Criticality assessment.

<sup>18</sup> Cases in which it is deemed necessary to expose United Nations personnel to Very High Risk are rare as this implies that in the period of the assessment, even after the implementation of all security risk management measures, injury or death of United Nations Personnel remains likely. It is rarely the case that this level of risk-acceptance is warranted for the delivery of a programme or mandated task.

<sup>19</sup> See Terms of Reference for PCSG (annex I). Further details on the PCSG can be found in Section E below.

### Step 8 – Manage and implement the results of the Programme Criticality assessment

33. Upon finalization of a Programme Criticality assessment, the SRS/Head of Mission or RC (as applicable) and the Designated Official should submit the results to the PCSG through the Programme Criticality Secretariat.<sup>20</sup>
- The submission should include a brief implementation plan that highlights some of the steps through which the United Nations country leadership intends to promulgate and implement the Programme Criticality assessment results.
  - While United Nations teams can tailor the process for implementation according to their contexts, it is generally recommended that a Programme Criticality Custodian Group (PCCG) or similar body be created at country level that regularly reviews the Programme Criticality assessment, carries out minor adjustments or re-ratings where necessary, and advises the United Nations country leadership when a revision of the Programme Criticality assessment is required.<sup>21</sup>
34. The final step is to apply the results of the Programme Criticality assessment within the relevant SRM processes to determine which programmes and mandated activities can proceed without additional risk management based on an agreed level of acceptable risk. This entails comparing the established PC level for each output to the present risk level, as determined through the SRM process, for each operational area where the output is conducted.<sup>22</sup> While this process should be led by the Security Management Team (SMT) and overseen by the DO, it also requires that each United Nations entity individually reviews that its outputs and activities are implemented within levels of acceptable risk. If the security risk to implementing an output is not within acceptable limits, United Nations entities can either implement additional Security Risk Management measures to lower the risk, or employ alternative delivery modalities for this output to ensure that United Nations personnel are not exposed to unacceptable risk.
35. As depicted in the flow chart below, the result of the Programme Criticality assessment will inform managers at country level what can be delivered where with the presence of United Nations personnel. While the Programme Criticality assessment is carried out separately from the SRM, the SRM process (Step 8) compares the Programme Criticality assessment results to the current risk to determine acceptable risk for each output.

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<sup>20</sup> See annex III: Cover note template for the submission of results of a Programme Criticality assessment to the PCSG

<sup>21</sup> A PCCG is recommended to consist of a select number of United Nations entities that represent a cross-section of the United Nations presence in-country. It should be made up of staff at Programme Manager's and/or Deputy Representative's level. Members are expected to represent and consider the interest of the whole United Nations country presence, and not only those of their own entity. A sample Terms of Reference is attached in annex IV.

<sup>22</sup> Assigning a Risk Level to an SRM Area or specific mission: As the SRM Manual (2015) specifies, any SRM area may feature a variety of threats and associated Event Descriptions. It therefore advises that "For the purposes of making Acceptable Risk decisions, the risk level assigned to an SRM Area, or any other programme or location to which an Ad Hoc SRM Process was applied, shall be the highest risk associated with any of the events that would be applicable to the programme activity under consideration." UNSMS Security Risk Management (SRM) Manual, pp.41-42.

