Humanitarian Outcomes

Independent Review of Programme Criticality

Part 1: Main Report

Submitted to the Programme Criticality Steering Committee

by

Humanitarian Outcomes

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21 July 2014

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Acronyms

AMISOM	African Union Mission to Somalia
BINUCA	UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic
CAR	Central African Republic
CEB	Chief Executive Board for Coordination
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CHAP	Common Humanitarian Action Plan
CSA	Chief Security Adviser
DFS	Department of Field Support
DO	Designated Official for Security
DOCO	Development Operations Coordination Office
DPA	Department of Political Affairs
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DSA	Deputy Security Adviser
DSRSG	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FSCO	Field Security Coordination Officer
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HLCM	High Level Committee on Management
HQ	Headquarters
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee on Humanitarian Affairs
IASMN	Inter-Agency Security Management Network
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
ISF	Integrated Strategic Framework
L3	Level 3
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MONUSCO	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC
NFIs	Non-Food items
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance
OJSR	Office of the Joint Special Representative
OSASG	Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary General
PC	Programme Criticality
PCCT	Programme Criticality Coordination Team
PCSC	Programme Criticality Steering Committee
PCWG	Programme Criticality Working Group
PMT	Programme Management Team
RC	Resident Coordinator
SG	Secretary-General
SLS	Security Level System
SMS	Security Management System
SMT	Security Management Team
SPM	Special Political Mission
SRA	Security Risk Analysis
SRM	Security Risk Management
SRP	Strategic Response Plan
SR	Strategic Result
SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary-General

TOR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNAMI	United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq
UNAMID	African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDOF	United Nations Disengagement Observer Force
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDSS	United Nations Department for Safety and Security
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNFIL	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMAS	United Nations Mine Action Service
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNMOGIP	United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNOM	United Nations Office in Mali
UNPOS	United Nations Political Office for Somalia
UNSCO	United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process
UNSCOL	United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon
UNSMIL	United Nations Support Mission in Libya
UNSOM	United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia
UNTSO	United Nations Truce Supervision Organization
USG	Under Secretary-General
UNSOA	United Nations Support Office for AMISOM
VTC	Video teleconference
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive summary

In 2007, part way through a decade during which it experienced major, targeted attacks and significant staff losses, the UN began to reflect on how it managed its operational security. In some settings, the Organisation was seen as overly risk adverse while in others it was accused of placing personnel at unnecessary risk. Recognising that it needed the ability to continue delivering under difficult security circumstances, the UN made a series of changes to its Security Management System, including to the Guidelines for Determining Acceptable Risk (UNDSS 2009b). These spelled out that the UN could not eliminate all risks and that it should be willing to accept higher risk when implementing more critical programmes. In 2011, after field-testing, the UN approved a framework for how it should determine, jointly at the field level, 'programme criticality'; a revised version of the framework was approved in February 2013 (UN System 2011c and 2013a).

To take stock of how well the instrument is functioning and meeting its goals a few years into its existence, the Programme Criticality Steering Committee (PCSC) commissioned this independent external review. The review, which covers October 2011 to the present, intends to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the programme criticality (PC) methodology and tool; to assess the rollout of the PC framework, including the use of PC results at country level and whether PC contributes to the UN's ability to 'stay and deliver'; to identify external factors that might have influenced the implementation of programme criticality; and to provide actionable recommendations for a way forward, including on the sustainability and institutionalisation within the UN system. The High Level Committee on Management/Chief Executives Board for Coordination has tasked the PCSC to recommend, by June 2014, 'a longer term institutional solution for the coordination of PC and providing technical support to the field' (UN System 2013a, 13).

The review was commissioned as a 'formative' rather than a 'full-fledged formal evaluation'. It was undertaken over a twelve-week time period, during which the review team conducted 152 interviews with stakeholders at headquarters level and during field visits to Afghanistan (Kabul), Mali (Bamako), Somalia (Mogadishu and Nairobi) and South Sudan (Juba). Team members also interviewed representatives in Nigeria, Pakistan, Syria and Yemen by phone. The team also conducted an online survey of UN personnel, in English and French, which generated 160 usable responses and conducted a systematic analysis of country-level documentation. The findings below are grouped according to the sections of the report that follows.

Global rollout

The rollout has been largely successful, with good coverage achieved in a short time. The fifteen countries where at least one PC assessment has been conducted since October 2011 reflect an appropriate selection, in that they include areas with large numbers of UN personnel and/or with multiple security areas of the country classified as SLS level 'high'. These results have been achieved even though the PCSC has not determined the schedule of the rollout and even though it is not clear whether the PCSC has a role in ensuring that PC assessments, which are 'mandatory in areas with residual risk levels of 'high' and 'very high'' (UN System 2013b, 3), are in fact carried out. The rollout has been conducted efficiently, relying entire on existing funds and with a budget of about half of that originally envisioned, but with some reduction in objectives. The support provided to the field has been timely and effective, with a strong but small pool of experts capable of facilitating PC assessments.

In-country PC assessments

Programme criticality provides the right balance to the security risk assessment (SRA) and no major gaps exist in the framework. While the tool can initially appear complex, country teams are able to grasp it (with support) and rate activities with criticality levels PC1-PC4. The changes made to the tool since 2011 have resulted in improvements. At country level, the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) and heads of agencies demonstrate a

high level of engagement. In almost every case, where present, political and peacekeeping missions have participated in the PC assessments. Most country teams do not yet have the capacity to undertake a PC assessment without outside support, however.

The review identified a few challenges with the tool. First, rating activities according to their contribution to different types of UN strategic results (SRs) (humanitarian, development, peace/security, etc.) can skew results in ways that do not accurately reflect criticality. Under capable leadership, PC ratings that fail the test of common sense can be adjusted, and the separate process of assessing PC1 should allow the most truly critical activities to come to the fore (as lifesaving or as a directed activity endorsed by the Secretary-General), but some activities may still be inappropriately deemed less critical than others. The team explored ways of addressing this, but found no clearly superior alternative.

Second, while the PC1 criteria are broadly appropriate, a conflation of PC with risk and concerns about funding have (alongside other factors) sometimes clouded decision-making on PC1. The process by which the Office of the Secretary-General endorses activities as PC1 is also not clear. Third, there have been some long delays between the workshop and the finalisation of PC levels, which has had implications for uptake. Lastly, the fact that PC assessments do not involve a comparison of PC levels to residual risk levels represents a lost opportunity to take results forward.

Use of PC results
The review found several ways in which programme criticality, as a small but important piece of the decision-making machinery for enabling UN operations in dangerous places, is positively influencing the UN's ability to stay and deliver. PC has provided a valuable conceptual tool. While the peer review can lead to difficult and contentious discussions, it is generally appreciated as integral to the exercise. It forces important conversations about priorities vis-à-vis security risks, for example, by asking 'why are we here?' or 'what is worth risking the lives of staff members to achieve?' PC in some contexts has helped to bridge gaps between security and programme personnel, lead to more nuanced discussions on how to manage risk, and sharpened strategic priorities. While uptake has been limited, individual agencies report having used PC levels to guide decisions on which programmes to enable. Headquarters approval for PC1 activities, regularly obtained for activities in Somalia and Syria, is largely seen as appropriate and necessary.

In the majority of the eight countries examined, however, PC levels essentially 'sat on a shelf' after the workshop and were not used as intended to inform decisions on acceptable risk. Residual risk levels either were not available in a suitable form or were never explicitly compared to agreed PC levels. Several interviewees observed that this had rendered PC essentially 'meaningless'. Not seeing a clear use for the effort expended, some country teams are questioning the value of returning to the exercise.

Field-level security advisers, as well as Designated Officials, vary considerably in their understanding of programme criticality and how to use PC results. At field and headquarters levels, UNDSS often uses the old terms 'extreme', 'critical', etc. rather than the PC levels and sometimes understand programme criticality to be determined by UN entities individually rather than collectively and in a flexible rather than structured way. With the exception of a few examples of evolving practice, there is little consent at the field level on exactly how PC levels should be verified (i.e. checked against the PC assessment done jointly by the UN system in country) and compared with residual risk levels in order to inform operational decisions (e.g., on mission clearance, staff deployment or the use of limited security assets).

As a component of 'duty of care', programme criticality is rightly viewed primarily as an internal tool, but it could be helpful in a number of ways to engage with outside actors on PC. Notably, if PC becomes more integrated into UN ways of working, communication with donor governments will become important.

Internalisation of programme criticality within the UN

Programme criticality is not living up to its objective of informing decisions on acceptable risk largely because of an incomplete grounding in the Security Management System. This is the case at the levels of guidance, practice and political support. The revised guidance and policy on security risk management (SRM) is potentially a key mechanism to guide the DO, supported by UNDSS, to ensure that agreed PC levels inform his/her final risk acceptance. A key aspect of embedding PC within decisions on acceptable risk will also be the willingness of individual UN entities to act in a collective manner to manage security risks.

As a relatively new initiative, PC is not yet fully integrated into the ways of working of UN entities, or into various system-wide support structures and planning processes. Despite the early engagement of the respective USGs and Executive Directors in approving and launching the initiative, the participation of DPKO, DPA and DFS, in the rollout has since been limited, other than involvement in the missions where PC assessments have been conducted. While examples exist of agencies developing guidance and providing headquarters support, this has been lacking for many. Also, some confusion exists as to the extent that programme criticality is UN policy. Interviewees indicated that it may carry more weight in the Secretariat, at least, if endorsed by the Secretary-General's Policy Committee.

Conclusions and recommendations

Programme criticality is an integral part of the UN's acceptable risk model. But as currently supported, without adequate management and accountability structures, it is at risk of dying 'a slow, unassisted death' in the words of one interviewee. The review identified three priority objectives if programme criticality is to reach its potential: (1) devise a more robust system of support and oversight to PC assessments, including timelines and procedures for revision/review; (2) fully integrate PC into the ways of working of the UN entities; and (3) foster the support of UNDSS and fully embed PC decisions within a functional SMS. All three objectives are inter-linked and inter-dependent.

The overall recommendations are presented first, followed by recommendations grouped according to the three priority objectives. The recommendations are designed to be broadly applicable irrespective of the global support structure chosen. A timeframe of either immediate (6–12 months) or medium-term (1–2 years) is indicated next to each recommendation. The recommendations are primarily directed to headquarters, which is the level needed to increase the support, oversight and accountability of the programme criticality mechanism, but with the understanding that they are intended to positively impact future PC exercises and uptake at the field level. Unless otherwise specified, the objective-level recommendations should be carried out by the PC secretariat with the active support and oversight of the governance and accountability body.

Overall:

1. Establish a stronger working-level governance and accountability body ('oversight body'), which meets monthly to address critical issues in the implementation of programme criticality and to direct the work of the PC secretariat.[1] **(Immediate)**
2. Increase the PC secretariat to a two-person team, each dedicating approximately 50 per cent full-time equivalent. UNDSS should contribute one of the PC secretariat team members,[2] thus facilitating programme-security collaboration and strengthening the link with the SMS. **(Immediate)**
3. Request the CEB and the SG Policy Committee to review and consider approving a revised PC Framework, the adapted structure (working-level oversight body) and institutional home.[3] **(Immediate)**

Objective 1: Devise a more robust system of support and oversight to PC assessments

4. Set up a process by which the oversight body regularly reviews residual risk levels by country and establishes priority countries to conduct PC exercises, with timelines, including the period within which a country should update the results. **(Immediate)**
5. Set up a process by which the oversight body reviews/approves PC exercises when complete and ensures finalisation of results within one month of the assessment; for very high risk countries this would involve a more detailed review, to ensure appropriateness.[4] **(Immediate)**
6. Revise the PC Framework **(immediate)** to:
   a. Clarify the guidance on how to conduct a PC exercise by:
      i. Re-drawing the 'Conceptual overview: Acceptable Risk Model balances Security Risk (SRA) with Programme Criticality (PC1-PC4)' so that four arrows come from PC1, three from PC2, etc.);
      ii. Emphasising that determinations of PC1 activities must maintain a strong focus on the 'critical impact of an activity on the population' rather than other, un-related factors;
      iii. Instructing that strategic results be balanced to reflect true priorities (explaining how PC levels will be determined based on these) and encouraging multiple PC exercises in sub-regions where objectives differ significantly, for example where there are discrete areas of conflict.

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[1] The body could retain the name PCSC but with a revised terms of reference to reflect a more robust oversight role. The body could be comprised of representatives of a more senior level than the technical-level PCCT but perhaps not Director-level, given the greater frequency of meetings and workload. In light of the increased time commitment, as well as to facilitate timely decision-making, the body could be limited in membership to approximately 6-8 entities. This could include UNDSS, DFS/DPKO, DPA, OCHA, UNDP, and rotating seats for two or three agencies. The chair could rotate, perhaps beginning with a representative of the office/entity chosen to host the PC secretariat. The entity/office chosen as host for the PC secretariat could be represented on the working-level oversight body, but need not be its chair. The PCCT can be dissolved.

[2] Allocating only 50 per cent of each person's time is meant to keep costs manageable while ensuring links with each person's respective institutions.

[3] Consider calling it a PC 'policy' rather than a 'framework', to avoid confusion.

[4] A mechanism, the Executive Group on Programme Criticality (EGPC), was designed to intervene to mediate or determine PC levels in the event that consensus is not reached at country level, but it has never been utilised. The EGPC is convened at USG level. It could be dissolved with the possibility of re-establishing it, or an alternate senior level mechanism could be created, once the exact form of the oversight body is determined. It might prove more practical to have the function in a single high-level office rather than requiring all of the USGs to come together.

b. Identify triggers for redoing a PC exercise, i.e., when there is a major change in the programming context / needs of the population.[5]

c. Include a step in the PC assessment whereby the PC level for each activity is compared to the residual risk level in each operational area where it is conducted. Within either the PC framework or the relevant SMS policy/manual (see recommendation 12 below), define a process whereby, following the PC assessment, the DO oversees the UN entity in taking steps to address any unacceptable risk within a defined timeline.

d. Establish clearer procedures for how agencies may appeal for a change to a PC level, including options for country-based models (e.g., providing a ToR for a 'PC core group', including which and how many entities should be included, at what level of representation).

e. Define a process by which some countries (those where security risk is high rather than very high; where the context has not changed significantly; and where there have been at least two PC assessments conducted successfully without outside facilitation) may move to a model whereby each UN entity proposes PC levels 2-4 for their activities, rather than inter-agency groups assessing 'contribution to strategic results' (Step 4) and 'likelihood of implementation' (Step 5) to produce these. The other steps would remain the same. This would be at the discretion of the RC/HC.

f. Establish a mechanism to clarify how an activity receives the endorsement of the Office of the Secretary-General for PC1, respecting the principle that 'care should be taken to keep activities identified as PC1 to a minimum, because they could put UN personnel at very high residual risk'.[6]

7. Oversee the development of expertise on programme criticality (including facilitators as well as senior managers with capacity to review PC exercises), adding a greater focus on developing field level (e.g., RC's office) knowledge to ensure sustainability. **(Medium-term)**

8. Develop an e-training package on PC and an online platform for managing and viewing PC results by country, made accessible to all relevant decision-makers. **(Medium-term)**

Objective 2: Fully integrate PC into the ways of working of all UN entities

9. Oversee the inclusion of appropriate references to programme criticality within key inter-agency and integrated planning tools,[7] such as humanitarian SRPs, ISFs, UNDAFs, inter-agency preparedness / contingency planning guidelines, as well as the RC/HC's Terms of Reference, training package and other relevant policy/guidance material developed at headquarters.[8] **(Immediate)**

10. Establish a checklist and basic guidance for UN entities for integrating PC in their own systems and training for field personnel / TORs (i.e., which types of staff should know about PC, how PC can be incorporated into business continuity / continuity of

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[5] For example, a request for CERF funding under the emergency window, a declaration of an L3 emergency, or a revision of a mission mandate/structure could be possible triggers.

[6] UN System 2013b, p.9. For example, ahead of in-country PC assessments, that Office could determine, in consultation with field-level actors as appropriate, which activity/activities are 'a directed activity that receives the endorsement of the Office of Secretary-General for this particular situation' (UN System 2013b, p.9).

[7] Recognising that 'in identifying PC levels, the PC methodology uses existing UN planning frameworks already agreed at country level. It is thus not a planning framework' (UN System 2013b, p.5).

[8] Recognising that PC assessments are only necessary in contexts of high or very high residual security risks.

operations planning, etc.). Monitor and offer support on this as necessary. **(Medium-term)**

11. Reflect on and possibly suggest ways of aligning various in-country planning cycles with the timeline for PC assessments.[9] **(Medium-term)**

Objective 3: Foster the support of UNDSS and fully embed PC decisions within a functional SMS

12. Working closely with UNDSS and the inter-agency working group on SRM, ensure that the SRM manual/policy (or another document as appropriate) elaborates clear guidelines for how PC levels will be used in making decisions on acceptable risk, including steps for how, when and by whom PC levels are to be verified (i.e. checked against agreed PC levels) and compared to residual risk levels when approving staff deployment and mission travel. **(Immediate)**

13. Work with UNDSS to ensure that DOs and security advisers receive trainings on the design and application of PC levels. Encourage utilisation of the correct terminology (PC1, PC2 instead of 'extreme', 'critical' etc.). **(Immediate)**

14. Support improvements led by UNDSS to improve the clarity of statements of residual risk within the SRAs. **(Medium-term)**

15. Consider devising an online platform that links the SRA, PC levels and programme assessments, possibly by taking advantage of existing IT capacity with UNDSS. **(Medium-term)**

Options for global support structures

Based on the objectives outlined above, the review team considered three options for sustained institutional support for PC within the UN system including (1) maintaining a single agency host, ideally UNICEF for reasons of continuity, its mixed mandate and other practical concerns; (2) establishing a new home in UNDG/DOCO, given its central role and wide remit in support of the RC system; (3) locating it within the Secretariat above the department level, for example, in the Chef de Cabinet or the Deputy Secretary-General's Office, to secure the engagement of the widest range of stakeholders and at a level where the strategic priorities of the UN are determined. On balance, the review found that the first option, with UNICEF as the single host agency, currently offers the best possible global support structure.