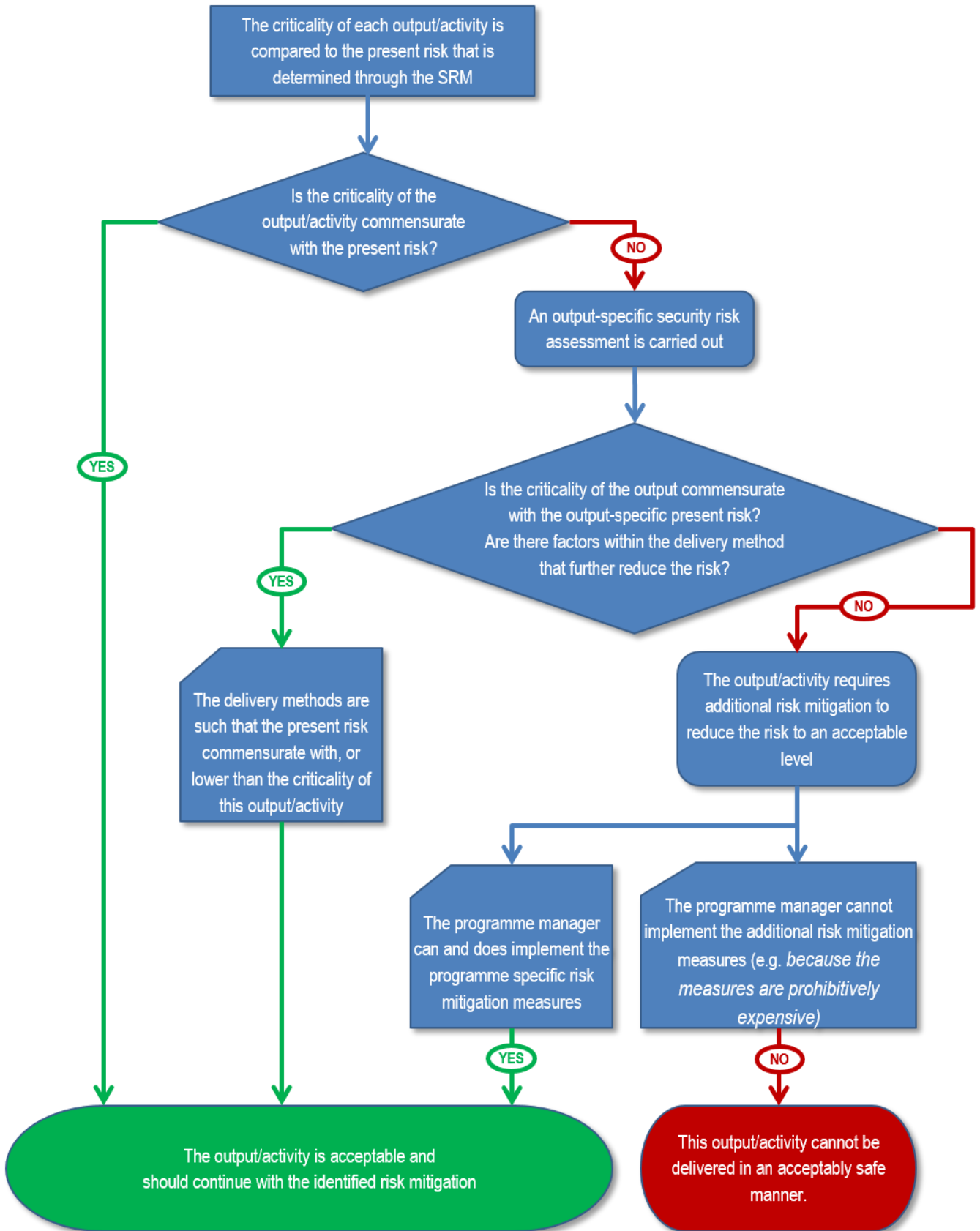


Figure 3: Security Risk Management enabling the implementation of programmes and mandated activities.

### Periodic review of the Programme Criticality assessment

36. Depending on the timeframe agreed in step 1 of a Programme Criticality assessment, its results must be revisited at least every 12 months, and possibly revised.
- Triggers for undertaking a full Programme Criticality assessment in accordance with this Framework are changes in existing strategic priorities or a significant change in the strategic or programmatic context.
  - If the strategic results remain unchanged and no major shifts in the programming environment have occurred, then a technical roll-over of the existing Programme Criticality assessment is possible. However, this needs to be documented by the UN country presence and transmitted to the Programme Criticality Secretariat for review by the PCSG.
  - Since United Nations outputs and associated activities may change while strategic results remain the same, a Representative of a United Nations entity operating in-country may flag the possible change in programmatic conditions to the United Nations team on the ground at any time and ask for a review of the Programme Criticality assessment. It is also recommended that a Programme Criticality Custodian Group, consisting of staff at senior technical level from a select number of United Nations entities, regularly reviews the Programme Criticality assessment, undertakes technical reviews as necessary, and informs the UNCT and mission leadership (where relevant) when a full revision is required.