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[9] Experience in some countries to date suggests that PC assessments may be most effective shortly after country-wide plans are agreed, but there may be other options and/or the need for flexibility.

1. Introduction

As a conceptual framework and planning tool, Programme Criticality (PC) represents a small but important piece of the decision-making machinery for enabling UN operations in dangerous places. Introduced in conjunction with the system-wide reformed approach to security risk management, PC is an operational embodiment of a new mindset regarding insecurity: one concerned with how to 'stay and deliver', as opposed to 'when to leave', and which integrates programme priorities in the risk calculus. To take stock of how well the instrument is functioning and meeting its goals a few years into its existence, the Programme Criticality Steering Committee commissioned this independent external review.

1.1 Objectives and scope

The review covers October 2011 to the present. The objectives are to:

1. examine the overall approach to Programme Criticality (PC), definition and criteria, the PC framework, methodology and tool, and highlight its strengths and weaknesses;

2. assess the rollout of the PC framework, including the conduct and results of PC assessments and their use at country level, and examine whether programme criticality contributes to UN actors remaining present and operational in high risk environments;

3. identify external factors (outside the PC framework) that might have influenced the ability to implement programme criticality; and

4. provide actionable recommendations for a way forward, including on the sustainability and institutionalisation of programme criticality within the UN system.

Recognising that PC is a relatively new tool, the review was conceived as a formative assessment rather than a full-fledged formal evaluation. Its main aims are to provide an independent perspective on how the PC framework has been implemented thus far, whether it is moving in the right direction, and whether it has meaningfully contributed to the UN's goal to 'stay and deliver'. The review was also tasked with assessing the mandate of the working-level Programme Criticality Coordination Team (PCCT), the body responsible for the development of the PC framework and methodology as well as introducing PC at country levels. Its mandate is expiring in June 2014 (PCSC 2014, 2). The team was asked to shed light on whether a need exists for sustained institutional support for PC on the global level, and if so, what form this should take.

1.2 Methodology

A team from Humanitarian Outcomes conducted the review over a twelve-week period beginning on 8 April 2014. Using standard evaluative criteria as the research framework (effectiveness, efficiency, appropriateness/relevance, coherence and coverage), the team devised a series of questions and indicators designed to elicit evidence on the application and results of PC in the different contexts. An inception report – describing the methodology and including a research matrix (Annex 1), interview guides (Annex 2) and draft survey questions (Annex 3) – was circulated to PCCT members and revised to incorporate their feedback. Preliminary findings were presented to the PCSC on 18 June and initial feedback from this meeting was incorporated in to the report.

Country cases

The review covered the 15 countries where the PC framework has been formally applied since October 2011.[10] Among these, the team selected eight countries for special focus: Afghanistan,

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[10] Afghanistan, Central African Republic, DR Congo, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

Mali, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen (with field visits in Afghanistan, Mali and Somalia). The team chose the focus countries in consultation with the PCCT, being sure to include mission and non-mission settings as well as countries designated as Level 3 (L3) humanitarian emergencies. The team aimed for a balance among the different regions and varying lengths of experience of countries implementing PC.

Key informant interviews

The team interviewed 152 persons (see Annex 5) on a not-for-attribution basis. These semi-structured interviews followed interview guides (Annex 2) adapted for context and affiliation. Team members conducted interviews during field visits to Afghanistan (Kabul), Mali (Bamako), Somalia (Mogadishu and Nairobi) and South Sudan (Juba)[11] and by phone to Nigeria, Pakistan, Syria and Yemen.

Additional phone and in-person interviews were conducted with UN personnel in New York, Geneva, and Rome. These included members of the Programme Criticality Steering Committee (PCSC), individuals on the PCCT and additional persons suggested by PCCT members. For the field visits, interviewees included (as far as possible) the Designated Official (DO), Head of Agency level, relevant leadership in the SRSG and/or RC/HC's office, programme officers involved in the PC exercise, and security personnel (UNDSS and agency security staff). For the field interviews conducted by phone, a smaller set of key stakeholders was selected to ensure a mix of programme, security and mission staff. The terms of reference for the review did not include representatives of member states, donor governments or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the suggested list of key informants, and guidance from the PC Secretariat confirmed this choice of focus.[12]

Survey

To augment the interviews and reach as many relevant stakeholders as possible, the team also designed and guided the dissemination of an online survey (in English and French), which garnered 160 complete responses from field and headquarters personnel. The survey was disseminated to stakeholders in the 27 countries[13] that received a letter from six Under Secretaries-General in January 2013 introducing the PC framework (see Annex 6); all UN personnel were invited to complete the survey.

Document review

The team conducted a systematic analysis of country-specific and general PC documentation (guidance, results matrices, PC mission reports, lessons learned documents, and other sources), using a series of quantitative indicators based on the research matrix. The results of the interviews, survey and document analysis have been incorporated into the findings.

1.3 Caveats

The short timeframe and mostly desk-based nature of this review limited the degree and diversity of consultation that was possible. Specifically, more consultations at the most senior levels of the organisation may have added value to the questions on the institutionalisation of PC. In addition, the length of time elapsed between the most recent PC assessment and when the review took place resulted in fewer knowledgeable interviewees in some countries.

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[11] Due to a previously planned mission for another research project, the interviews for South Sudan were able to be conducted in-person rather than by phone.

[12] The one exception was several heads of international NGOs in Afghanistan, who were interviewed at the suggestion of the OCHA office there.

[13] As well as three others which have either conducted or expressed interest in conducting a PC assessment: Burkina Faso, Chad and Niger.

2. Background: The concept of programme criticality in a reformed system of security risk management

Toward the end of a decade in which the UN faced major, targeted attacks and significant losses to staff, it enacted a series of changes to the UN Security Management System (SMS) in 2009. Recognising that a growing number of settings in which the UN had important humanitarian, development and political roles involved severe security challenges, these reforms were designed to improve programme delivery and avoid the need for wholesale evacuations and cessation of activities. They included the establishment of the new Security Level System (SLS) to replace the phase system, and changes in the Security Risk Management (SRM) model to better enable programmes to continue amid insecurity (UNDSS, 2009a).

Also among the new tools introduced were the 'Guidelines for Determining Acceptable Risk' (UNDSS, 2009b), which acknowledge that not all security risks can be totally eliminated, and the UN must be willing to accept some 'residual risk' that remains after all appropriate mitigation measures are applied. These guidelines stipulate that the UN can and should accept higher levels of residual risk when the programmes it is implementing are more critical to its key objectives in the country. In this way, decision makers have a means to balance the risks to staff with the importance of the programme.[14]

Field-testing the Guidelines for Determining Acceptable Risk identified the need for greater clarity on determining this measure of 'programme criticality'. In June 2010, the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) formed a 'Programme Criticality Working Group' (PCWG), chaired by UNICEF, with the goal to 'define four levels of programme criticality and develop a common framework for informing decision making within the guidelines for acceptable risk' (UN System 2011b, 1). The PCWG was comprised of senior representatives from CEB member organisations with large field presences, together with OCHA and representatives from UNDSS, Political Affairs, Field Support and Peacekeeping Operations (UN System 2010), and supported by a sub-technical working group.

In October 2011, after significant field-testing, the HLCM (and subsequently the CEB) 'approved the Programme Criticality framework (methodology and tool) for decision making within the Guidelines for Acceptable Risk' and recommended that it be rolled out in at least 12 high priority countries (UN System 2011b, 9). In doing so, the committee affirmed that the rollout would be a collective UN-wide responsibility to be planned and implemented by a Programme Criticality Coordination Team (PCCT)[15] under UNICEF's leadership.

Following additional field-testing, the HLCM approved the revised PC Framework in March 2013. At this meeting, the HLCM also established the Programme Criticality Steering Committee (PCSC) to replace the PCWG and 'approve(d) a continued guided rollout of the PC framework . . . in priority countries until June 2014, at which time the need for an independent assessment of PC should be determined' (UN System 2013a, 13). It also tasked the PCSC to recommend, by June 2014 latest, a longer-term institutional solution for the coordination of PC and providing technical support to the field (UN System 2013a, 13). The CEB approved these HLCM decisions in June 2013.

The PCSC is convened at Director level and is comprised of DOCO, DPA, DPKO, DSS, FAO, OCHA, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO (UN System 2013b, p.16). The 2013 PC

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[14] Both the Guidelines for Determining Acceptable Risk and this report focus exclusively on the management of security risks rather than all forms of risk (fiduciary, organisational, etc.). Where not otherwise specified, 'risk' refers to security risk, in this report.

[15] Composed of members of DFS, DOCO, FAO, ILO, OCHA, UNAIDS, UNDP, DPA, DPKO, DSS, UNFPA, UNHCR, WFP, WHO, UNEP, UNICEF and UNODC.

Framework also states that 'membership of the PCSC is open; any UN system organization can request to become a member of the PCSC' (UN System 2013b, p.17). The PCSC is meant to convene at a minimum every four months (UN System 2013b, p.17); its meetings have indeed occurred with this approximate frequency. To date the PCSC has been chaired by UNICEF, which also hosts the PC Secretariat, which consists of 50 per cent of one staff member's time. The PCSC is supported by the technical level Programme Criticality Coordination Team (PCCT) and its Secretariat.

3. Overview of the Programme Criticality Framework

The PC Framework is 'a common UN 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'. PC is 'not a security function' but is 'an important component' of the UN SMS Guidelines for Determining Acceptable Risk (UN System, 2013b). PC assessments should include all activities that involve UN personnel to whom the UN SMS applies (UNDSS, 2011). These personnel include, among others, both international and local staff members[16] as well as individually deployed military and police personnel in DPKO or DPA-led missions.[17]

A UN-wide programme criticality assessment becomes mandatory when the SRA determines the residual risk level to be 'high' or 'very high'. The timing of doing so, however, 'should be determined at field level based on context and need' (UN System, 2013b, 3). Both resident and non-resident UN entities are required to participate. The final accountability for the PC assessment sits with the SRSG/Head of Mission (if relevant),[18] while the Resident Coordinator (RC) is responsible for conducting the exercise and ensuring quality (UN System 2013b).

Using the PC methodology and tool, the UN team in-country collectively assigns ratings to activities from a scale of PC4 (least critical) to PC1 (most critical). This joint assessment is meant to 'provide a reality check by in-country experienced peer reviewers' (UN System 2013b). The output of a PC assessment is a list of all UN activities in country (i.e., those conducted with UN personnel), each rated with a PC level. Participants/agencies do not rate activities directly, but rather are asked to list all strategic results for the UN in country and then assess (in small groups), on a scale of 0–5, the extent to which a certain activity contributes to each strategic result (Step 4 below) and its likelihood of implementation on a scale of 1-5 (Step 5). Using these scores, an Excel-based tool produces PC levels 2–4 for each activity based on a formula that multiplies the average 'contribution to strategic results' score (Step 4) with the 'likelihood of implementation' score.[19]

A programme criticality assessment has eight steps:

1. Establish geographical scope and timeframe.

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[16] '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)' (UNDSS 2011).

[17] It does not cover military members of national contingents or members of formed police units when deployed with their contingent or unit.

[18] I.e., if there is an SRSG/head of mission and if he/she also has a mandate to coordinate UN activities in country.

[19] The formula itself and the cut-off markers for each PC level (PC2–4) are kept in hidden columns in the Excel document, to prevent tinkering and to encourage participants to conduct the analysis systematically according to the criteria provided. PC4 is assigned for a score of less than 5, PC3 for a score of 5 to 10, and PC2 for a score of 10 to 25. This means that a rating of PC2 can be generated by the following combinations: 5x5, 5x4, 5x2, 4x4, and 4x3.

2. List strategic results (SRs).

3. List UN activities/outputs (involving UN personnel).

4. Assess contribution to strategic results.

5. Assess likelihood of implementation.

6. Evaluate activities/outputs with PC1 criteria.

7. View PC level results, form consensus within the UN system and approve final results.

8. Agree on a process to address and manage the results of the PC assessment.

Notably, the determination of PC1 activities (Step 6) takes place after all activities are rated PC2–PC4. This is a change from the earlier version of the Framework, where the step came earlier in the process. Two possible criteria indicate an activity should be considered PC1:

1. Either the activity is assessed as *lifesaving* (humanitarian or non-humanitarian) *at scale* (defined as any activity to support processes or services, including needs assessments), that would have an *immediate and significant impact on mortality*; or

2. The activity is a directed activity that receives the endorsement of the Office of the Secretary-General for this particular situation.

Where a PC1 activity is implemented in situations of 'very high' residual risk, the Executive Head of the relevant UN entity must approve its implementation, followed by the USG DSS, who gives the final approval.

The PC Framework makes it clear that programme criticality is only 'one side of the balance'. The other side is residual risk: 'the statement of the risk present at the current time, after the implementation of security risk management measures, in a specific location where the programme is being delivered.' Both sides are necessary for the acceptable risk model and the PC framework to function appropriately (UN System, 2013b, 10–11) (See Figure 1, which appears in the Framework on page 11). Together with the SRA that covers the corresponding geographic location and according to the policy for Determining Acceptable Risk, country level decision-makers must determine which activities should be enabled, based on the agreed level of acceptable risk. The 'final decision on which activities are enabled based on acceptable risk is with the DO' (UN System 2013b).

Figure 1: Conceptual overview: Acceptable Risk Model balances security risk (SRA) with programme criticality (PC1–PC4)
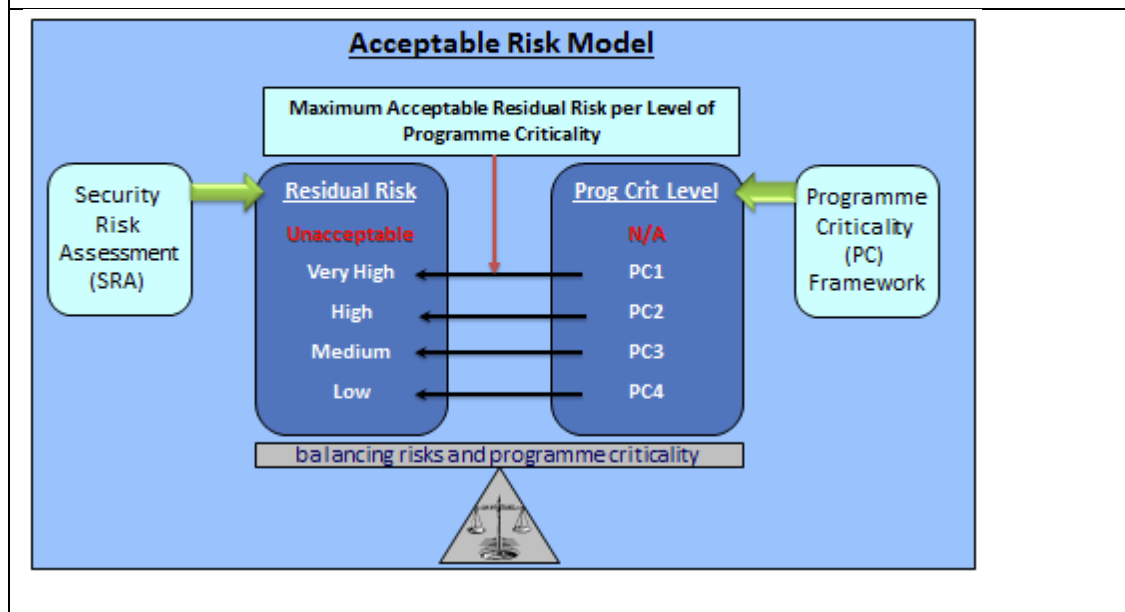
The PC methodology does not include a specific step where PC levels are explicitly compared to residual risk levels for each activity. Rather, the process of addressing and managing the results of the PC assessment (Step 8) is left to UN teams to define 'according to their contexts'. This final step 'entails . . . determin[ing] which programmes will be enabled' and 'may also include looking further into the application of risk mitigation measures for certain activities/outputs, and/or decisions on programme management' (UN System 2013b, 9).

Elsewhere, the framework stresses the importance of clear separations in determining PC and residual risk: 'There must be no consideration of risk level when determining PC' and 'no consideration of PC when determining risk level' (UN System 2013b, 10).