## E. Programme Criticality Oversight and Support Structures

37. The Programme Criticality Steering Group (PCSG), chaired at ASG level, was established based on the decision by the Policy Committee of the Secretary-General on 12 January 2016. The PCSG exercises strategic oversight of the implementation of this Programme Criticality Framework. It is responsible to ensure that in contexts where Programme Criticality assessments are mandatory, the United Nations country leadership is supported as well as held accountable for the conduct of quality Programme Criticality assessments. It may also intervene to facilitate decision-making where there is an impasse and/or in the unlikely event that consensus on programme criticality levels is not reached at country level, and/or an appeal is made to the PCSG by a United Nations entity present in the country in question.
38. In specific fast evolving situations, the PCSG can support the rapid determination of Programme Criticality, in a manner to suit the context, as per its terms of reference.<sup>23</sup>
39. The PCSG is supported by a technical level Programme Criticality Coordination Team (PCCT)<sup>24</sup> and by the Programme Criticality Secretariat (PC Sec). The PCCT and the PC Sec are the main points of contact for United Nations teams and senior leaders on Programme Criticality. Together, these support structures are responsible for providing support, guidance and quality assurance to United Nations country presences in the implementation of this Programme Criticality Framework. This includes providing necessary support to allow for quality Programme Criticality assessments to be undertaken in country or geographic areas within the country where this is needed and, where this is not the case, for action to be taken to ensure that the assessment in question takes place or is revised appropriately.

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<sup>23</sup> See PCSG Terms of Reference (annex I)

<sup>24</sup> See PCCT Terms of Reference (annex II)

40. For full Programme Criticality assessments, it is highly recommended for United Nations country presences to draw on external facilitation support that can be provided by the PCSG/PCCT.<sup>25</sup> At country level, a focal point is usually assigned in the office of the RC and/or SRSG, as appropriate, to coordinate the preparations for the Programme Criticality assessment across the United Nations country presence. This includes ensuring the collection, compilation and quality of inputs, and to ensure the dissemination of information. Supplementary guidance is available to in-country focal points and external facilitators in each step of the Programme Criticality assessment.

## **F. Validity of this Programme Criticality Framework**

41. The Programme Criticality Framework will be reviewed on a regular basis; the review is to be overseen by the PCSG. The PCSG, through the PCCT, monitors the implementation of the Programme Criticality Framework across the United Nations System and reports annually to the Secretary-General.

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<sup>25</sup> Upon request by the respective UN country presence, the PCCT and the PC Sec assemble a small support team of trained Programme Criticality facilitators from different UN entities. Such a support team usually provides remote support during the final preparations of a Programme Criticality assessment, and on-site facilitation support and advice during the peer review phase of the assessment. Such external facilitation support has proven useful to UN country presences in addressing any problems and challenges during the assessment phase, and in generating credible and accepted Programme Criticality results in accordance with the Programme Criticality Framework.