4. Rollout of programme criticality

4.1 Coverage of rollout and global support to PC

Geographically, the PC rollout has been largely appropriate. To date, since October 2011, PC assessments have been conducted in 15 countries: Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria and Yemen (see Annex 6).[20] A comparison of the approximate UN footprint in these countries (see Annex 6) with security levels by sub-region (UN System 2014d) shows that most countries with a large number of UN personnel and/or with multiple security areas of the country classified as SLS level 'high' have by now conducted at least one PC assessment. (Countries such as Egypt, Ethiopia and Thailand, for example, have high numbers of UN personnel, but not in areas identified as security level 'high'.) Settings such as Gaza, Kenya and Lebanon would seem ripe for a PC assessment. By and large, however, the countries where PC has most relevance have now completed at least one PC assessment. In a few countries (e.g.,

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[20]Field testing for the PC framework was also conducted in Kenya in late 2010 or 2011. This exercise occurred before the beginning of the scope of the review and also before the first version of the framework was approved and so is not included here. The exercises for Iraq and Libya were led by actors in-country, without the support of field missions by PCCT facilitators. Some general guidance was given by video teleconference to the Iraq team.

Afghanistan, Mali, Mauritania) it has been well over a year since the last PC assessment was conducted, while in others (e.g., Sudan, Yemen) it has been over 18 months between assessments.

The rollout happened in several stages. First, before the Framework was approved, field testing was conducted in DR Congo, Kenya and Somalia.[21] Second, in approving the Framework in October 2011, the HLCM asked that PC be rolled out in at least 12 priority countries between January 2012 and April 2013;[22] nine countries conducted PC assessments during this period (see Annex 6). In January 2013, a letter emphasising the importance of PC as a concept supporting the UN system's efforts to 'stay and deliver' in high risk areas was sent to field presences in 27 countries (see Annex 6).[23] The letter was co-signed by the UNDG Chair, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, and the Under Secretaries-General (USGs) for DSS, DPKO, DFS and DPA (Clark et al, 2013). In the third stage, between May 2013 and May 2014, an additional six countries conducted PC assessments for the first time, and several others repeated them.

The rollout was not comprehensive or systematic in several ways. First, it was necessary to rely on SLS levels rather than residual risk levels to select the 27 focus countries. Although the PC Framework states that it is 'mandatory' in areas with residual risk levels of 'high' or 'very high' (UN System 2013b, 3), residual risk levels are not yet reliably available by country. Second, the January 2013 letter represents the only official communication on PC from headquarters to the field. It was sent over a year after the Framework was approved, missing an important window of opportunity for educating and communicating around 'what is PC'.

Third, the PCCT has provided support to country teams based on requests from the field, using a demand-driven approach; in other words, 'they weren't in charge of the schedule of the rollout.'[24] Although this approach undoubtedly builds ownership, it contradicts the 'mandatory' nature of the PC Framework. It is unclear whether the PCSC has an enforcement role. In certain countries where the PCSC was concerned that PC was not moving ahead, the PCSC chair sent a message to the RC/HC asking if they could do anything to support the process, while in other cases the PC secretariat contacted the field with offers of technical support. In at least one country (South Sudan), interviewees said that headquarters should have made more effort to encourage the country team to conduct a PC exercise in 2013, but it was not flagged explicitly and has not yet been incorporated within other policies and instruments that might have triggered action at the country level (for example, the Resident Coordinators' ToRs, or UN-wide planning mechanisms such as the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and the Integrated Strategic Framework.). One interviewee on the PCCT noted that for 'most of the countries we went to, it was reactive, i.e., they had experienced a crisis and it was at that point they asked for a PC mission'.

4.2 Cost of rollout
The PC rollout and implementation has largely been cost and time-efficient – although some cost savings were because objectives were reduced from those originally proposed. When the Framework was approved in October 2011, the PCWG prepared an indicative budget of $1.2 million for Phase One of the rollout (January 2012 to April 2013) and suggested that the PCCT jointly fundraise for this. These efforts did not gain traction from senior leadership, however,

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[21] The results of these assessments were intended to be applied.

[22] Afghanistan, Colombia, DR Congo, Iraq, Pakistan, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Yemen.

[23] Niger was not one of the SLS level 4 and above countries that was contacted, but the country was added based on a request from the RC/UNCT.

[24] In the words of an interviewee. The online survey sought to shed light on why some of the 27 countries opted not to conduct a PC exercise, but it did not generate any usable responses on this question.

because it seemed too small an amount, and too 'random' an initiative, to justify approaching donors by USGs. The original proposed budget included a fund to support travel costs for facilitators, a PC e-package and a full-time coordinator.

Instead, a less expensive rollout was pursued, with much of the costs covered by in-kind contributions from various UN entities. The e-tool was dropped in favour of an Excel-based tool; the secretariat was supported by a half-time instead of full-time coordinator; and travel costs for PC facilitation field missions were borne by agencies/departments[25] themselves. Total costs[26] of the PC rollout are estimated at $585,680 for October 2011-April 2014, compared with the original estimate of $1.2 million over a shorter timeframe (see Annex 7). The majority of costs (59 per cent) have been borne by UNICEF, with UNDP, UNHCR, WFP, UNDSS and OCHA contributing modestly, and WHO, DPKO/DFS and DPA contributing smaller amounts.[27]

Compared with a donor-supported model, the use of voluntary contributions of staff time and other in-kind support helped to reinforce the idea that the PC rollout was a collective responsibility for the whole organisation. But it also came with a reduction in the scope of support provided to PC (e.g., the lack of e-tool and full time senior manager) and it puts the sustainability of the model in question, particularly since it relies on agencies/departments' incurring the costs of deploying facilitators, which is not always assured given multiple priorities and shifting internal funding streams available for inter-agency processes.

4.3 Technical and facilitation support to PC assessments

The PCCT successfully ensured that a qualified pool of facilitators was available and mobilised for PC support missions. Appropriately, given the new and evolving nature of the PC Framework, 'on the job' training was prioritised over formal training, and the PCCT successfully ensured that at least one experienced facilitator led each PC exercise. There was a high level of satisfaction with the facilitation in-country: a large majority of survey respondents deemed the skills and knowledge of facilitators 'good' or 'excellent', and interviews indicated the same. A few interviewees across a range of countries suggested that the facilitators did not take a strong enough hand, but for an iterative process, and given the importance of not being seen as imposing something from the top down, they generally struck the right balance.

The PCCT took steps to grow the pool of individuals knowledgeable and experienced on PC. It conducted two training sessions of 15–25 persons each in August 2012 and March 2014, for which the latter received very positive feedback,[28] and sought to have new facilitators join experienced facilitators on missions when costs allowed. The pool of highly experienced facilitators remains small, consisting of approximately 6–9 persons from UNICEF, OCHA, UNDP, UNDSS, UNHCR and WFP. In all, 17 people have facilitated at least one PC assessment mission. Only two people have 'graduated' from participating in a training session to facilitating a field mission. Training sessions have not targeted in-country PC focal points, e.g., from the RC's office. However, they should capitalise on these focal points in developing future training. This would result in some countries undertaking second and third PC assessments without (or with less) outside facilitation.

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[25] Notes on terminology: throughout this report, the word 'agencies' is used as shorthand for UN agencies, funds and programmes and other organisations (i.e., non-missions) whose personnel falls under the UN Security Management System. The term 'UN entities' is used to describe both agencies and DPKO and DPA-led missions. 'UN teams' describes all UN entities in country (mission and non-mission) while 'UNCT' is used to describe specific UN Country Teams in-country; UNCTs typically consist only of UN agencies (i.e., not missions).

[26] Not including staff time dedicated to engage in the PCSC, PCCT.

[27] DPKO and DFS also recently conveyed their intention to contribute $5,000 each.

[28] Participant feedback was only available for the second session.

Once countries expressed interest, the PCCT provided support that was both timely and useful. In the online survey, almost all respondents reported that support was timely.[29] A similarly very large majority found the guidance 'somewhat useful' or 'very useful', with only three per cent saying it was 'not very useful'. These findings were echoed in interviews. Although some issues remain with the tool itself (discussed below), the technical guidance to explain it is of generally good quality, with a few stakeholders noting that it could be simplified even further.

5. In-country programme criticality assessments

5.1 Country-level participation and engagement

Between eight and 20 UN entities participated in the PC assessments in each country. This represented an average of 68 per cent of all UN entities included on the UNCT lists on the UNDG website. Interviews and country documentation suggests that smaller UN agencies tend not to participate, likely because they do not have permanent personnel in-country. The country-level focal point/lead has most often been the RC or his/her Office, sometimes with additional support provided by another agency (e.g. UNICEF or UNDP).

In countries where they are present, DPKO, DFS and DPA-led missions have almost always participated in PC assessments. Their activities have been rated in Afghanistan (UNAMA/DPKO); Central African Republic (BINUCA/DPKO); DR Congo (MONUSCO/DPKO); Iraq (UNAMI/DPA); Libya (UNSMIL/DPA); Mali (UNOM/DPA); Somalia (UNPOS/DPA and UNSOA/DPKO); South Sudan (UNMISS/DPKO); Sudan (UNAMID/DPKO) and Yemen (OSASG/DPA). Only UNMOGIP (DPKO) in Pakistan and OJSR (DPA) and UNDOF and UNTSO (DPKO) in Syria have not participated in PC assessments when conducted. Mission personnel have questioned the relevance of the assessment in relation to their Security Council mandates, however, and the basis on which they could reprioritise mission tasks through what they viewed as a UNCT process.

Leadership has been strongly engaged in PC assessments at the country level. A majority (55 per cent) of survey respondents reported the RC as having been 'very engaged' in the PC exercise, with another 27 per cent perceiving the RC as 'somewhat engaged'.[30] The engagement of heads of agencies at field level was seen as slightly less strong,[31] but in many cases, another suitably strong representative participated instead. Interviewees in the focus countries generally revealed a strong level of interest and participation.

5.2 PC method and tool

Overall functionality of the tool

The PC methodology and tool have broadly achieved their objectives. The consensus among interviewees held that PC provides the right balance to the risk analysis (SRA) and that no major gaps exist in the framework. When led by experienced facilitators, country teams have been able to determine PC levels for most activities involving UN personnel, and the outputs (PC assessments) are consistent with the overall goal of programme criticality. A small but notable percentage of survey respondents (17 per cent, across 10 different countries) indicated that some significant activities involving UN personnel did not receive a PC determination. A few

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[29] Of 74 respondents who said their setting had conducted a PC exercise for which they requested guidance, only one answered that guidance had not been timely (and ten didn't know).

[30] This finding held broadly true for both the focus countries of this review as well as the non-focus countries.

[31] 41 percent of survey respondents reported that they were 'very engaged'.

interviewees also noted that a missing piece has been UNDSS security assessments, which should be included as activities in and of themselves.

The PCCT has made important adjustments to both the tool and the overall process, notably in the revised second version of the Framework. Interviews in focus countries confirmed that earlier experiences with PC tended to be less positive than more recent ones, indicating improvement. The lingering challenges with the methodology, described below, have not prevented the tool from performing its core function.

Rating activities according to their contribution to strategic results

A key challenge with the PC tool is in the rating of activities according to their contribution to strategic results. The guidance defines 'criticality' broadly, only noting that it is to be understood as 'the critical impact of an activity on the population, not necessarily on the organisation' (UN System 2013b, 3). The UN's overall objectives in a country usually span politics/governance, peace and security, humanitarian, development, and human rights sectors. Using this mixed set of objectives as the basis for rating criticality creates the impression among some participants that, to some degree, they are comparing apples and oranges. Some stakeholders also pointed out that it potentially raises issues of humanitarian principles, in that humanitarian activities directly affecting the survival and wellbeing of people may be deemphasised or subsumed by political objectives.

Countries identify on average five to six strategic results (SRs), and an activity contributing to only one strategic result (e.g., 'support to elections' under the 'peace/security' SR, or 'provision of NFIs' under the 'humanitarian' SR) might receive a score of PC3 or PC4. Conversely, an activity involving training of government workers or women's/civil-society empowerment could potentially be framed as contributing strongly to two or more SRs, boosting its PC rating. This helps explain some seemingly counterintuitive results, as in Afghanistan, where the majority PC2 ratings were given to the activities of FAO, UNDP, and UNFPA. Some UN agency representatives have devised creative arguments for why their activities contribute to multiple SRs and the extent to which the collective accept these propositions depends at least in part on the strength of personalities involved.

Rating PC1s during a separate discussion allows the most truly critical activities to come to the fore. And with strong leadership, other PC ratings that do not 'sit right' or fail the test of common sense can be altered by adjusting the numbers for either the SR or 'likelihood of implementation' scores. Interviewees reported achieving good results in this way. But this prompts the question of why, as one interviewee noted, the tool as designed 'has to be played with in order to deliver the right results'.

The research team explored ways of addressing the SR points mechanism, but found no clearly superior alternative. The benefits of using the SRs as a framework would seem to outweigh the risks of any other approach. A structured process is necessary to frame criticality decisions, and the UN's broad strategic goals in country offer the best available basis for this. It is therefore important to get the SRs right, making sure political goals do not outweigh humanitarian ones, and merging strategic results where it makes sense for the purposes of the PC exercise. Having high-level discussions on the SRs first, before beginning the debate on PC levels, is preferable, particularly the first time a PC assessment is conducted. For this part of the process, the leadership of the senior-most officials in country (i.e., SRSG, DSRSG and/or RC/HC) is key.

In many settings, as allowed for by the framework, the PC exercise can be limited to a specific geographic area where the same strategic results apply, rather than at national level. The number of PC exercises does not need to match the number of SRAs. For example, one PC exercise could be conducted for an area of a country affected by a refugee influx and another for the rest of the country. This can help to ensure more meaningful and realistic results.

PC1 activities

Both of the criteria for PC1 activities are appropriate, and the PC1 definition is largely workable. It is explicit enough to convey its meaning, while broad enough to allow flexibility in interpretation at the country level. It has allowed PC1 to be appropriately applied to activities that are lifesaving but are not conducted by a humanitarian agency, or to activities that do not have a direct, lifesaving impact but that the UN must nonetheless support in that time and place (e.g., elections). Overall, however, as described below, the practice of determining PC1 activities would benefit from a sharper focus on the 'critical impact of an activity on the population' (UN System 2013b, 3) rather than other, un-related factors.

Some unevenness exists between countries in the number of activities designated as PC1. The most recent PC exercises in several countries (CAR, Mali, Niger, South Sudan) produced over two dozen PC1 activities, while those in other countries produced none (Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan). In a few countries, the more recent exercises have produced many fewer PC1 activities than the first iteration (e.g., Syria, which went from 35 to seven, and Yemen, which went from over 200 to 13). A more 'balanced' approach seems to have come from participants realising that PC1s were not necessary for the maintenance of staff and programmes, as was earlier believed. [32]

Discussions in-country suggest that factors other than criticality are often considered when determining PC1s. The first is risk. A handful of interviewees believed that PC1 activities were only conducted in situations of 'very high' residual risk – a clear misconception that might be partially addressed by a re-drawing of Figure 1 (which appears in the PC framework) such that the arrows for PC1 point to all risk levels, PC2 to three levels, etc. In other cases, the confusion was more subtle. Facilitators – seeking to counteract the tendency to inflate PC ratings – often stress that PC1 should be something 'worth risking staff members' lives for'. While such a statement is in line with the spirit of framework, in some settings this may contribute to an over-focus on risk.[33] In countries such as Afghanistan and Somalia a deep appreciation exists of what it means to put staff in situations where they might be killed. In other countries, particularly those where the UN is not a named target of militant groups, this possibility may seem more remote, and there may be more readiness to identify PC1s – including by agencies that have not shown a high risk tolerance in that country in the recent past.

Second, in at least one setting (Afghanistan), agencies reported avoiding PC1s in part because this would require consultation with headquarters, abdicating decision-making control. Third, in other settings (Syria, Yemen) the strong perception was that donors would reduce funding for agencies without any PC1 activity. Finally, one interviewee felt an incentive existed to have higher PC levels because allowing staff to stay in situ meant the agency would not incur the significant costs associated with evacuation and relocation. Overall, several interviewees noted that broader weaknesses in security risk management – i.e., insufficient risk assessment and a lack of comparison of PC levels to risk levels – resulted in an undue focus on having activities ranked PC1 or PC2 instead of looking at how to lower residual risk.

Concerning the second criteria for PC1 ('a directed activity that receives the endorsement of the Office of the Secretary-General for this particular situation'), some missions have responded to the PC exercise by advocating for 'all' mission activities to be PC1, usually under Criteria 2. In

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[32] Earlier PC or similar exercises (or staff reduction initiatives taken from the security side) conducted in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen that resulted in staff cuts or relocations contributed to these concerns.

[33] Programme criticality is a measure of an activity's impact on the most pressing needs of a population, but also a guidepost for the purpose of decision-making on acceptable risk. It is therefore not possible to assess PC completely independently of risk.

Mali, the political mission[34] agreed with the rest of the UN team to rate as PC1 those of its activities that were 'core to the spirit of the mandate'. In Somalia, UNSOM attempted to have all mission activities as PC1 under Criteria 2, but this was not supported during the peer review process. Most were ranked PC2 and PC3. In South Sudan, the mission's three PC1 activities were a mix of Criteria 1 and 2. However, the process for how the Secretary-General endorses an activity is not clear, either within DPKO/DPA or the PC guidance itself. It is not clear whether officials at the field level can suggest activities to the Secretary-General (for these to then become 'Secretary-General-endorsed activities') or if the initiative must come from the Secretary-General or his/her Office.