## G. Glossary of Terms and Definitions

<b>Activity</b>	<p>Actions taken or work performed through which inputs, such as funds, technical assistance and other types of resources, are mobilized to produce specific outputs (see Output definition below).</p> <p>(See UNDG, <a href="#">Results-Based Management Handbook, 2012</a>.)</p>
<b>Designated Official (DO)</b>	<p>In each country or designated area where the United Nations is present, the senior-most United Nations official is normally appointed in writing by the Secretary-General as the Designated Official for Security, and accredited to the Host Government as such. The DO is accountable to the Secretary-General, through the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security, and is responsible for the security of United Nations personnel, premises and assets throughout the country or designated area.</p> <p>Normally, the Resident Coordinator will be appointed as the DO by the Secretary-General, unless the Secretary-General appoints a more senior United Nations official who is resident in the country, on the advice of United Nations Department of Safety and Security (DSS).</p> <p>(UNSMS Security Policy Manual Chapter II Section B: Framework of Accountability)</p>
<b>Output</b>	<p>Outputs are a composite of various activities that collectively lead to a measurable change towards the achievement of strategic results. For the purposes of this Framework and of Programme Criticality assessments, outputs are defined as per the UNDG RBM Handbook:</p> <p><i>'Outputs are changes in skills or abilities and capacities of individuals or institutions, or the availability of new products and services that result from the completion of activities within a [development] intervention within the control of the organization. They are achieved with the resources provided and within the time period specified'.</i></p> <p>(See UNDG, <a href="#">Results-Based Management Handbook, 2012</a>).</p>
<b>Programme Criticality Coordination Team (PCCT)</b>	<p>The PCCT convenes United Nations entities at senior technical level to coordinate and provide support in the implementation of Programme Criticality (see terms of reference in annex II).</p>
<b>Programme Criticality Steering Group (PCSG)</b>	<p>Chaired at Assistant-Secretary-General level, the PCSG convenes United Nations entities at principals' level to oversee the implementation of the Programme Criticality Framework (see terms of reference in annex I).</p>
<b>Present/current risk</b>	<p>The security risk based on the threats, and the security measures and procedures <i>currently</i> in place. <i>(This is the relevant risk category for Programme Criticality assessments)</i></p>
<b>Residual risk</b>	<p>The security risk remaining <i>after</i> approved security measures and procedures have been implemented.</p>

<b>Results-based management (RBM)</b>	<p>RBM is a management strategy by which all actors, contributing directly or indirectly to achieving a set of results, ensure that their processes, products and services contribute to the achievement of desired results (outputs, outcomes and higher level goals or impact). The actors in turn use information and evidence on actual results to inform decision making on the design, resourcing and delivery of programmes and activities as well as for accountability and reporting.</p> <p>(See: UNDG, <a href="#">Results-Based Management Handbook, 2012.</a>)</p>
<b>Resident Coordinator (RC)</b>	<p>The RC is the designated representative of – and reports to – the Secretary-General (as chairman of the Chief Executives Board/CEB) through the UNDP Administrator in her/his capacity as the Chair of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG). The RC is accredited by letter of the Secretary-General, to the Head of State or Government and acts as the primary interlocutor with them.</p> <p>The RC is the leader of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) and as such plays a central role at the country level in making possible the coordination of United Nations operational activities for development in order to ensure alignment of United Nations assistance with national development priorities, plans and capacity building in the context of internationally agreed treaty obligations and development goals, and placing the United Nations centrally in development and international cooperation in the country.</p> <p>(UNDG, Resident Coordinator Job Description)</p>
<b>Risk</b>	<p>The likelihood of a harmful event occurring and the impact of the event if it were to occur (Risk = Likelihood x Impact)</p>
<b>Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG)</b>	<p>Appointed by the Secretary-General, often to lead a United Nations peacekeeping or special political mission. Usually the highest-ranking United Nations official in a country.</p>
<b>Security Management Team (SMT)</b>	<p>The SMT will consist of the DO, who acts as chair, the head of each United Nations organization present at the duty station and the Chief Security Adviser/Officer. The SMT advises the DO on all security-related matters. In peacekeeping missions, where the Head of Mission serves as the DO, the SMT may also include Heads of components, offices or sections, as specified by the DO.</p> <p>(UNSMS Security Policy Manual Chapter II Section B: Framework of Accountability)</p>
<b>Security Risk Management (SRM) and the SRM process</b>	<p>SRM is the process of identifying future harmful events (“threats”) that may affect the achievement of United Nations objectives. It involves assessing the likelihood and impact of these threats to determine the assessed level of risk to the United Nations and identifying an appropriate response. SRM involves four key strategies, namely controlling, avoiding, transferring and accepting security risk. Security risks are controlled through prevention (lowering the likelihood) and mitigation (lowering the impact).</p> <p>The SRM process was first launched by the United Nations Security Management System (UNSMS) in 2004. A revised SRM process was promulgated through the UNDSS Policy on Security Risk Management (SRM) in April 2016. The SRM process supports valid, context-specific, and timely</p>



security risk assessments and risk management decisions to ensure that programmes are delivered within an acceptable level of security risk.

**United Nations  
personnel**

United Nations personnel is defined as:

- i. All United Nations system staff members, including temporary staff, in posts subject to international or local recruitment (except those who are both locally-recruited and paid by the hour);
- ii. United Nations Volunteers (UNVs);
- iii. Individually deployed military and police personnel in DPKO- or DPA-led missions, including, but not limited to:
  - a. United Nations police officers, military observers, military liaison officers, military advisors and staff officers; and
  - b. Military members of national contingents or members of formed police units when not deployed with their contingent or unit.
- iv. Consultants, individual contractors and experts on mission when actually employed by an organization of the United Nations system; and
- v. Officials other than United Nations Secretariat staff members and similar non-staff officials of other organizations of the United Nations system with a direct contractual agreement with a United Nations System organization

(UNSMS Security Policy Manual Chapter III: Applicability of the UNSMS)

## Annex I:

### Terms of Reference Programme Criticality Steering Group (PCSG)<sup>26</sup>

1. The Programme Criticality Steering Group (PCSG) was established based on the decision by the Policy Committee of the Secretary-General on 12 January 2016 to endorse Programme Criticality as a mandatory policy of the Organization in areas where the present security risk is high or above high. The PCSG replaces the Executive Group on Programme Criticality (EGPC) and the Programme Criticality Steering Committee (PCSC).
2. The purpose of the PCSG is to exercise strategic oversight of the implementation of the United Nations Programme Criticality Framework and methodology, which serves to define levels of programme criticality in order to inform decision-making in accordance with the United Nations Security Risk Management (SRM) process.
3. The PCSG is supported by the Programme Criticality Coordination Team (PCCT) at technical level as well as by the Programme Criticality Secretariat (PC Sec). The PCSG has the following responsibilities:
  - a. The PCSG directs the PCCT and its functions, which include providing advice and support to United Nations country presences on Programme Criticality assessments and monitoring the use of Programme Criticality results in operational decision-making on the acceptable security risk to United Nations personnel.
  - b. The PCSG advises when and where Programme Criticality assessments are required. It ensures that, in contexts where Programme Criticality assessments are mandatory, the United Nations country leadership (Resident Coordinator or Special Representative of the Secretary-General/Head of Mission) is supported as well as held accountable for the conduct of Programme Criticality assessments in accordance with the Programme Criticality Framework.
  - c. The PCSG receives the PC results and the implementation plan from the United Nations country leadership in settings where Programme Criticality assessments are mandatory and reviews them for consistency with the Programme Criticality Framework.
  - d. In the event of an impasse and/or lack of consensus among a United Nations country presence on programme criticality levels that cannot be resolved at country level, the PCSG can intervene to mediate and to determine PC levels for the specific situation in question. A request for such an intervention can be made by either the United Nations country leadership or any United Nations entity involved in the Programme Criticality assessment (*see process of the Appeal mechanism below*).
  - e. The PCSG reports annually to the Secretary-General on the implementation of Programme Criticality.
  - f. In specific fast evolving crisis situations, there may be a need to rapidly facilitate a determination of Programme Criticality levels to make urgent decisions about

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<sup>26</sup> The Programme Criticality Framework is a common United Nations system framework for decision-making that puts in place guiding principles and a systematic structured approach in using Programme Criticality as a way to ensure that programme activities can be balanced against security risks. Programme Criticality is not a security function but is required for ensuring that critical programmes are implemented within levels of acceptable risk.

acceptable risk for United Nations staff. In such situations, the PCSG can support the rapid determination of Programme Criticality, in a manner to suit the context. Where relevant, the PCSG may agree to address only those activities that are to be considered PC1, and thereafter instruct the country level leadership to undertake a rapid PC assessment for activities of levels PC2-PC4. Decisions taken must be recorded and shared with all concerned entities.<sup>27</sup>