Lack of clarity around timing and finalisation of PC results

In several countries (Mali, South Sudan, Yemen) there was either a long delay between the workshop and the finalisation of the PC results, or the results were never finalised. This had a negative impact on uptake. A firmer set of expectations on the timeline for finalising PC results may have helped to address this. As mentioned, it is also not clear how often countries must complete a PC exercise or how it fits into other planning cycles.

Lack of comparison with risk levels, as part of the PC assessment

The fact that PC assessments do not themselves involve a comparison of PC levels to risk levels has been a hindrance to uptake (discussed in detail in Section 6.1). As a result, there is no hard look at activities where the level of risk is currently unacceptable; what additional risk mitigation measures could be employed; or, if none is possible, how UN entities need to adjust their activities accordingly (see Table 1). Setting aside this step for some undefined time in the future has meant that in practice it often never happens.

Comparing risk levels with PC levels is part of the acceptable risk model and therefore arguably more appropriately described within the relevant SMS policy on SRM, rather than the PC framework. This was the logic behind designing Step 8 as it was. But security risk management is a continuous process, and programme criticality is an integral piece of it. Therefore, there is good reason not to perform this comparison as part of the same workshop, when clear statements of residual risk are available.

5.3 In-country sustainability

The capacity of UN teams at country level to perform PC assessments independently, without outside support, is uneven. Some countries (Iraq, Libya) conducted their first PC assessment without a field support mission, while others (Pakistan, Sudan) conducted their second or third assessments without support. In several cases (CAR, Yemen, Mali, Syria) field support was provided or requested for second and third PC assessments. In a few instances, country teams conducting a PC assessment independently have misunderstood or incorrectly applied the methodology. Country teams where the focal point (typically someone within the RC/HC's office) has already participated in a PC exercise, in either the same or a different country, have a greater chance of successfully doing so on their own. Unfortunately, cumulative knowledge and experience with the PC methodology can be easily lost within a matter of months, due to staff turnover.

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[34] The United Nations Office in Mali (UNOM) existed for only four months before it was subsumed into the UN Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), however. There has not been a PC assessment in Mali since MINUSMA was established in April 2013.

6. Use of programme criticality results

6.1 Availability of residual risk levels

The review team was asked to examine the 'inter-linkages between PC and the Security Risk Management model (SRM), without going into an evaluation of the SRM itself' (PCSC 2014, 3). Country-specific SRAs and documentation on security-related decision-making were suggested as two of several 'key documentary evidence sources' (PCSC 2014, 5). The team reviewed the most recently approved SRAs for each of the eight focus countries, and asked stakeholders about the extent to which 'clear statements' of residual risk were available.

It found significant variation between countries and that in many cases, risk assessments are not available in a form that readily allows for comparison between residual risk and PC levels.[35] In the majority of SRAs examined, residual risk levels are available only by broad threat category (e.g., armed conflict, terrorism, etc.[36]), rather than by geographic area, which would be exponentially more complex and resource-intensive to produce. The template for the SRA (specifically the 'risk analysis matrix'), moreover, does not easily lend itself to this type of analysis. The SRAs for two countries lacked detailed residual risk analyses (UNDSS 2013e, UNDSS 2014c), and interviewees in both countries suggested that many actors lacked a sufficient understanding of residual risk overall.[37] In Somalia, by contrast, risk levels are broken down by threat type as well as by geographic area and residual risk levels are available at a level that is almost as specific (UNDSS 2014b). Syria's SRA also provides for more geographically specific residual risk analyses than other countries. Some countries (e.g., Pakistan) also have regional SRAs (not examined by the review team), which presumably would have the same effect.

In many countries, mission and programme-specific SRAs are conducted much more frequently than the full-country SRA. While this is appropriate and necessary, especially in highly fluid contexts such as Syria, in some cases the lack of generic, geographically defined residual risk levels seems to have contributed to a less than robust comparison of PC levels and risk levels. In several countries, UNDSS only provides residual risk levels when agencies request them for specific programmes or activities. Used in isolation this approach can reduce transparency and clarity on whether the (formally agreed) PC level of the activity is high enough to justify the residual risk, i.e., as necessary to allow DO to take an informed decision on final risk acceptance, in accordance with the Guidelines for Determining Acceptable Risk (see discussion below).

6.2 Contribution of PC results to decisions on acceptable risk

Participants generally placed high value on the process of conducting PC exercises. Even though time-consuming and contentious, the peer review aspect was, for the most part, appreciated. Decision-makers felt that programme criticality was a valuable conceptual tool that helped as in many cases to clarify UN-wide and internal priorities vis-à-vis security risks, i.e., answering questions of 'why are we here?' or 'what is worth risking the lives of staff members to achieve?'

Individual agencies reported having used the resulting PC levels to guide decision-making around which programmes to enable (e.g., staff deployment, allocation of limited security resources), notably in Syria as well as in Pakistan and Yemen. In Syria, internal deliberations

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[35] A majority of survey respondents (67 per cent) said that updated SRAs, including statements of residual risk for the relevant locations, were in place at the time the PC exercise was undertaken. The research team believes that this finding more likely reflects the fact that SRAs themselves were generally available, rather than being a good reflection on whether their quality was suitable.

[36] Which are then sometimes further broken down into more specific types of threats relevant for that context.

[37] In some countries, maps showing the SLS levels are brought to the PC workshops as a substitute for the residual risk analysis. This is obviously not ideal, since the SLS is threat- rather than risk-based.

leading up to the 2013 PC exercise in Beirut helped several agencies to identify a small number of high priority activities, helping to justify the continued presence of (particularly international) staff in an increasingly dangerous environment. Overall, however, many interviewees could not easily point to ways that programme criticality had influenced their agency's decision-making and in some countries (e.g., Mali and South Sudan) a majority said that it had not.

Uptake of PC results has been even more limited within missions. Peacekeeping missions in particular, given their resources and military assets, have limited incentive to pay attention to and comply with PC results. Mission personnel also have a different security posture than other UN actors, and a relatively high risk tolerance due to the military contingents deployed to support and protect the civilian component of the mission. Special Political Missions (SPMs) bring fewer security assets and therefore often operate within a shared security resourcing arrangement with the UNCT. In Somalia, for example, these conditions resulted in a mission more engaged in the application of PC results than it might otherwise have been inclined to be.

The contributions noted above in relation to usage are important in their own right. But in the majority of the eight countries, PC levels essentially 'sat on a shelf' after the workshop and were not used as intended to inform decisions on acceptable risk. This was because either residual risk levels were not available in a suitable form (see Section 6.1 above) or were available but were never explicitly compared to agreed PC levels. Several interviewees observed that this had rendered PC essentially 'meaningless'.

PC levels, 'together with a statement of residual risk', mean to 'inform managers in the field what can be delivered where with the presence of UN personnel' (UN System 2013b, 11). There are a few key situations during which this can happen. These are described below, along with the steps for which the PC framework and the Guidelines for Determining Acceptable Risk suggest would be appropriate, alongside a summary of current practice. The evidence in the table suggests that, while a few examples of good practice exist, on the whole PC results are not sufficiently informing decisions on acceptable risk.

Table 1: Situations in which PC results should be used to inform decisions on acceptable risk

Situation	Appropriate steps based on an interpretation of the PC Framework and the Guidelines for Determining Acceptable Risk	Lead and supporting actors (final risk acceptance is with the DO)[38]	Current state of practice / examples
Following the PC assessment, the PC level for each activity is compared to the residual risk level in each geographic area where UN personnel are undertaking the activity	1. A UN entity determines that several or all of its programmes/activities are not critical enough to justify current risk levels. 2. The DO requests the UN entity to take steps to remedy the situation within a defined timeline. 3. Working with UNDSS (which may carry out a programme-specific risk assessment), the entity *either* reduces residual risk to acceptable levels through additional mitigation measures (if not prohibitively expensive or otherwise inappropriate), including possibly redeploying personnel *and/or* identifies means to carry out the activity without the presence of UN personnel *or* suspends the activity.[39]	Head of agency, using UNDSS/SMT advice. DO ensures compliance with timeline	Explicit comparison of PC levels with residual risk levels does not take place during the PC assessment, or in any systematic way afterwards (and sometimes not at all). Somalia was the only example where residual risk levels were provided during the assessment period and systematically considered
A formal or de facto staff ceiling is in place because of logistical constraints (e.g., not enough flights or offices / residences) *or* A limited number of security assets are available, e.g., for convoys	1. Personnel supporting the most critical activities (i.e., PC1, then PC2 etc.) are prioritised in movement under the ceiling/constraint. 2. UNDSS, using the agreed list of PC levels, asks each UN entity to verify the PC level of the activity the individual staff member is supporting before approving the movement. In situations where the number of personnel supporting activities of a given PC level exceeds the number of spaces, the senior-most official in country	UNDSS comparing and verifying PC and risk levels, on behalf of the DO	In Somalia, OCHA and UNDSS work together to review all requests to use a tightly limited number of convoys, using PC levels to make these decisions. In Mali, PC levels did not inform staff deployments to Kidal, where there were limited facilities.

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[38] Except for PC1 activities conducted in 'very high' residual risk, which must be approved by the executive head of that entity followed by the USG DSS.

[39] See Figure 2 in the PC framework (UN System 2013b, 12).

	(e.g., SRSG), together with the RC/HC (if not the same person), agrees with the UNCT/mission a process to determine the most critical activities within this PC level. This 'micro PC assessment' would be led by the programme side.		
There is an identified need to reduce overall exposure of staff for security reasons, e.g., to reduce the impact of a possible attack (in terms of the number of persons affected)	1. Conducting a risk analysis (looking at likelihood x impact) UNDSS defines a number of staff that would bring the residual risk down to 'very high' or 'high' depending on the type of activities most staff are supporting (e.g., in a country with many PC1 activities this could be a higher number of UN personnel, in a country with no PC1s it would be lower, etc.). 2. Working from this figure, all personnel supporting PC1 activities are considered first, and a similar procedure to above is followed in case of the need to distinguish within levels.	As above	In Yemen, individual agencies have started to use PC levels to guide decisions which staff should be retained as overall presence is reduced, e.g., in Sana'a. There is no inter-agency process using PC levels. In Libya, PC levels have been proposed but not yet used to inform decisions on possible staff reductions, which have not taken place.

Field-level security advisers', as well as Designated Officials', understanding of programme criticality and how to use PC results varies significantly. In one country, UNDSS said that it presents the residual risk level to the agency and says 'if you still want to go, we will support you', letting the agency take a decision, regardless of whether the activity is the appropriate PC level. This official felt that the designated PC levels were not always appropriate, and did not want to see what he felt were important activities be blocked because they were not rated PC1. In another country, UNDSS was adamant that 'PC should play no role in security decision-making' and that 'PC changes nothing about the level of risk mitigation required', a sentiment reflected in more than one setting.

When implemented correctly, PC, together with the Guidelines for Determining Acceptable Risk, has the effect of empowering programme managers to make decisions ('putting the ball back in the programmatic court', in the words of one interviewee). It does this by sharing accountability across the system – through the peer review process as well as the headquarters verification of PC1s – and freeing up security advisers to focus on assessing risk and identifying ways of managing it, rather than placing the burden on them to determine 'yes or no'. In practice, however, this shift is far from complete, and many remnants of the old approach remain in place.

A final important note regarding prospects for more robust implementation of PC results within the SMS concerns the willingness of UN entities to act in a collective manner to manage security risks. There are internal and external pressures on any given UN entity and their priorities will potentially need to be re-calculated in relation to wider UN priorities. Some entities may have to cease operations while others scale down or scale up. Deep structural impediments, related to mandate, financing and executive oversight, for example, make this difficult, and are not easily overcome. UN entities also differ in their conceptions of security risk management and risk management more broadly, as well as in the degree to which such approaches are implemented within any given entity. Nonetheless, the strong practical necessity of managing security as a single UN has been consistently validated as a principle.

6.3 Headquarters approval of PC1 in very high risk

As far as the review team is aware, the Executive Head of the relevant UN entity and the USG DSS signed off on all identified PC1 activities carried out in known 'very high' residual risk areas. This is taking place regularly for Syria and Somalia. This approval process, established by the Guidelines for Determining Acceptable Risk, is largely seen as appropriate and necessary, and is credited with enabling activities in very high-risk settings by ensuring that decisions are taken at the appropriate level of the Organisation.[40]

A few inconsistencies and discrepancies exist, however. Some activities other than those that were designated as PC1 in the PC assessment processes appear to have received headquarters approval in 'very high' risk settings. UNDSS reports that 'extreme' criticality activities had recently been approved by the USG in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan – even though none of these countries have identified PC1 activities. It is not clear whether another process occurred in these countries to confirm these activities as PC1, but it seems unlikely. In Syria, as noted in Table 1, at least one agency carried out a PC1 in very high risk that was not deemed to be PC1 through the country-wide assessment (i.e., it was an individual agency determination of criticality).

The Guidelines for Determining Acceptable Risk, published in 2009, do refer not to PC levels 1–4 (these had not yet been defined) but rather to four levels of 'extreme', 'critical', 'essential' and 'all'

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[40] The review team could not identify a situation where an activity identified as PC1 under the second criteria ('SG-endorsed') was carried out in a 'very high' residual risk area.

(UNDSS 2009b, 2). UNDSS is not using the PC designators as per the tool for the purpose of security clearance at the headquarters level, in part because it is following the language of its most recently approved policy (UNDSS 2009b), which is by now essentially out of date, but also because it believes that the term 'PC1' would not be clear to senior officials whose signature is requested.

6.4 Use of PC for contingency planning and crises

Some countries initiated their first PC exercise in response to an increase in conflict (CAR, Mali, South Sudan). This is not ideal; the review found that PC exercises are best done in advance of crises. In South Sudan, where a PC assessment was undertaken five weeks after conflict broke out in December 2013, participants were ill prepared and the exercise was rushed, having significant consequences for its application.

No clear mechanism is in place to trigger a country-level review of PC levels when a crisis breaks out. Less than half (40 per cent) of survey respondents could point to a time when the PC Framework was used to guide the UN response to a rapidly evolving situation (e.g., new refugees/IDPs, uptick in conflict, etc.), but over half of those found it 'useful' or 'very useful' when this was done.

PC levels do not need to be changed constantly; unless there is a major change in the context, about every six to twelve months is usually appropriate.[41] A large majority of survey respondents (86 per cent) believed the PC results were still 'very' or 'somewhat' relevant two months after the exercise and only a slightly smaller majority (79 per cent) said the same for six months afterwards.[42] Agreed PC levels should be adhered to unless there is a good reason to do otherwise, and any changes (e.g., if a UN entity wants to add activities or appeal for a change in level) should be validated by a country wide process. To date there has not been clear guidance on what such a process should look like.

Ideally, PC results are incorporated into agency-specific or inter-agency contingency planning or business continuity plans. Some agencies, including in Afghanistan, had done this or were proposing to do so. In Somalia, agencies without business continuity plans after the targeted attack against the UN Common Compound in Mogadishu were forced to pull staff back to Nairobi. Those with 'Plan B' arrangements, linked to their PC levels, including alternate offices and residences, were able to continue critical programmes.

6.5 Other effects of PC

PC had several positive unintended consequences. First, it often increased coherence across the UN, sometimes highlighting the need for a revision of strategic goals as the country underwent rapid change (Mali, Syria). PC was seen as an important team-building mechanism and a tool for the RC/HC to build leadership, by demonstrating a serious consideration of security risks. PC was also credited with improving collaboration between security and programme staff, and spreading the idea that risk management is something everyone does. It sparked ideas for joint risk mitigation measures (Syria) and prompted agencies to request UNDSS and/or the SMT to improve the SRAs

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[41] In one context, a major agency suggested that one of its activities could only be determined as PC1 'on a case by case basis, based on a particular location at a given time'. This goes against the spirit of the PC framework, which conveys that PC assessments be conducted jointly. Instead, the activity could have been defined more narrowly so as to distinguish the circumstances in which it would merit being PC1 versus PC2.

[42] Although the proportion went from 36 per cent 'very relevant' and 49 per cent 'somewhat relevant' two months after the PC exercise, to 28 per cent 'very relevant' and 51 per cent 'somewhat relevant' six months after the exercise.

(Mali, DRC). Lastly, on a very practical level, the list of activities can substitute for or otherwise complement the 'programme assessment', which is an input to the SRA; several countries (Afghanistan and Pakistan) sought to increase efficiencies here. PC was also credited with prompting discussions on how to reduce unnecessary overlap between agency and mission activities in South Sudan.

On the negative side, PC sometimes increased a sense of competition among agencies, as well as between agencies and missions, in particular where there were limited shared security assets (Somalia) and/or a history of exercises resulting in staff cuts (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen). In general, deeming certain staff members less essential or critical than others continues to raise acute sensitivities in many countries. Although some see the term 'non-programme critical personnel' as less biting than 'non-essential staff', others believe it is no different. Such concerns are believed to be delaying necessary security risk management decisions in some settings.

6.6 PC and non-UN actors

As a component of the UN's 'duty of care' to its personnel, programme criticality is rightly viewed primarily as an internal tool. Nonetheless, it would be helpful for the UN to engage with outside actors on PC. At field level, it may be appropriate in some settings for UN leadership to use the broad results of the PC exercise as a springboard for dialogue with the host government on priority areas for access. At headquarters level, a limited number of member states have expressed concern that programme criticality could be used to circumvent agreed priorities, e.g., those in the UNDAF. To address these concerns, it is appropriate for UN officials to continue to engage in open communication, including clarifying that the exercise is conducted at the level of activities rather than programmes; that it concerns only on activities involving UN personnel; and that agreed planning tools are used to assess criticality via the SRs. In difficult security environments, the UN will need to prioritise certain activities, beginning with lifesaving and SG-endorsed activities (PC1) and then other activities that significantly contribute to strategic results. None of this needs to be controversial among member states, when properly explained.

As noted above, agencies in the field have expressed concerns that donor governments are linking or could link funding to high PC levels. There is no clear evidence to support or deny this, but since government donor agencies have not been specifically briefed on PC[43], they likely do not have a strong knowledge of the process[44] (although there might be knowledge at the bilateral level, i.e., between a single donor and an individual agency). Moving forward, if stronger governance and accountability mechanisms are established for using PC results, there will likely be a need to consider how to communicate decisions to donors (to scale back, re-orient programming, or to allocate resources to lifesaving priorities, where this proves necessary). Broad funding alignment to critical programming is both appropriate and feasible.

Lastly, although few NGOs and other non-UN humanitarian actors were interviewed for this review,[45] indirect evidence shows that the concept has started to permeate discussions within the

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[43] Member states were briefed in the context of Fifth Committee discussions on safety and security and there have also been reports of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on the conclusions of the High-Level Working Group on PC in 2012.

[44] The review team was advised that there was no need to interview donor representatives because they are mostly not aware, due to the internal nature of the PC tool.

[45] In Afghanistan, several heads of NGOs were interviewed at the suggestion of the OCHA office. They were only marginally aware of the PC exercise in the UN, but thought it was a good idea in principle. However, they made the point that in Afghanistan the UN 'only stays, it doesn't deliver', with the vast majority of projects

Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) in productive ways. NGO partners would likely find value in understanding the concept, and at field level communicating PC levels to partners could be valuable to explain operational decisions (e.g., why the UN agency needs to find a partner to conduct an activity, or why a UN staff member may be able to monitor one project but not another). There are of course important ethical questions related to risk transfer to partners but are outside the scope of the review (Egeland et al., 2011).

6.7 Does PC support the UN's goal to 'stay and deliver'?

The reviewers were asked to 'examine whether programme criticality contributes, in the way it was intended, to UN actors being able to 'stay and deliver' particularly in higher risk contexts . . .', recognising that there are '. . . a broad number of factors that go far beyond PC', which 'have contributed to whether the UN is able to stay and deliver, and it will be important to distinguish the factors that directly relate to PC from those that do not' (PCSC 2014, 3).

The research team first asked stakeholders directly for their opinion on this question. Second, it sought to identify the major factors contributing to 'stay and deliver', as a way to gauge the relative contribution of PC. On the first aspect, a majority (70 per cent) of survey respondents said that PC had contributed 'very much' or 'somewhat' to this goal; security personnel were more likely to believe it had contributed 'very much' and programme staff and senior management were more measured in their responses. A similar majority of all respondents (66 per cent) believed that PC had led to more consideration of alternative delivery strategies, as compared with before the PC rollout, but more answered 'somewhat' (41 per cent) than 'very much' (25 per cent). Field interviewees were similarly positive about the overall contribution of PC to 'stay and deliver' – although, as noted, more as a concept than a practical tool for decision-making.

For the second aspect, essentially, the UN's approach to security risk management is the major contributing factor to 'stay and deliver',[46] which is in turn shaped by the policies and guidance of the Security Management System; the quality of leadership of and training provided to the DO, the RCs/HCs and UNDSS security advisers; and the overall security culture within the UN (e.g., adherence to rules and regulations, individual and organisational risk tolerance, ability of programme staff to understand security conditions, etc.). The review found several ways in which PC was positively contributing to these factors. As noted, PC has provided a valuable conceptual tool to manage risk, strengthened links between programme and security staff, and in a limited number of settings (e.g., Somalia) acted as a tool to inform daily decisions of UNDSS/the DO. But it is important not to over-state these contributions, especially relative to the much broader UN SMS reforms since 2009. PC's contribution to 'stay and deliver' has also been limited by the shortcomings described, i.e., the incomplete way in which it informs decisions on acceptable risk.

Lastly, during the finalisation of the inception report, the review team was asked to examine whether UN staff are able to deny participating in high-risk missions. It determined that this question is much more tied to broader changes to the UN SRM approach since 2009 rather than to programme criticality specifically (other than that the PC Framework may have helped trigger Headquarters-level discussions on the matter). In its 2011 discussion of the PC Framework, the HLCM 'reaffirmed' '. . . within this approach, the possibility for any staff to opt for "not-staying",

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being implemented by partners, with infrequent visits by UN staff from Kabul or provincial capitals (so they did not immediately see what difference it would make).

[46] Other factors identified included surge capacity (which when the L3 was declared in South Sudan was credited as having more of an impact than PC on the UN's ability to stay and deliver) as well as broader human resource policies.

without being penalized by their organizations' (UN System 2011c, 8). Practice seems to vary, however, with some agencies specifically communicating to staff that they can refuse a specific deployment and it will have no impact on their advancement, with others less clear on this point and allowing individual choice, but with likely career consequences. In Somalia, staff members were acutely aware of the personal risks they faced, and all felt that they had taken highly informed decisions in this regard.

7. Internalisation of programme criticality within the UN

7.1 PC within the UN security management system

The evidence suggests that the major reasons that PC is not living up to its main objective – to inform decisions about acceptable risk – lie within the UN security management system. A detailed examination of the UN SMS is outside the scope of this review. Saying precisely where the challenges lie is difficult, other than to note it is at headquarters as well as field level, and that gaps remain in technical guidance (e.g., the mis-match between the Guidelines on Determining Acceptable Risk and the PC Framework,[47] the SRA tool not designed to easily produce clear statements of residual risk) *and* in practice (e.g., varying capacity of security advisers to develop residual risk analyses and DOs' lack of knowledge on how PC should be applied[48]). Both the PC Framework and the SMS policy manual lack clear guidance on how PC should be used in different operational situations (see Table 1).

At headquarters and field, there was confusion within UNDSS as to whether PC constituted 'policy'. Some believed that the CEB had only approved an initial rollout of PC. The misunderstanding may stem from the fact that a full description of PC is not included within the relevant sections of the SMS policy manual.[49] It may also reflect that it is called a PC 'framework' and not a 'policy'.[50] Both the SMS policy manual and the PC Framework were endorsed by the CEB, but the SMS policy manual carries much more weight for UNDSS than any other document. Some believed PC might carry more weight within UNDSS and elsewhere if the SG Policy Committee endorsed it. Finally, because PC was conceived as 'belonging to the programme side', the Inter-Agency Security Management Network (IASMN) did not discuss or review PC in the same level of detail as it did with other changes to the SMS, although it was consistently informed and invited to give feedback.

There are encouraging signs at the technical level, with UNDSS and others working on conceptual and practical tools for improving SRM. This is a highly relevant place in which to include detailed guidance on how the DO, supported by UNDSS, ensures that his/her final risk acceptance[51] is informed by agreed PC levels. The new SRM guidance/policy under development also intends to improve the clarity of statements of residual risk, which (if rolled out) will increase the chances of

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[47] The fact that the Guidelines for Determining Acceptable Risk state that programme criticality is 'determined by agency' (UNDSS 2009b, 2) – no longer correct given that the PC framework states that this must be done 'jointly by the UN system in country' (UN System 2013b, 5) – may be contributing to a lack of regard for the PC process within UNDSS.

[48] The 'Handbook for UN Designated Officials for Security', published in 2012 (UNDSS, 2012a), does not mention programme criticality.

[49] The current versions of which predate the PC framework.

[50] The reasons for this choice of wording were not made clear to the research team.

[51] Or that of the executive head of agency / department USG and USG DSS, for PC1 in very high risk.

PC being correctly applied. Going forward, a key question will be whether UNDSS embraces, from the top down, its evolving role as primarily a security adviser rather than a security decision-maker, as well as its role in helping the DO and others with accountability to ensure that the SRM approach is correctly applied.

7.2 Internalisation of PC by the UN entities

As a relatively new initiative, PC is not yet fully integrated into ways of working.[52] Some of the major agencies, funds and programmes are beginning to incorporate it into their trainings, staff orientations and security policies, and several agencies (e.g., UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP) have produced internal guidance notes on PC for their field offices and/or arranged for visiting staff to support the exercises. It is generally not yet integrated into agencies' business continuity / continuity of operations plans. And PC is beginning to be, but is not yet well reflected in the ToRs and trainings for key advisers and decision-makers, on both the programme and security side (e.g., Country Representatives, Deputy Country Representatives, Security Advisers, etc.).

Despite the early engagement of the respective USGs in approving and launching the initiative, the participation of DPKO, DPA and DFS in the rollout has since been limited. Headquarters has generally not provided guidance and support on PC to mission personnel participating in the PC exercises in the field. It was noted that this is due to time and budgetary constraints, but also reflects a limited prioritisation of the PC agenda by the principals and senior management. While PC applies equally to mission personnel given they fall under the UN SMS, several DPKO and DPA interviewees questioned whether PC represents enforceable policy, and indicated that it would carry more weight in the departments if included in departmental policies and if endorsed by the Secretary-General's Policy Committee.

More importantly, from a system perspective, no expectation is set anywhere in the RC/HC's terms of reference or training package that he/she have a responsibility to conduct a PC exercise in settings of a certain threat or risk level. Inter-agency contingency planning (where it occurs, e.g., when conducted by OCHA) does not yet include references to PC levels. PC has not been flagged within guidance on country wide planning processes, such as the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), the humanitarian Strategic Response Plans (SRPs), the Policy on Integrated Assessment and Planning, the Peacebuilding Support Package or the Integrated Strategic Framework (ISF).

8. Conclusions

Programme criticality is an integral part of the UN's acceptable risk model; for 'acceptable risk' to work, there must be an effective way to measure programme criticality and to use resulting PC levels. At present, although recognised as an essential conceptual tool, programme criticality is falling short of its potential. While it has helped shift mindsets and become part of the lexicon in some of the most dangerous environments, influenced the practice of some agencies, and had other positive unintended consequences, PC has started to truly take root – in operational terms – in only a very few settings.

As currently structured and supported – and given the major challenges with links to the SMS as well as the uneven application of the results – there is a real risk of programme criticality 'dying a

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[52] The conditions outlined in 'Annex II: Terms of Reference: Programme Criticality Steering Committee (PCSC)' of the PC Framework (UN System 2013b, 16–17) are not yet met.

slow unassisted death', in the words of one interviewee. Management and accountability structures to oversee the implementation of PC have yet to be developed. Without robust implementation of PC results, country-level participants are beginning to question the value of returning to the exercise.

The review team considered ways of scaling back ambitions, such as making PC applicable only to the agencies, funds and programmes, or making it an optional exercise, or downgrading its role within the acceptable risk model (e.g., letting each agency decide on the criticality of its activities). Each of these would undermine, in different ways, the changes made to the UN Security Management System and the broader goals of the security risk management approach, which are at the heart of the recent reforms to help the UN to stay and deliver. Letting the tool be optional would also not be practical because awareness raising and training would likely disappear.

The review identified the following priority objectives if programme criticality is to reach its potential: (1) devise a more robust system of support and oversight to PC assessments, including timelines and procedures for revision/review; (2) fully integrate PC into the ways of working of the UN entities; and (3) foster the support of UNDSS and fully embed PC decisions within a functional SMS. All three objectives are inter-linked and inter-dependent.

9. Recommendations

The overall recommendations are presented first, followed by recommendations grouped according to the three priority objectives identified above. The recommendations are designed to be broadly applicable irrespective of the global support structure chosen (see section 10). A timeframe of either immediate (6–12 months) or medium-term (1–2 years) is indicated next to each recommendation. The recommendations are primarily directed to headquarters, which is the level needed to increase the support, oversight and accountability of the programme criticality mechanism, but with the understanding that they are intended to positively impact future PC exercises and uptake at the field level. Unless otherwise specified, the objective-level recommendations should be carried out by the PC secretariat with the active support and oversight of the governance and accountability body.

9.1 Overall recommendations

1. Establish a stronger working-level governance and accountability body ('oversight body'), which meets monthly to address critical issues in the implementation of programme criticality and to direct the work of the PC secretariat.[53] **(Immediate)**
2. Increase the PC secretariat to a two-person team, each dedicating approximately 50 per cent full-time equivalent. UNDSS should contribute one of the PC secretariat team

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[53] The body could retain the name PCSC but with a revised terms of reference to reflect a more robust oversight role. The body could be comprised of representatives of a more senior level than the technical-level PCCT but perhaps not Director-level, given the greater frequency of meetings and workload. In light of the increased time commitment, as well as to facilitate timely decision-making, the body could be limited in membership to approximately 6-8 entities. This could include UNDSS, DFS/DPKO, DPA, OCHA, UNDP, and rotating seats for two or three agencies. The chair could rotate, perhaps beginning with a representative of the office/entity chosen to host the PC secretariat. The entity/office chosen as host for the PC secretariat could be represented on the working-level oversight body, but need not be its chair. The PCCT can be dissolved.

members,[54] thus facilitating programme-security collaboration and strengthening the link with the SMS. **(Immediate)**

3. Request the CEB and the SG Policy Committee to review and consider approving a revised PC Framework, the adapted structure (working-level oversight body) and institutional home.[55] **(Immediate)**

9.2 Recommendations for objective 1: Devise a more robust system of support and oversight to PC assessments

4. Set up a process by which the oversight body regularly reviews residual risk levels by country and establishes priority countries to conduct PC exercises, with timelines, including the period within which a country should update the results. **(Immediate)**

5. Set up a process by which the oversight body reviews/approves PC exercises when complete and ensures finalisation of results within one month of the assessment; for very high risk countries this would involve a more detailed review, to ensure appropriateness.[56] **(Immediate)**

6. Revise the PC Framework **(immediate)** to:
   a. Clarify the guidance on how to conduct a PC exercise by:
      i. Re-drawing the 'Conceptual overview: Acceptable Risk Model balances Security Risk (SRA) with Programme Criticality (PC1-PC4)' so that four arrows come from PC1, three from PC2, etc.);
      ii. Emphasising that determinations of PC1 activities must maintain a strong focus on the 'critical impact of an activity on the population' rather than other, un-related factors;
      iii. Instructing that strategic results be balanced to reflect true priorities (explaining how PC levels will be determined based on these) and encouraging multiple PC exercises in sub-regions where objectives differ significantly, for example where there are discrete areas of conflict.
   b. Identify triggers for redoing a PC exercise, i.e., when there is a major change in the programming context / needs of the population.[57]
   c. Include a step in the PC assessment whereby the PC level for each activity is compared to the residual risk level in each operational area where it is conducted. Within either the PC framework or the relevant SMS policy/manual (see recommendation 12 below), define a process whereby, following the PC assessment, the DO oversees the UN entity in taking steps to address any unacceptable risk within a defined timeline.

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[54] Allocating only 50 per cent of each person's time is meant to keep costs manageable while ensuring links with each person's respective institutions.

[55] Consider calling it a PC 'policy' rather than a 'framework', to avoid confusion.

[56] A mechanism, the Executive Group on Programme Criticality (EGPC), was designed to intervene to mediate or determine PC levels in the event that consensus is not reached at country level, but it has never been utilised. The EGPC is convened at USG level. It could be dissolved with the possibility of re-establishing it, or an alternate senior level mechanism could be created, once the exact form of the oversight body is determined. It might prove more practical to have the function in a single high-level office rather than requiring all of the USGs to come together.

[57] For example, a request for CERF funding under the emergency window, a declaration of an L3 emergency, or a revision of a mission mandate/structure could be possible triggers.

d. Establish clearer procedures for how agencies may appeal for a change to a PC level, including options for country-based models (e.g., providing a ToR for a 'PC core group', including which and how many entities should be included, at what level of representation).

e. Define a process by which some countries (those where security risk is high rather than very high; where the context has not changed significantly; and where there have been at least two PC assessments conducted successfully without outside facilitation) may move to a model whereby each UN entity proposes PC levels 2-4 for their activities, rather than inter-agency groups assessing 'contribution to strategic results' (Step 4) and 'likelihood of implementation' (Step 5) to produce these. The other steps would remain the same. This would be at the discretion of the RC/HC.

f. Establish a mechanism to clarify how an activity receives the endorsement of the Office of the Secretary-General for PC1, respecting the principle that 'care should be taken to keep activities identified as PC1 to a minimum, because they could put UN personnel at very high residual risk'.[58]

7. Oversee the development of expertise on programme criticality (including facilitators as well as senior managers with capacity to review PC exercises), adding a greater focus on developing field level (e.g., RC's office) knowledge to ensure sustainability. **(Medium-term)**

8. Develop an e-training package on PC and an online platform for managing and viewing PC results by country, made accessible to all relevant decision-makers. **(Medium-term)**

9.3 Recommendations for objective 2: Fully integrate PC into the ways of working of all UN entities

9. Oversee the inclusion of appropriate references to programme criticality within key inter-agency and integrated planning tools,[59] such as humanitarian SRPs, ISFs, UNDAFs, inter-agency preparedness / contingency planning guidelines, as well as the RC/HC's Terms of Reference, training package and other relevant policy/guidance material developed at headquarters.[60] **(Immediate)**

10. Establish a checklist and basic guidance for UN entities for integrating PC in their own systems and training for field personnel / TORs (i.e., which types of staff should know about PC, how PC can be incorporated into business continuity / continuity of operations planning, etc.). Monitor and offer support on this as necessary. **(Medium-term)**

11. Reflect on and possibly suggest ways of aligning various in-country planning cycles with the timeline for PC assessments.[61] **(Medium-term)**

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[58] UN System 2013b, p.9. For example, ahead of in-country PC assessments, that Office could determine, in consultation with field-level actors as appropriate, which activity/activities are 'a directed activity that receives the endorsement of the Office of Secretary-General for this particular situation' (UN System 2013b, p.9).