### **Composition and Working Modalities**

4. The PCSG shall be convened at ASG level under a two-year rotating (co-) chairmanship.
5. The PCSG should convene twice per year. The co-chairs of the PCSG may call additional ad hoc meetings when deemed necessary, for example in case of an appeal from a United Nations country presence for support in the determination or verification of PC results.
6. The current members of the PCSG are the following United Nations organizations and departments: FAO, DOCO, DPA, DPKO, UNDSS, OCHA, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, WHO.
7. The PCSG membership shall be open to all United Nations entities with an operational and staffing footprint in high-risk countries. United Nations entities wishing to join may make a request to the co-chairs of the PCSG at any time. PCSG members are required to designate a focal point at technical level to act as member of the PCCT. Membership in the PCSG carries the expectation of a participation in the cost-sharing and resourcing arrangement to cover common expenses such as for the PC secretariat, tools development and training<sup>28</sup>.
8. A quorum for decisions is reached with at least 70 per cent of PCSG members present. If the decision concerns a mission setting, the relevant lead department needs to be represented in order for the quorum to be reached.
9. Secretariat support for the PCSG will be provided by the PC Sec. If there is no PC Sec in place, such functions shall be covered by the co-chairs of the PCCT.

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<sup>27</sup> The PC levels are defined in the CEB-approved Programme Criticality Framework.

<sup>28</sup> DOCO and UNDSS are exempt from the cost-sharing arrangement.

## **I. Appeal mechanism**

Step 1: The United Nations country leadership or any Head of Agency at country level can appeal against the results of a Programme Criticality assessment in case the disagreement could not be resolved at country level. Such an appeal should be presented by the PCSG member of the respective United Nations entity or – should that entity not be represented in the PCSG – by a representative of the United Nations entity at the appropriate level (ASG or senior Director). The Resident Coordinator and/or SRSG in country may also present the matter to the PCSG. The presentation to the PCSG should include relevant details on the matter and reasons for the appeal.

Step 2: The PCSG co-chairs circulate the appeal to PCSG members for virtual comments. If a rapid decision is required, the co-chairs may also decide to call a meeting or telephone conference immediately.

Step 3: Upon receipt of opinions from PCSG members, the PCSG co-chairs make a provisional determination on the matter and present it to PCSG members for their consideration and approval. Decisions by the PCSG must be taken by consensus, with a quorum of at least 70 per cent of members. If the decision concerns a mission setting, the relevant lead department needs to be represented in order for the quorum to be reached.

Step 4: The PCSG co-chairs relay the decision to United Nations country presence. All PCSG members support the implementation of the decision.

## **II. Standing agenda (to be amended as required)**

### **1. Review of results of recent Programme Criticality assessments**

- *The PCCT co-chairs and PC Secretariat present key results of recent PC assessments*

### **2. Horizon scanning: Where are new Programme Criticality assessments required?**

- *The PCCT co-chairs and UNDSS present country contexts to the PCSG:*
  - a) where a PC assessment is mandatory but currently not in place;*
  - b) where a PC assessment is outdated and should be reviewed; or*
  - c) where a PC assessment may be advisable based on observed trends in-country.*
- *All PCSG members are invited to propose PC assessments.*