[59] Recognising that 'in identifying PC levels, the PC methodology uses existing UN planning frameworks already agreed at country level. It is thus not a planning framework' (UN System 2013b, p.5).

[60] Recognising that PC assessments are only necessary in contexts of high or very high residual security risks.

[61] Experience in some countries to date suggests that PC assessments may be most effective shortly after country-wide plans are agreed, but there may be other options and/or the need for flexibility.

9.4 Recommendations for objective 3: Foster the support of UNDSS and fully embed PC decisions within a functional SMS

12. Working closely with UNDSS and the inter-agency working group on SRM, ensure that the SRM manual/policy (or another document as appropriate) elaborates clear guidelines for how PC levels will be used in making decisions on acceptable risk, including steps for how, when and by whom PC levels are to be verified (i.e. checked against agreed PC levels) and compared to residual risk levels when approving staff deployment and mission travel. **(Immediate)**

13. Work with UNDSS to ensure that DOs and security advisers receive trainings on the design and application of PC levels. Encourage utilisation of the correct terminology (PC1, PC2 instead of 'extreme', 'critical' etc.). **(Immediate)**

14. Support improvements led by UNDSS to improve the clarity of statements of residual risk within the SRAs. **(Medium-term)**

15. Consider devising an online platform that links the SRA, PC levels and programme assessments, possibly by taking advantage of existing IT capacity with UNDSS. **(Medium-term)**

10 Options for institutional support for programme criticality

The review team explored various options for providing sustained institutional support for PC within the UN system. The three most viable of these are presented below for consideration[62], with an indication of the most workable of these at the end of this section.

Option 1: A single agency host

The findings from the review indicate that UNICEF has performed strongly in establishing and overseeing the rollout of programme criticality to date. Given the importance of maintaining links to the Secretariat in New York and the benefits of UNICEF being a multi-mandated agency (humanitarian and development) with significant field presence, UNICEF is the most viable option if the single agency model is chosen. A rotating model is not ideal for reasons of continuity, as well as the likelihood that the agency would not be based in New York and as such would have limited opportunity to engage (in-person) with the widest range of stakeholders.

This model carries three risks. First, although UNICEF has generally maintained an effective separation of duties, a few additional measures could help to ensure a firewall between UNICEF's responsibilities as a host of the headquarters secretariat and UNICEF's own engagement in PC exercises at field level. The review team found these to be relatively minor and straightforward to address, including more deliberate communication on UNICEF's inter-agency role, and a prioritisation of mixed facilitation teams. Second, there are risks related to sustainability and funding, and whether a cost-share model can be continued and/or whether a need exists for earmarked donor government financing. The review found mixed views on the feasibility of cost-share arrangements; some agencies indicated challenges, but this was not a uniform reaction. The team did not pursue the viability of alternative financial support, but given that donors have not been approached to date, direct donor support should not be ruled out. Third, given the identified importance of more strongly engaging the Secretariat departments at headquarters, such as UNDSS,

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[62] The option for UNDSS to host the PC Secretariat was also considered (among other options) but the review team concluded that this might undermine efforts to ensure that PC is a programme-led process.

DPKO and DPA, the indication was that there would be more political buy-in if the function of hosting a PC secretariat was not at the agency level.

- **Strengths:** strong performance to date, continuity and existing institutional capacity;

- **Weaknesses:** need to firewall host and agency functions; potentially not sustainable in the long run, if funding / support wanes; Secretariat departments less likely to be fully engaged.

Option 2: UNDG/DOCO

Some interviewees indicated that given the mandate of UNDG and the technical role DOCO play in servicing UNDG, an appropriate home for the future PC secretariat might be with DOCO. This would ensure links to a central body with a wide remit and coverage, in support of the UNCTs, including coordinating the RC system and supporting the One UN approach. The risks with this potential home are that the general desire has been to narrow, not widen, the scope of initiatives adopted by UNDG/DOCO. Similar to Option 1, there are potential resourcing constraints, if it remains outside the Secretariat and might therefore struggle to fully engage all stakeholders to the process. And the option would lack the institutional continuity afforded by Option 1.

- **Strengths:** central body supporting the RC system and One UN initiative;

- **Weaknesses:** UNDG/DOCO unable to assume additional responsibilities without increased human resource capacity with a sustainable funding base; and Secretariat entities less likely to be fully engaged (compared with Option 3).

Option 3: In the Secretariat, above the departmental level

Consultations did not allow for a detailed review of this option, but some interviewees indicated that to secure the engagement of the widest range of stakeholders there would be value in establishing a small PC secretariat above the department level in the office of the Chef de Cabinet or the Deputy Secretary-General. This would establish programme criticality as mechanism above some of the departments where there has been limited engagement to date, in an office that has a mandate for bringing together the strategic priorities of the UN system. The challenges of this option include that it risks conflating what is essentially a technical-level exercise (carried out at the level of activities) with wider political considerations. It also may result in less opportunity for the agencies, funds and programmes to engage. Lastly, it would require further and more detailed consultation, including at senior political levels, if this option was pursued.

- **Strengths:** establishes high-level leadership and enables a focus on UN-wide priorities in the highest-risk environments; promotes engagement from the departments, including UNDSS;

- **Weaknesses:** risks conflating the technical-level exercise of PC (carried out at activity level) with wider political considerations; potentially less opportunity for agencies, funds and programmes to engage.

Future global support structure

The review team found that **Option 1**, with UNICEF remaining as a single host agency, would most likely provide the best sustained institutional support for programme criticality within the UN system for programme criticality at this time, for the reasons outlined above.

Independent Review of Programme Criticality

Part 2: Annexes

Submitted to the Programme Criticality Steering Committee

by

Humanitarian Outcomes

Katherine Haver, Abby Stoddard, Adele Harmer, Kate Toth

17 July 2014

Contents

Annexes

Annex 1: Review matrix: Research questions, indicators and information sources

	Research question	Indicators / sub-questions	Information sources
	Criterion 1: Effectiveness		
1	Has the PC framework been able to determine PC levels for activities involving UN personnel? Are there any gaps in the framework?	Where the PC framework was used, what proportion of activities involving UN personnel had a PC-level determined? Where and why were there gaps?	Interviews (HQ and field) Online survey
		What were the strengths and weaknesses of the PC framework? What are the analytical or conceptual 'gaps' in the PC framework (including the overall approach, the definition and criteria, the methodology and related tools), and what practical significance did they have? Are the definitions of 'criticality' and the criteria for PC1 activities appropriate and useful? How were PC1 activities selected (how have the criteria been applied) and how might this be improved/ clarified?	Interviews (HQ and field) Online survey Document review (PC Framework)
2	How have UN teams in the field applied the PC framework and how effectively were the PC results used in making operational decisions?	To what extent have respective UN entities used the PC assessments, with the relevant SRA and the policy on Determining Acceptable Risk, to take management decisions, including which programmes were enabled, what further risk mitigation measures are taken, and how many and what type of personnel are in different locations? What are the practical links between PC levels and the security system, and do these reflect the goal of balancing programme activities against security risk? To what extent are staff members able to deny participating in 'risky' missions and how is this affected by PC if at all?	Interviews (HQ and field) Online survey
		Is PC making any discernible difference to agency programming and operations?	Interviews (HQ and field) Online survey
		How many UN teams revisited the PC Framework within 12 months? How many did so later, earlier or not at all? At what level of formality?	Document review (PC Country Support table)

3	Have there been any unintended consequences, positive or negative?	What type of positive and negative unintended consequences have been experienced, according to participating UN entities, at the field level? And at the institutional level (Headquarters)?	Interviews (HQ and field) Online survey
4	Has the PC concept and framework facilitated joint UN system decision-making and coordination?	How many UN entities (resident and non-resident) participated in PC assessments, as a proportion of the total UN entities operating with UN personnel in a given country?	Document review (List of participants in PC assessments, list of UN resident and non-resident entities
		As compared to before the PC rollout, what changes occurred in the level of joint UN system decision-making and coordination?	Interviews (HQ and field) Online survey
5	What effect have the PC concept and framework had on the relationship and collaboration between programme and security professionals?	As compared with before the PC rollout, what were the changes in the reported strength of relationship and levels of collaboration between programme and security professionals? What have been the practical effects of such changes?	Interviews (HQ and field) Online survey
6	What were the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives?	Why were the objectives achieved or not achieved? What role was played by the external support provided? If there was variation among countries in the achievement of the objectives, what were the reasons for this?	Interviews (HQ and field) Online survey Document review
Criterion 2: Appropriateness / relevance			
7	To what extent and how successfully has programme criticality attained its objectives? Was it optimal?	Has programme criticality attained its broad objectives of 'contributing to the UN's goal to 'stay and deliver' particularly in high threat environments' and 'ensur[ing] that programme activities can be balanced against security risks'? Has the PCSC, supported by the PCCT, fulfilled its functions as outlined in 'Annex II: Terms of Reference' of the PC Framework (Feb 2013)? What could have been done differently?	Interviews (HQ and field) Online survey Document review
8	To what extent has the initial application of PC shown that it is a useful concept and framework?	Is the PC framework used in country contexts with high security risks, especially those with significant presence of UN personnel and critical programmes? To what extent does it inform decision-making?	Interviews (HQ and field) Online survey Document review
9	Does Programme Criticality provide the right balance to the risk analysis (SRA)?	Does the security side complement the programmatic side and vice versa, in the conceptual framework (see also question 1)? Were updated SRAs (including statements of residual risk	Interviews (HQ and field) Online survey

		corresponding with the geographical scope of the PC assessment) in place at the time the PC exercise was undertaken?	Document review (Mission reports from PC support missions, final results of PC exercise)
10	Are the outputs of PC assessments consistent with the overall goal of PC?	[NB. The 'output' is considered to be the final results from PC exercises, i.e. the Excel-based tool] Are UN teams able to formulate and accurately capture SRs and link activities to the SRs? Do the number of different 'types' of SRs (humanitarian, development, peace/security, etc.) (and the number of activities within each) make a difference? What is the variation between countries in the total number of activities and the number of PC1 activities, and does that affect outcomes in a meaningful way? Is there a common understanding of what constitutes an activity (reflecting the PC framework)? How can challenges around the formulation of activities and outputs be addressed?	Document review (Mission reports from PC support missions, final results of PC exercise (Excel tool and any narrative summary))
11	Are the outputs of PC consistent with the intended impacts and effects?	Synthesis of evidence from question 7 and 10	See questions 7 and 10
12	How closely has decision-making in the field followed the PC approach? What is the evidence?	Was the decision-making around the determination of activities as PC1 (in particular when in very high risk level) appropriate and in line with the PC Framework? [A detailed examination of whether steps 1-8 as outlined in the PC Framework (Feb 2013) were followed will take place in three field visit countries]	Interviews (field and HQ) Additional document collection as needed (three field visits)
13	To what extent are the PC assessments and use of results owned at country level? How have accountabilities been exercised?	What was the level of engagement of senior management (including RC and/or SRSG/Head of Mission as relevant, as well as heads of agencies/departments) in the PC exercise at country levels? What was the level of engagement of the DO (and DSS) in using the results of the PC assessment and endorsing the decisions taken at country-level, taking both the PC assessment and the SRA into consideration?	Interviews (field)
14	How has the PC framework been used in decision-making?	To what degree have key actors (at field and HQ) used the PC framework to make important decisions, including re: which programmes are enabled, what security risk mitigation measures are taken, and/or how programmes are managed? Is there variation between the respective UN entities in this regard? (see	Interviews (field and HQ) Online survey

		also question 2)	
15	Have there been any differences in PC roll-out in mission and non-mission settings? If so, what?	What differences can be seen in mission versus non-mission settings, e.g. in terms of the role of the SRSG/Head of Mission (DO), the security management function, and available risk mitigation measures?	Interviews (field and HQ) Online survey
16	What are the special considerations, if any, that should be considered in mission settings?	How might the PC framework, or the way it is implemented, need to be adapted, if at all, for mission settings?	Interviews (field and HQ) Online survey
Criteria 3: Coherence and coordination			
17	Is PC consistent and coherently applied vis-à-vis related UN polices and guidance (such as the UN SMS in particular but also others)?	What are the most relevant related UN policies and guidance? Are they understood and applied to in ways that are consistent with PC and vice versa?	Interviews (HQ and field) Online survey
18	Is PC appropriate as UN system wide tool? Have all actors worked towards the same goal?	What is the reported level of added value in having a single UN system framework to undertake PC assessments, rather than using multiple approaches? What is the reported level of dialogue and decision-making between UN mission personnel and UN programmatic entities, compared with before the PC rollout? [baseline]	Interviews (HQ and field) Online survey
19	To what extent and how successfully has programme criticality been rolled out and applied at field levels in a coordinated manner? Was it optimal?	Did UN senior management at field level support the coordinated roll out and application of PC? How many separate PC assessments were carried out for each designated area (within a field context) and what was their added value and degree of coordination? Did the PCSC ensure that PC assessments were undertaken in country areas where this was needed, and where this was not the case, take action to ensure that the assessment took place or was revised appropriately (in line with the PCSC TOR as outlined in the PC Framework)?	Interviews (HQ and field) Document review (Mission reports from PC support missions, final results of PC exercise)
Criterion 4: Efficiency			

20	Were the processes of the PC roll-out and implementation timely, cost-/time-efficient, and sufficient to achieve objectives?	What were the costs of the PC rollout (not including UN entity inputs in staff time), including training, travel, other support costs? Were these resources sufficient or insufficient to achieve objectives?	Document review (Agency/Department Contributions to PC roll out to date)
21	To what extent was there sufficient capacity in place to undertake the PC assessment and use the results?	Did UN entities operating in country (resident and non-resident) allocate the needed capacity to participate in the PC assessment and to use the results in the determination of acceptable risk? Was there a balance of programme and security personnel involved in the PC assessment? Was the level and type of expertise of the PC facilitators appropriate?	Interviews (field and HQ) Document review (list of participants in PC assessments) Interviews (field and HQ) (List of participants in PC assessments, by country)
22	What have been the bottlenecks in the process?	Were there any stages in the process where progress was impeded, and what were the practical implications of these setbacks?	See questions 20 and 21
23	How timely and useful has the support and guidance of the PCCT been to the roll out of PC at field levels?	How quickly did the PCCT respond to requests for support, including deployment of missions? What were the perceptions of how useful this support was?	Interviews (field and HQ) Online survey Document review (PC Country Support Table)
	Criterion 5: Coverage		
24	To what extent has PC been used across contexts and geographical areas? To what extent has this been sufficient and appropriate to context?	What proportion of countries with SLS 4 and above have conducted a PC assessment? How is PC used, and how could it be used, in non-crisis contexts as well as for contingency planning and preparedness? Can PC be built into both the operational management and contingency planning cycle/exercises?	Document review (PC Country Support Table, List of Security Level System (SLS) levels)

25	Has the PC approach led to a better dialogue and consideration of alternative delivery strategies?	Has PC led to more dialogue and consideration of alternative delivery strategies (e.g. to expand coverage, if warranted by the PC assessment) at the country level, as compared with before the PC rollout? [baseline]	Interviews (field and HQ) Online survey
Criterion 6: Sustainability			
26	To what extent have the PC results remained relevant over time, and has the use of PC responded appropriately to the evolving nature of the context in country?	How relevant were the PC results two and six months later? What factors explain any variation here? Did UN entities and leadership use the PC framework to respond appropriately to evolving contexts in country, including but not limited to contexts undergoing rapid change or crisis (e.g. South Sudan, Syria)?	Interviews (field) Online survey
27	What were the major factors which influenced the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of the programme or project?	Has there been 'mainstreaming' of programme criticality? Does this need to be further supported? Is there (in line with Annex II of the PC Framework) a significant PC expert pool of UN personnel from various agencies/departments with solid knowledge of the PC framework and methodology? Has expertise on PC been maintained and mainstreamed within agencies/departments? Is there an agreed plan to roll out PC and have capacity for PC individually within agencies/departments? What factors influenced whether this has occurred?	Interviews (HQ) Online survey

Annex 2: Interview guides

Field level interview guide

Background
When/how did you first learn of the PC concept?

In your opinion is its application in this context appropriate? Useful?

Does your agency already have an internal process for determining critical (or essential/nonessential) programme and staff? If so, how did it relate, or not, to the PC exercise?

PC assessment process
1. Was there sufficient capacity (including number and technical expertise of staff) and financial resources (from HQ and/or in-country) to undertake the PC assessment? Were the number of facilitators and their skills/knowledge sufficient?
2. How useful and timely was the guidance provided by the PCCT/Secretariat to the roll out of PC at field levels?
3. [For SRSG/RC/HC and DSS] Did the UN entities operating in country (resident and non-resident) allocate the needed capacity to participate in the PC assessment, including appropriate focal points?
   - [For agencies] Did your agency allocate the needed capacity to participate in the PC assessment, including appropriate focal points?
4. Were updated SRAs (including statements of residual risk corresponding with the geographical scope of the PC assessment) in place at the time of the PC exercise? If not, why not and what impact did this have?
5. To your knowledge, were there significant activities involving UN personnel for which a PC level was not determined (either because it was not listed or a PC assessment was not possible)? If so, which ones and why?
6. Were separate PC assessments carried out for different designated areas? How well were these coordinated?
7. How engaged were senior management, including RC and/or SRSG/Head of Mission as relevant, as well as heads of agencies/programmes, in the PC exercise?
   - How have DOs, SRSGs, DSRSGs and RC/HCs interpreted their respective roles with regard to endorsement and application of PC results?
8. How have UN teams in the field determined PC level 1? Have the criteria for PC level 1 been understood and deemed adequate at field level?
9. Was PC consistent and coherently applied vis-à-vis related UN polices and guidance (such as the UN SMS)? Were there any tensions or discrepancies in this regard?

Use of PC results
10. How (if at all) did your programme or agency use the results of the PC assessment, together with the relevant SRA and the policy on Determining Acceptable Risk, to take management decisions, e.g., which programmes were enabled, further risk mitigation measures, personnel numbers, etc.?

11. [As relevant/if known] Did other UN entities use the results of the PC assessment to take management decisions? Did they have sufficient capacity (including number and technical expertise of staff) and financial resources to do so?
    - Have you seen any impact (positive or negative) for programmes in the ways the PC results have been acted upon?
    - Are you aware of any good practices in this regard?
12. How engaged were senior management (including the DO, as well as heads of agencies and departments) in follow-up to the PC exercise and continued use of the PC results?
13. How engaged were the DO and UNDSS in using the results of the PC assessment, taking both the PC assessment and the SRA into consideration? What were some of the successes and challenges in this regard? Could you provide some examples?
14. Were the results of the PC assessment still relevant two months later? Six months later?
    - Was the PC Framework used to respond to changes in the context, including rapidly evolving situations? If not, why not?
15. Did the PC concept and framework facilitate (or hinder) joint UN system decision-making and coordination, as compared to before the PC rollout?
    - What was the value in having a single UN system framework to undertake PC assessments, rather than using multiple approaches?
    - Did the PC concept and framework strengthen (or weaken) the relationship and levels of collaboration between programme and security professionals, as compared to before the PC rollout? How?
    - (For mission settings) How does the level of dialogue and decision-making between UN mission personnel and UN programmatic entities compare with before the PC rollout?
16. (For mission settings) Were the PC tools and approach well-adapted for mission settings? Are there special considerations for the use of PC in mission settings?

Overall strength of PC
17. Overall, did programme criticality contribute to the UN's goal to 'stay and deliver', particularly in high threat environments'?
    - Did it help to ensure that programme activities are balanced against security risks?
    - Did it help to enable (or hinder) activities assessed as 'lifesaving', 'at scale' and with an 'immediate and significant impact on mortality' (PC1)?
    - Did it lead to better (or worse) dialogue and greater (or less) consideration of alternative delivery strategies (including more or less coverage) at the country level, as compared with before the PC rollout?
18. If PC has not obtained its objectives, why not? What internal and external factors might have influenced this?
19. Did the PC concept or process have any positive or negative unintended consequences, in this setting?

Headquarters interview guide

Background
When/how did you first learn of the PC concept? How many countries have you seen it implemented in?

Does your agency already have an internal process for determining critical (or essential/nonessential) programme and staff? If so, how did it relate, or not, to the PC Framework?

Roll-out / implementation of PC
1. What were some of the successes and challenges in the rollout, including participation in PC missions?
2. How does your agency or programme use PC in its decision-making?
   - Did your programme or agency use the results of the PC assessment, together with the relevant SRA and the policy on Determining Acceptable Risk, to take management decisions, e.g., which programmes were enabled, further risk mitigation measures, personnel numbers, etc.?
   - Was the PC Framework used to respond to changes in the context, including rapidly evolving situations? If not, why not?
3. Was the process for determining whether an activity is PC1 (and very high level risk) clear and appropriate? Are there modifications you would suggest to this?
4. Was PC consistent and coherently applied vis-à-vis related UN polices and guidance (such as the UN SMS)? Were there any tensions or discrepancies in this regard?
5. Did the PCSC ensure that PC assessments were undertaken in country areas where this was needed, and where this was not the case, take action to ensure that the assessment took place or was revised appropriately?
6. At the field level, across the contexts with which you are familiar, how engaged were:
   - Senior management (including the DO, as well as heads of agencies and departments) in the PC exercise and follow-up to it (including the continued use of the PC Framework)?
   - The DO and UNDSS in using the results of the PC assessment, taking both the PC assessment and the SRA into consideration?
7. Did the PC concept and framework facilitate (or hinder) joint UN system decision-making and coordination, as compared to before the PC rollout?
   - What was the value in having a single UN system framework to undertake PC assessments, rather than using multiple approaches?
   - Did the PC concept and framework strengthen (or weaken) the relationship and levels of collaboration between programme and security professionals, as compared to before the PC rollout?
   - (For mission settings) How does the level of dialogue and decision-making between UN mission personnel and UN programmatic entities compare with before the PC rollout?
8. (For mission settings) Were the PC tools and approach well-adapted for mission settings? Are there special considerations for the use of PC in mission settings?

Overall strength of PC
9. In your view, are there any analytical or conceptual 'gaps' in the PC Framework? If so, what are they?
10. What was the Headquarters approval process of activities that are PC1 **and** implemented in situations of very high residual risk? Was it clear and appropriate? Are there modifications you would suggest?

11. Overall, did programme criticality contribute to the UN's goal to 'stay and deliver', particularly in high threat environments?
    - Did it help to ensure that programme activities are balanced against security risks?
    - Did it lead to better (or worse) dialogue and greater (or less) consideration of alternative delivery strategies (including more or less coverage) at the country level, as compared with before the PC rollout?
    - Did it help to enable (or hinder) activities assessed as 'lifesaving', 'at scale' and with an 'immediate and significant impact on mortality' (PC1)?
12. If PC has not obtained its objectives, why not? What internal and external factors might have influenced this?
13. Did the PC concept or process have any positive or negative unintended consequences, in this setting?

Sustainability of PC
14. Is there an expert pool of UN personnel from various agencies/departments with solid knowledge of the PC framework and methodology?
    - What is the expertise within the respective agencies? To what extent is expertise on PC maintained and mainstreamed within agencies/departments?
    - If not, what steps need to be taken to reach these goals?
15. What steps (if any) should be taken to ensure the sustainability of programme criticality? What (if any) role should there be for sustained global support on PC?

Annex 3: Online survey

Thank you for participating in this survey, which will contribute to the 'Independent Review of Programme Criticality'. The review aims to assess whether the programme criticality (PC) concept and framework, approved in October 2011, has contributed to the UN's goal to 'stay and deliver', particularly in high threat environments.

In January 2013, the PC Framework was introduced [link] to 30 countries with Security Level System (SLS) level 4 and above. The review team is seeking input from the UN in these 30 countries to better understand their experiences, *regardless of whether PC was formally applied in that country.*

If you work in Headquarters or a regional office, you may answer the questions *either* in relation to one context with which you are familiar *or* in relation to programme criticality as a general approach.

Your responses will be kept confidential. Quotes may be cited anonymously in the report.

1. Name of your agency/department/fund/programme:

2. What type of location do you currently live and work in?
   - Headquarters
   - Regional office
   - Country office or duty station

3. Please select the category of staff that best describes your role:
   - Senior management
   - Programme
   - Security
   - Administrative / support staff
   - Other, please describe:

4. What country does your work pertain to?

5. Do you wish to:
   - Answer questions relating to the rollout of programme criticality in **one** specific field context that you are familiar with
   - Answer only general questions about programme criticality

6. Has the UN conducted a programme criticality exercise in your field location (or another field location with which you are familiar) since October 2011?
   - Yes
   - No
   - I don't know

7. If not, why not? Select as many as apply.
   - Not necessary / appropriate for this context
   - Takes too much time, competing priorities
   - Do not have the capacity to implement results

- Could not get the necessary support / capacity to conduct the exercise
- Insufficient interest from UN agencies/programmes in-country
- I don't know the reason
- Other

8. Has the UN team in your country requested guidance or support from the Programme Criticality Coordination Team (PCCT) or the Programme Criticality Secretariat (PC secretariat)?
- Yes
- No; we were not aware that this was available
- No; we did not think this guidance / support would be necessary or useful
- I don't know
[Option for write-in comments]

9. Did they respond in a timely way?
- Yes
- No
- I don't know
[Option for write-in comments]

10. How useful did you find the support from the PCCT and PC Secretariat?
- Very useful
- Somewhat useful
- Not very useful
- Not at all useful
- Not sure / no opinion / NA
[Option for write-in comments]

11. How would you rate the skills/knowledge of the facilitators of the PC exercise?
- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Not sure / no opinion / NA
[Option for write-in comments]

12. What proportion of UN entities allocated sufficient resources / capacity to participate in the PC assessment, including appropriate focal points?
- All
- Most
- Some
- Few to none
- Not sure / no opinion / NA
[Option for write-in comments]

13. Were there any significant activities involving UN personnel for which a PC level was not determined (either because it was not listed or a PC assessment was not possible)?
- Yes

- No
- Not sure / no opinion / NA

[Option for write-in comments]

14. Were there updated SRAs (including statements of residual risk for the relevant locations) in place at the time the PC exercise was undertaken?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Not sure / no opinion /NA

    [Option for write-in comments]

15. How engaged was the RC (or RC/SRSG/Head of Mission) in the PC exercise?
    - Very engaged
    - Somewhat engaged
    - Not very engaged
    - Not at all engaged
    - Not sure / no opinion /NA

    [Option for write-in comments]

16. How engaged were the Heads of agencies/departments in the PC exercise?
    - Very engaged
    - Somewhat engaged
    - Not very engaged
    - Not at all engaged
    - Not sure / no opinion /NA

    [Option for write-in comments]

17. To what extent did your programme/agency/department use the results of the PC assessment(s) to take management decisions?
    - Very much
    - Somewhat
    - Not very much
    - Not at all
    - Not sure / no opinion /NA

    [Option for write-in comments]

18. How engaged were senior leadership (including RC/SRSG/Head of Mission as relevant, as well as heads of agencies/departments) in the follow-up to the PC exercise(s) and the use of the PC results?
    - Very engaged
    - Somewhat engaged
    - Not very engaged
    - Not at all engaged
    - Not sure / no opinion /NA

    [Option for write-in comments]

19. Did UNDSS use the results of the PC assessment(s) when processing and approving security clearances?
    - Yes

- No
- Not sure / no opinion /NA
[Option for write-in comments]

20. How relevant were the results of the PC assessment(s) two months later?
    - Very relevant
    - Somewhat relevant
    - Not very relevant
    - Not at all relevant
    - Not sure / no opinion /NA
    [Option for write-in comments]

21. How relevant were the results of the PC assessment(s) six months later?
    - Very relevant
    - Somewhat relevant
    - Not very relevant
    - Not at all relevant
    - Not sure / no opinion /NA
    [Option for write-in comments]

22. Can you think of an example of when the PC Framework was used to guide the UN response to a rapidly evolving situation (e.g., new refugees/IDPs, uptick in conflict, etc.)?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Not sure / no opinion /NA

    [Option for write-in comments]

23. If yes, how useful was the PC Framework in this situation?
    - Very useful
    - Somewhat useful
    - Not very useful
    - Not at all useful
    - Not sure / no opinion /NA
    [Option for write-in comments]

24. Is PC making any discernible difference to the way UN entities conduct their programming and operations?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Not sure / no opinion /NA
    [Option for write-in comments]

25. Did the PC concept and framework help to improve dialogue and decision-making between UN Mission personnel and UN programmatic entities, as compared with before the PC rollout?
    - Very much
    - Somewhat
    - Not very much

- Not at all
- Not sure / no opinion
- Not relevant: No UN peacekeeping/political/peacebuilding mission in this country
[Option for write-in comments]

26. Overall, in your view, did programme criticality contribute to the UN's goal to 'stay and deliver', particularly in high threat environments'?
    - Very much
    - Somewhat
    - Not very much
    - Not at all
    - Not sure / no opinion / NA
    [Option for write-in comments]

27. Did it help to ensure that programme activities are balanced against security risks?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I don't know
    [Option for write-in comments]

28. Did it lead to more consideration of alternative delivery strategies, as compared with before the PC rollout?
    - Very much
    - Somewhat
    - Not very much
    - Not at all
    - Not sure / no opinion / NA
    [Option for write-in comments]

29. Did the PC concept or process have any positive or negative unintended consequences, in this setting? [write-in response]

Thank you for your time. Please contact the team lead for the review if you have further comments or questions: Katherine Haver, Katherine.haver@humanitarianoutcomes.org

Annex 4: Reference documents

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Annex 5: Persons interviewed

Headquarters, regional and other locations
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Simon Butt, Security Advisor, OCHA
Lloyd Cederstrand, Coordination and Response Division, OCHA
Ted Chaiban, Director, EMOPS, UNICEF
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Terry Davis, Principal Security Advisor, UNICEF
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Timo der Weduwen, Chief, Training & Development, UNDSS
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Zlatan Milisic, Deputy Director, Programme, Policy and Innovation, WFP
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Armel Luhiriri, Human Rights Division, UNMAS, MINUSMA and Representative, UNHCR
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Annex 6: List of countries of relevance to the PC Framework

Note: Countries that have conducted PC assessments since the first version of the framework was endorsed in October 2011 are highlighted in bold.

	Country	Total staff as of Dec 2012[1]	SLS level 4 or above, Jan 2013[2]	SLS level 4 or above, Jan '13-May '14[3]	Date of PC assessment(s), Oct 2011-April 2013	Date of PC assessment(s), April 2013-May 2014	PCCT conducted field support mission(s)	DPKO, DFS or DPA-led missions since October 2011; missions known to have participated in PC are in bold	Focus country for the Review
1	**Afghanistan**	1181	✓	✓	Sept 2012		✓	**UNAMA** (DPKO)	✓
2	Algeria	144		✓					
3	Burkina Faso[4]	311							
4	**Central African Republic**	312	✓	✓	Apr 2013	June 2013	✓	**BINUCA** (DPKO); MINUSCA (DPKO)	
5	Chad[5]	550							
6	Colombia	210	✓	✓					
7	**DR Congo**	4012	✓	✓	(field-tested in 2010 or 2011)	Mar 2014	✓	**MONUSCO** (DPKO)	
8	Cote d'Ivoire	1331	✓	✓				UNOCI (DPKO)	
9	Egypt	758		✓					
10	Eritrea	96		✓					
11	Ethiopia	1808	✓	✓					
12	Georgia	102	✓	✓					
13	Guinea Bissau	205	✓	✓				UNIOGBIS (DPA)	

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[1] UN System (2013) 'Personnel statistics: Data as of 31 December 2012', High Level Committee on Management (HLCM), Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), CEB/2013/HLCM/HR/12. See Table 15, 'Number of staff by duty station and organisation'. Figures are based on the 'annual statistical tables on the staff of the organisations in the United Nations common system with appointments for a period of one year or more as at 31 December 2012. The tables exclude information on National Professional Officers.'

[2] These countries were sent the official communication in January 2013 notifying them of the PC Framework.

[3] A country is considered here as SLS Level 4 and above if any security level area within it is Level 4.

[4] Country listed on 'Country Support Table, Programme Criticality Roll-out' (PCCT, April 2014).

[5] Ibid.

#	Country								
14	India	757	✓	✓					
15	**Iraq**	754	✓	✓		Oct 2013		**UNAMI** (DPA)	
16	Israel, West Bank and Gaza	21, 1033	✓	✓				UNSCO (DPA)	
17	Kenya	3028	✓	✓	(field-tested in 2010 or 2011)				
18	Lebanon	1320	✓	✓				UNSCOL (DPA), UNFIL (DPKO)	
19	**Libya**	225	✓	✓	Apr 2013			**UNSMIL** (DPA)	
20	**Mali**	242	✓	✓	July 2012, Feb 2013		✓	**UNOM** (DPA), MINUSMA (DPKO)	✓
21	**Mauritania**	125	✓	✓	June 2012		✓		
22	**Niger**	242			Apr 2013		✓		
23	**Nigeria**	598	✓	✓		Sept 2013, Mar 2014	✓		✓
24	**Pakistan**	679	✓	✓		June 2013, May 2014	✓	UNMOGIP (DPKO)	✓
25	Philippines	429	✓	✓					
26	**Somalia**	291	✓	✓	(field-tested in 2010 or 2011)	July 2013	✓	**UNPOS** then UNSOM (DPA) and **UNSOA** (DFS)	✓
27	**South Sudan**	1943	✓	✓		Jan 2014	✓	**UNMISS** (DPKO)	✓
28	**Sudan**	4396	✓	✓	Apr 2012	May 2014	✓	**UNAMID** (DPKO)	
29	**Syria**	394	✓	✓	June 2012	Jul 2013, Sept 2013	✓	OJSR (DPA), UNDOF (DPKO)	✓
30	Tajikistan	123		✓					
31	Thailand	1425	✓	✓					
32	Turkey	184	✓	✓					
33	Ukraine	83		✓					
34	Western Sahara	235	✓	✓				MINURSO (DPKO)	
35	**Yemen**	290	✓	✓	May 2012	Jan 2014	✓	**OSASG** (DPA)	✓
Total	**15**		**27**	**32**	**9** [6]	**10**	**13**	# of missions participating in PC: **11**	**8**

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[6] Twelve, including the field-testing countries.