### **3. Review of feedback from Programme Criticality assessments and lessons learned (once per year)**

### **4. Review and approval of the annual report to the Secretary-General (once per year)**

### **5. Matters presented by PCSG members or the PCCT**

**Annex II:**  
**Terms of Reference**  
**Programme Criticality Coordination Team (PCCT)**

1. The technical-level Programme Criticality Coordination Team (PCCT) was established following the approval of the revised Programme Criticality Framework by the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) in March 2013. As affirmed by the Secretary-General's Policy Committee on 12 January 2016 (Decision 2016/1), the PCCT supports the ASG-level Programme Criticality Steering Group (PCSG) in exercising strategic oversight of the implementation of the Programme Criticality Framework.
2. The PCCT has the following responsibilities, as directed by the PCSG:
  - a. The PCCT, supported by the Programme Criticality Secretariat (PC Sec), provides advice and support to United Nations country presences on Programme Criticality assessments and monitors the use of Programme Criticality results in operational decision-making on the acceptable security risk to United Nations personnel.
  - b. The PCCT supports the PCSG in advising when and where Programme Criticality assessments are required, and in ensuring accountability of the United Nations country leadership for completing Programme Criticality assessments in accordance with the Programme Criticality Framework. It provides technical advice and support to country presences where required, including by mobilizing trained facilitators from within the PCSG/PCCT member entities.
  - c. The PCCT, through the co-chairs and PC Sec, receives the results of Programme Criticality assessments and the implementation plan from United Nations country presences where Programme Criticality assessments are mandatory and reviews them for consistency with the Programme Criticality Framework, before submitting them to the PCSG through the PC Sec.
  - d. In the event of an impasse and/or lack of consensus among a United Nations country presence on Programme Criticality levels that cannot be resolved at country level, the PCSG can intervene to mediate and to determine Programme Criticality levels for the specific situation in question. In such cases, the PCCT and the PC Sec advise the United Nations country leadership and country presence on necessary actions to take in line with the Appeals mechanism process outlined in the Terms of Reference of the PCSG.
  - e. The PCCT ensures availability of an effective pool of trained Programme Criticality assessment facilitators and is responsible for the conduct of regular trainings in this regard.
  - f. As required, the PCCT reviews and revises the Programme Criticality framework for approval by the PCSG and HLCM.
  - g. The PCCT develops and revises implementation tools, based on lessons learned and good practices from Programme Criticality assessments and from the use of Programme Criticality results in the Security Risk Management process.
  - h. The PCCT, supported by the PC Sec, prepares an annual report to the Secretary-General on the implementation of Programme Criticality and submits it for the PCSG.
  - i. In specific fast evolving crisis situations where the PCSG may be called to support the rapid determination of Programme Criticality levels to make urgent decisions about acceptable risk for United Nations personnel, the PCCT and PC Sec support the PCSG in the execution of its responsibilities.
  - j. PCCT members proactively increase awareness of the concept, methodology and application of Programme Criticality within their respective organizations.

- k. PCCT members proactively reach out to their organization's country presence (where relevant) to promote active engagement in Programme Criticality assessments.

### **Composition and Working Modalities**

3. The PCCT shall be convened at technical level with a two-year rotating (co-)chair, in line with the PCSG (co-)chair. The (co)chair is responsible for representing the PCCT at PCSG meeting and for the overall coordination of the PCCT's work.
4. The PCCT shall convene regularly every six to eight weeks, or more often if required in certain situations, such as in case of an appeal from a United Nations country presence for support in the determination or verification of Programme Criticality results.
5. The PCCT membership is linked to membership in the PCSG which shall be open to all United Nations entities with an operational and staffing footprint in high-risk countries. United Nations wishing to join may make a request to the co-chairs of the PCSG, and at technical level to the co-chairs of the PCCT, at any time. Membership in the PCSG and PCCT carries the expectation of a participation in the cost-sharing and resourcing arrangement to cover common expenses such as for the PC Sec, tools development and training.<sup>29</sup>
6. The current members of the PCCT, in line with those of the PCSG, are: FAO, DOCO, DPA, DPKO, UNDSS, OCHA, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, WHO.
7. Decisions are taken on a consensus basis. A quorum for decisions is reached with at least 70 per cent of PCCT members present. If the decision concerns a mission setting, the relevant lead department needs to be represented in order for the quorum to be reached.

Secretariat support for the PCCT and the PCSG will be provided by the PC Sec. The PC Sec should be housed in one of the (co)chairing entities. If there is no PC Sec in place at any given time, such functions shall be covered by the PCCT (co)chair.

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<sup>29</sup> DOCO and UNDSS are exempt from the cost-sharing arrangement.

### Annex III

## PROGRAMME CRITICALITY ASSESSMENT FOR [COUNTRY]

### COVER NOTE FOR SUBMISSION TO THE PROGRAMME CRITICALITY STEERING GROUP (PCSG)

**To:** The Co-Chairs of the Programme Criticality Steering Group  
**Through:** The Programme Criticality Secretariat

**Date:** [please indicate date of submission]

With this note, I am / we are submitting the results of the Programme Criticality Assessment for [Country, specify region if necessary].

**Duration of validity of the PCA:** [e.g. 1 January – 30 June 2016]

**Geographic scope of the PCA:** [e.g. nation-wide / province x / region y ]

**Dates of the PC assessment workshop:** [e.g. 2 – 5 February 2016]

#### Enclosed to this note are:

- The overview of strategic results defined for this PC assessment;
- The full PC rating table;
- The list of outputs assessed as PC1.

#### **I. Comments (*Optional – please delete if not relevant*)**

[Please include any comments or remarks that you may have on the Programme Criticality Assessment itself, and/or its results. You may also specify any support requirements that you may have identified for the implementation and use of the PC results.]

#### **II. Programme Criticality Implementation Plan**

[Please provide a brief outline, in bullet point format, on what key steps will be taken, or have already been taken, to roll-out and implement the results of the PC assessment in your country. These can include the following, recommended steps:

- Establish a PC Custodian Group (PCCG) that regularly reviews the Programme Criticality assessment (please also list the members of this working group).
- Convene a briefing of the SMT to brief on the outcomes of the PC assessment, compare PC levels to the relevant SRM and consider additional risk management measures where necessary to ensure programme delivery.
- Brief security focal points (UNDSS, mission and AFP security advisors) on the PC results and their use in decision-making.
- Maintain regular dialogue between programme and security professionals (e.g. between UNCT/PMT and SMT) to regularly review the balance between Risk and Programme Criticality, and make adjustments to security management processes if necessary.
- Disseminate PC results to all UN personnel and explain implications on programme delivery and risk-based decision-making.]

**III. Appeal / request for support or mediation (*please delete if not relevant*)**

[If the PC Assessment process resulted in an impasse or disagreement between UN entities that could not be resolved at country level, you may decide to present the matter in this submission note in order to seek the support from the Programme Criticality Coordination Team (PCCT) or, if needed, mediation from the PCSG. Heads of Agencies are free to also present the matter to the PCSG through their respective headquarters.]

**Signatures:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
SRSG or Resident Coordinator [specify]  
[please add name]

\_\_\_\_\_  
Designated Official  
[please add name]



## Annex IV

### Programme Criticality Custodian Group (PCCG)

#### Terms of Reference

*Sample – to be adjusted as necessary*

#### **Purpose:**

An in-country Programme Criticality Custodian Group (PCCG) brings together a core group of UN entities that have committed themselves to acting as the custodian of Programme Criticality, and to ensuring that the results of the Programme Criticality Assessment are regularly reviewed and updated/adjusted, if so required.

#### **Members:**

The PCCG consists of around five UN entities that represent a cross-section of the UN presence in-country. It should be made up of staff at Programme Manager's and/or Deputy Representative's level. Members are expected to represent and consider the interest of the whole UN country presence, and not only those of their own entity. The PCCG is normally convened by the Office of the Resident Coordinator but can be chaired by any UN entity selected by PCCG members.

#### **Tasks:**

- Finalize outstanding decisions from the PC Assessment (if relevant);
- Regularly review PC rating results and discuss potentially inaccurate ratings with the UN entities concerned;
- Make adjustments to the PC ratings in accordance with the PC methodology and in a peer review format;
- Recommend adjustments of PC1 ratings to UN senior management;
- Liaise and consult with security professionals on the use of Programme Criticality results in decision-making on staff security;
- Make recommendations to the UN country leadership (RC or SRSB) on whether to carry out a full revision of the Programme Criticality Assessment, and support preparations for a new PC Assessment;
- Support UN country leadership in reporting to the HQ-based Programme Criticality Steering Group, if required.

#### **Frequency of meetings:**

The PCCG should meet, at a minimum, at mid-point and at the end of the validity of the PC assessment. Meetings can also be called on an ad hoc basis.