Annex 7: Agency/Department Contributions to PC roll out to date (October 2011 - April 2014)

The below is in USD and in addition to staff time that has been dedicated to engage in the PCSC, PCCT, etc. In country costs covered by UNCTs have included venue and transport costs for facilitators (minor). UN entities paid travel costs for the Training of Trainers (ToT).

	DSS	DPKO/ DFS[7]	DPA	OCHA	UNDP	UNHCR	UNICEF	WHO	WFP
PC Coordination costs (Secretariat and rollout support)	10,000			10,000	10,000	10,000	240,000		10,000
Travel costs PC rollout (# missions/ total average cost)[8]	1/ 5,000			3/ 15,000	8/ 40,000	5/ 25,000	16/ 80,000	2/ 10,000	6/ 30,000
PC e-tool prototype development	In kind	In kind		In kind					
PC Independent Review		In kind (tbd)	10,000	16,000	10,000	10,000	23,680		10,000
Other					In kind (staff member for KM platform, ~5% weekly)	~7,000 (PC e-learning, to be paid)	~4,000 (PC ToT 2014)		
TOTALS	**15,000**	**In kind**	**10,000**	**41,000**	**60,000**	**52,000**	**347,680**	**10,000**	**50,000**

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[7] DPKO and DFS recently conveyed their intention to contribute $5,000 each.

[8] Estimated cost per facilitator per rollout mission (average): USD5,000 (travel and DSA 5 days)

Annex 8: Terms of Reference – Independent Review of Programme Criticality

Terms of Reference

Independent Review of Programme Criticality

Background

In 2009, the UN system made improvements to its Security Management System (UNSMS) which led to the establishment of the new Security Level System (SLS). Three changes in particular focused on improving programme delivery and strengthening the mind-set within the UN from 'when to leave' to 'how to stay'. Firstly, it constituted a change in the Security Risk Management model (SRM), which included placing the 'programme assessment' part of the SRM model first in the process. This put programmes goals in the forefront and added emphasis on the fact that the SRM must enable programmes. Secondly, the UN developed the 'Guidelines for Acceptable Risk'. These acknowledged that all risks cannot be totally eliminated, so the UN system must be willing to accept whatever risk remains after applying risk management strategies (i.e., the 'residual risk'). The Guidelines for Acceptable Risk state that the UN can accept higher levels of residual risk when implementing more critical programmes. In this way, the risks taken are 'balanced' with the criticality of the programme. The Acceptable Risk Model also outlines that decisions are taken at the appropriate level. The third and subsequent change was the recognition that the UN system needed a standard way of determining programme criticality (since this did not previously exist and was unevenly applied across countries), and thus it established a 'Programme Criticality Working Group' to define four levels of programme criticality and develop a framework for determining programme criticality for decision making. This third and last element was needed for a completion of the security management framework.

Following significant field testing, a Programme Criticality (PC) framework, which is a common UN system 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, was endorsed for roll out at country level by the HLCM and subsequently by the CEB in October 2011. A revised version of the framework was approved by the same bodies in February 2013. The revised version of the PC framework was based on lessons learned from applying it in a number of countries between October 2011 and December 2012.

The concept of Criticality is to be understood to mean the impact of an activity on the population, not on the organisation. Criticality is determined by looking at an activity's contribution to the UN's strategic objectives in a certain geographical area and the likelihood of implementing that activity in the said geographical area and timeframe. In addition, an activity's criticality is also looked at to see if it meets the criteria of 'lifesaving at scale with an immediate and significant impact on mortality', or is a 'directed activity by the Secretary General for a particular situation' and is thus determined to be the most critical activities (called PC level 1)[9].

Programme Criticality (PC) is one side of the balance when making decisions on whether a UN programme stays and delivers. The other side of the balance is the statement of the risk present at the current time, after the implementation of security risk management measures, in the specific location where the programme is being delivered; referred to as residual risk. Final decision-

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[9] United Nations System Programme Criticality Framework. CEB/2013/HLCM/February 2013.

making on acceptable risk requires both the output of a PC assessment and determined residual risk levels, and these two components must be comparable[10].

As recommended by the Programme Criticality Steering Committee (PCSC)[11] and endorsed by in the High Level Committee on Management (HLCM) and CEB in October 2013, the UN system will undertake an independent review of the Programme Criticality Framework and Concept in 2014. The review is commissioned by the PCSC, and will cover the time period 2011 – 2013.

Purpose and Objectives
Following a three-year guided rollout of the Programme Criticality framework at country level, the UN system now wants to take stock and have an independent perspective on PC so far, specifically by looking at the experiences at country level, with a view to understanding (i) whether the system is moving in the right direction and (ii) how best to proceed in working to strengthen the ability to stay and deliver while at the same time taking appropriate decisions with respect to security risk.

The mandate of the working-level Programme Criticality Coordination Team (PCCT), which was tasked with the development of the PC framework and methodology as well as to guide the rollout of PC at country levels, is expiring in June 2014. The intent was that by this time, several key countries would be supported and trained in undertaking PC assessments and would consequently be able to independently conduct PC assessments as required at country levels. Further, the aim was to mainstream capacity in applying PC and undertaking the PC assessments within departments and agencies, so that a dedicated global technical support structure would no longer be required. While the main aim is to review the experience with PC to date in order to determine how to proceed, it is also expected that the review will shed light on whether there is a need for sustained global support on PC. Undertaking a review at this time is therefore opportune in informing future action.

It is proposed that the review of PC be formative in nature, with the aim to assess whether the programme criticality concept and framework has *contributed* to the UN's goal to 'stay and deliver' particularly in high threat environments. A formative review is one undertaken during implementation to take stock and gain a better understanding of what is being achieved and to identify improvements. The choice has been to not go into a full-fledged formal evaluation of PC at this stage, since this requires there to be a sufficient and long-standing evidence base as well as the ability to clearly distinguish causality. It is felt that PC is not yet ripe for this, but that an evaluation may be planned for 2 to 4 years in the future.

Thus, the objectives of the review are to:

(i)   Examine the overall approach to PC, definition and criteria, the PC framework, methodology and tool and highlight its strengths and weaknesses;
(ii)   Assess the roll out of the PC framework, including the conduct and results of PC assessments and their use at country level and examine whether programme criticality contributes, in the way it was intended, to UN actors being able to 'stay and deliver' particularly in higher risk contexts;
(iii)   Identify external factors (outside the PC framework) that might have influenced the ability to implement programme criticality; and

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[10] United Nations System Programme Criticality Framework. CEB/2013/HLCM/February 2013, 10.

[11] The PCSC is an inter-agency body which is the successor of the PCWG. It convenes at Director Level.

(iv)   Provide actionable recommendations for a way forward, including on the sustainability and institutionalisation of programme criticality within the UN system.

The review will thus look into the application of the PC concept and framework in its entirety, its strengths and weaknesses, as well as its use in decision-making under the acceptable risk model. It can make proposals regarding the inter-linkages between PC and the Security Risk Management model (SRM), without going into an evaluation of the SRM itself. It will focus on the experience of using PC in those countries where the PC framework has been formally applied[12] from the time it was approved in October 2011. Special attention should be given to the experience of PC rollout in mission settings.

The PC concept—the fact that we need an assessment of programmes as a balance to risk when making final decisions related to delivery—is recognised to be valuable. The present review will look into whether the current PC framework, methodology, tool and overall approach to PC have best achieved that goal, with a view to making improvements where needed. The focus will be on the conduct and results of PC assessments and the use of their results in the field. Due attention should be given to the capacity and resources already invested in policy development and rollout of PC.

It is recognised that there may be factors beyond PC that have contributed to whether the UN is able to stay and deliver, and it will be important to distinguish the factors that directly relate to PC from those that do not, with a more in-depth study of the former.

The review will not include an evaluation of the ultimate impact of PC since the evidence base is not yet there and it will be too difficult to ascertain causality. Put another way, answering the question 'have we better been able to stay and deliver' would require looking into a broad number of factors that go far beyond PC, and it is not envisaged that this review look in depth at any such outlying factors, though they may be touched upon.

Review Criteria
The following represents a provisional and illustrative list of broad criteria/questions to be fine-tuned by the consultants in the inception report and through data collection. The consultants are also asked to propose baselines.

Effectiveness
- *Has the PC framework adequately been able to determine PC levels of activities involving UN personnel? Are there any gaps in the framework?*
- *How have UN teams in the field applied the PC framework and how effectively were the PC results used in making operational decisions?*
- *Have there been any unintended consequences, positive or negative?*
- *Have the PC concept and framework facilitated joint UN system decision-making and coordination?*
- *What effect have the PC concept and framework had on the relationship and collaboration between programme and security professionals?*
- *What were the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives?*

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[12] To date: Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Iraq, Kenya, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Yemen.

- *How have UN teams in the field determined PC level 1? Have the criteria for PC level 1 been understood and deemed adequate at field level?*
- *How have DOs, SRSGs, DSRSGs and RCs interpreted and their respective roles with regard to endorsement and application of PC results?*

Appropriateness / Relevance
- *To what extent and how successfully has programme criticality attained its objectives? Was it optimal?*
- *To what extent has the initial application of PC shown that it is a useful concept and framework?*
- *Does Programme Criticality provide the right balance to the risk analysis (SRA)?*
- *Are the outputs of PC assessments consistent with the overall goal of PC?*
- *Are the outputs of PC consistent with the intended impacts and effects?*
- *How closely has decision-making in the field followed the PC approach? What is the evidence?*
- *To what extent are the PC assessments and use of results owned at country level? How have accountabilities been exercised?*
- *How has the PC framework been used in decision-making?*
- *Have there been any difference in PC rollout in mission and non-mission settings? If so, what?*
- *What are the special considerations, if any, that should be considered in mission settings?*

Coherence and Coordination
- *Is PC consistently and coherently applied vis-à-vis related UN polices and guidance (such as the UN SMS in particular but also others)?*
- *Is PC appropriate as UN system-wide tool? Have all actors worked towards the same goal?*
- *To what extent and how successfully has programme criticality been rolled out and applied at field levels in a coordinated manner? Was it optimal?*

Efficiency
- *Has programme criticality been implemented in an efficient way compared to alternatives?*
- *Has the roll out and application of programme criticality been cost-efficient and objectives achieved on time?*
- *To what extent was the sufficient capacity in place to undertake the PC assessment and use the results?*
- *What have been the bottlenecks in the process?*
- *How timely and useful has the support and guidance of the PCCT been to the roll out of PC at field levels?*

Coverage
- *To what extent has PC been used across contexts (including Mission and non-Mission settings) and geographical areas? To what extent has this been sufficient and appropriate to context?*
- *Has the PC approach led to a better dialogue and consideration of alternative delivery strategies?*

Sustainability
- *To what extent have the PC results remained relevant over time, and has the use of PC responded appropriately to the evolving nature of the context in country?*
- *What were the major factors which influenced the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of the programme or project?*

Methodology
The review should be rigorous and evidence-based and follow a participatory approach with major stakeholders.

A mixed-method approach that triangulates all available data sources to reach conclusions and findings will be employed and may include, but need not be limited to, the following:

- Desk review of key documentary evidence sources (PC framework and support tools, documentation of country-specific PC assessments and PC results documents, lessons learned documents, reports to the HLCM/CEB, country-specific SRAs, documentation on security-related decision-making etc.)
- Systematic secondary analysis of data/statistics (such as reference to PC in SCR and security-related decisions, number of staff/missions deployed to specific areas, etc);
- In-country direct observations;
- Key Informant Interviews (by phone and face to face) and focus group discussions;
- Case studies (with field visits)
- Surveys

The review will be forward looking and also document best practices, and where relevant, alternatives to the current state of affairs taking into consideration resources already dedicated and costs of possible alternative courses of action.

A list of existing information and documents will be provided to the review team, as relevant and possible by the PC Secretariat.

The key informant interviews will include staff at UN HQ (senior and working level staff including in DSS, DPKO, DPA, agencies, funds and programmes, including past PCWG members) and field levels including leadership (DOs, SRSGs and RC/HCs), programme members, and security professionals. A draft list of key informant interviews will be prepared and proposed by PC experts (see below) as a basis.
Case studies should be included in the review, but caution should be applied in making comparisons across cases since each context will have large number of variables to consider and determining causality will therefore be challenging. Case studies would be selected by the consultants in consultation with the PC experts.

Deliverables
The following main outputs are required:

- Inception Report and presentation of initial findings to the PC experts and the PCSC (potentially though a workshop), developed through a scoping phase to drill down on research questions and methodology;

- Draft Review Report with key findings and conclusions, including information on the methodology, persons met, best practice, recommendations and lessons learnt;

- SMART recommendations for the UN system on what is working well, what needs to be strengthened and to identify any gaps requiring immediate or medium-term action;

- Debriefing with PCSC of the key findings before report finalisation;

- Final report, including a concise executive summary and not exceeding 10,000 words.

Governance Arrangements
As mentioned above, the review will be conducted by a team of independent consultants. Two levels of governance arrangements will be put in place to further ensure the independence of the review.

A Steering Group of an inter-agency nature will have oversight of the review, make final decisions, provide quality assurance and to the maximum extent possible protect the independence of the review. It will consist of 4 to 5 senior level UN staff who have not directly been involved in the implementation of PC. Members could be drawn from the PCSC membership and country-level senior UN leadership and should include at least one senior evaluation expert from the UN system. As well as overseeing the independence and transparency of the review, the evaluation expert(s) will foster adherence to UN evaluation standards, quality, policies and procedures. The PCSC should determine the final composition of this steering group. In summary the steering group will be committed to:
- Review and approve the PC review ToR;
- Validate the selection of the PC review consultant(s);
- Review and approval of preliminary and final reports.

In addition, members of the PCSC should be interviewed and will comment on the inception report, mid-course and on the final draft. The PCSC could also be called upon in an ad hoc manner should it be required.

The review team will refer to PC experts in the PCCT, DSS or agency security staff, who will input into the preliminary and final reports. The review team should also refer to evaluation experts from departments and agencies as relevant. There will be regular meetings between PC experts from the PCCT during the course of the consultancy, so that PC experts can provide feedback on the content of the various deliverables. PC experts will also ensure the needs and feedback of its respective agencies and departments are taken into account in the design and implementation, and use of the findings.

The PC Secretariat will provide coordination and support to consultants, including to facilitate field visits, interviews, share necessary data and documentation, etc. The PC Secretariat in UNICEF (EMOPS), as the chair of the PCSC, will be in charge of day-to-day management of the process and consultants.

Ethical Considerations
This review will follow standard ethical standards for evaluation and research. Each individual to be interviewed will be asked to provide verbal consent to participating in interviews and focus groups. The interviewees' confidentiality will be upheld.

Qualifications and competencies
Required qualifications and experience, Senior Consultant – International:
- Masters, PhD or Advanced degree in related subject area (International relations, Crisis Management, Peace and Security, Humanitarian Operations, Social Services, Sociology, etc.);
- At least 12-15 years progressively responsible experience including evaluative and analytical work on performance for results at an organisational or interagency level;
- Knowledge of current evaluative and analytical literature within the UN system in general;
- Knowledge of and exposure to United Nations field operations and security related decision-making;

- Excellent English and French speaking and writing skills;
- Excellent and proven research skills including development and application of analytical frameworks and tools and production of analytical papers;
- Excellent interviewing capacity.

Required qualifications and experience, Mid-Level Consultant – International:
- Masters, PhD or Advanced degree in related subject area (International relations, Crisis Management, Peace and Security, Humanitarian Operations, Social Services, Sociology, etc.);
- At least 7 years progressively responsible experience including evaluative and analytical work on performance for results at an organisation or interagency level;
- Significant knowledge of current evaluative and analytical literature within the UN system in general;
- Some exposure to UN field operations and or security risk management practices would be desirable;
- Excellent English and French speaking and writing skills;
- Strong knowledge of results-based management and monitoring concepts;
- Good knowledge of the local context, including institutions and people would be an asset;
- Very good interviewing and facilitation skills.

Timeline
A proposed timeline for the process is outlined below.

- o <u>By 17 Mar 2014</u>: Identification and recruitment of consultants to undertake evaluation completed.
- o <u>By 15 April 2014</u>: Delivery of Inception Report
- o <u>By 15 June 2014</u>: Draft Review Report and initial presentation of findings
- o <u>By 20 June 2014</u>: Debriefing with PCSC of the key findings before report finalisation, including discussion on recommendations for the UN system
- o <u>By 11 July 2014</u>: Final report, including a concise executive summary and not exceeding 10,000 words.