

Mid-Term Review
of DPPA Strategic Plan 2020-2022

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The evaluation report reflects the personal views of the author and does not necessarily represent the policies or position of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.

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Executive Summary, Key Findings & Recommendations

Purpose and scope of this Mid-Term Review

The UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) commissioned an independent Mid-Term Review to assess: i) the progress made by DPPA in the first 17 months of its 2020-2022 Strategic Plan, from 1 January 2020 to 31 May 2021, and ii) how well DPPA's strategic planning tools have served the Department to date.

This is DPPA's first Strategic Plan following the restructuring of the peace and security pillar. Conducting a Mid-Term Review half-way through the implementation period enables the Department to gain a view of progress to date, and to identify scope for adaptation in the second half of the strategy period. The review was also requested to include concrete recommendations for improvements to both implementation and results reporting, while factoring in changes in operating context due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The primary audience for the report is the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Rosemary A. DiCarlo, along with senior directors and staff within DPPA. The findings and recommendations of the Mid-Term Review are intended to serve as a basis for decision-making by DPPA leadership, in order to improve DPPA's performance and impact as outlined in the Strategic Plan. In keeping with DPPA's commitment to inclusivity, accountability and transparency, this report has been written with a broader audience in mind, including stakeholders, donors, counterpart organisations and researchers.

A changing operational context for DPPA

DPPA's 2020-2022 Strategic Plan covers a period of increasing tension in international affairs, with the multilateral system under pressure.

The instability caused by armed conflicts, terrorism, natural disasters, displaced populations, political crises, increasing technological disruption, along with climate and environmental change, were exacerbated by the unchecked spread of the COVID-19 virus and the ongoing global pandemic in 2020-2021. This has multiplied risks and inequalities for vulnerable populations in conflict situations, notably for women and girls, children (especially unaccompanied children), detainees, refugees or displaced persons, those who have disabilities, the elderly, and people who belong to a vulnerable minority group.

The COVID-19 pandemic global outbreak in 2020 also coincided with constraints on the UN's funding position due to delays in regular budget contributions by some Member States, which prevented the Department filling a number of critical vacant positions. Despite these constraints, DPPA continued to advance its conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding work, thanks to Member States' voluntary contributions to DPPA's Multi-Year Appeal fund (MYA), which received \$35.9 million of the \$40 million requested in 2020.

Another major feature of DPPA's operational context in 2020-2021 was determined by the reforms to the peace and security pillar that entered into force on 1 January 2019.

DPPA's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

DPPA's rapid and flexible risk-response model provided a valuable means to manage the threat to global peace and security posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Identifying the potential for COVID-19 to exacerbate conflict patterns, DPPA supported the analysis and response of over 30 Special Political Missions (SPMs) and 100+ UN Country Teams, assessing the impact of COVID-19 on conflict dynamics, and proposing actions to foster peacemaking and prevent violence in the context of the pandemic.

DPPA's response to COVID-19 included the rapid and flexible work of the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), which worked with UN Resident Coordinators and partners to make adjustments during 2020-2021 to nearly half of all ongoing PBF-funded programmes, mitigating risks of violent conflict posed by the pandemic, including countering hate speech and disinformation, addressing social cohesion, and helping to ensure equitable access to health care.

DPPA recognised the impact of COVID-19 on the most at-risk members of conflict-affected populations, particularly women and girls. DPPA continued to push for implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPS), including through gender responsive analysis, targeted efforts to support women's meaningful participation and to address conflict related sexual violence, and dedicated funding for gender programming.

The Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire on 23 March 2020, supported by DPPA efforts, received endorsement from over 180 Member States, as well as a broad range of regional and civil society organisations. However, a lack of tangible support from actors with influence over conflict parties prevented the ceasefire reaching its full potential.

DPPA adapted its working methods in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, reallocating resources and putting into practice pre-existing efforts promoting the safe use of digital technologies for conflict prevention and resolution. The Department encouraged innovative approaches across its work, including shifting meetings of the Security Council and its subsidiary organs from solely in-person to fully virtual format. DPPA also pivoted to offer many of its training and learning opportunities online.

DPPA and its SPMs designed and implemented new hybrid models of mediation, combining in-person and digital interactions, as well as other tools such as digital focus groups powered by Artificial-Intelligence software. Some of these new virtual practices are likely to be continued even after the pandemic subsides, while other aspects of DPPA's mandate are likely to depend on in-person engagement with counterparts and cannot be readily moved to a purely virtual format.

Implementation at the mid-term of the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan

DPPA is performing soundly in the implementation of its strategic goals, based on the evidence available for this Mid-Term Review of the 2020-2022 Strategy.

The Department reported that it met or exceeded more than 79 per cent of its own performance measures under the Strategic Plan for 2020, and is on track to deliver similar performance in 2021.

In the first half of the strategy period, DPPA launched flexible and timely risk-responsive initiatives, including a total of 188 deployments of teams or individual experts in response to requests.

DPPA's Strategic Plan in practice

Finding : Evidence reviewed for this Mid-Term Review indicates that the Department's 2020-2022 Strategic Plan is useful in aligning effort, clarifying strategic logic through the Department's 'Theory of Change', and communicating the value of DPPA's work to outside audiences.

Recommendation 1:

⇒ **DPPA should consider developing a more operationally-focused Theory of Change for its next strategy cycle, better reflecting the process through which DPPA identifies risks of conflict, reaches relevant actors and networks, engages them in dialogue, and exerts influence for peace. Additional benefit might be obtained if each Division were to formulate a theory of change or strategic logic as part of its workplan, supporting the whole-Department strategic logic.**

Finding : The Secretary-General's 2019 reform of the UN peace and security pillar means that DPPA and DPO are now aligned by a common vision statement, collaboration between Executive leadership, a shared set of objectives, a shared regional structure, and an emerging shared risk management approach, while retaining their distinct mandates and responsibilities.

Finding : The bulk of attention in DPPA's May 2020 risk register is devoted to the COVID-19 pandemic, for good reason. In most cases the risk definitions are very broad and incorporate multiple risk factors into a single risk, which is likely to make the assessment of gravity and likelihood more complex for DPPA staff and management.

Recommendation 2:

⇒ **Noting the approval of the UN Secretariat-wide risk register in July 2020, and bearing in mind DPPA's ongoing work to assess and manage risks on an organisation-wide basis and in conjunction with DPO, additional benefit might be gained by DPPA**

systematically covering additional categories of organisational risk, and directing attention to the most significant identified risk factors.

DPPA's strategic planning and reporting tools in practice

Finding : DPPA's robust and functioning Results Framework supports the Department's requirement for transparency, accountability, and a strong value-for-money claim under the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan.

Recommendation 3:

- ⇒ **DPPA should consider providing a one-page 'dashboard' view of its performance against strategic goals, combining both qualitative and quantitative assessments, while avoiding the temptation to reduce all of the Department's work to mere numbers.**

Recommendation 4:

- ⇒ **DPPA should improve on the relevance of indicators where feasible, focusing attention on DPPA's impact on the ground.**
-

Finding : DPPA does not fully report on significant but hidden interim results such as the cultivation of trusted networks with key actors, and the quiet but substantial support provided by DPPA to UN Resident Coordinators, Country Teams, Development Coordination Offices, SPMs, and other partner organisations. Senior DPPA staff advised that these kinds of achievements are routine activities rather than results, and advised against seeking to quantify these aspects of DPPA's work.

Recommendation 5:

- ⇒ **Given the significance of interim results such as trusted access and engagement with the right actors, DPPA should examine whether it might be possible to report on the value of these hidden achievements in an aggregated and de-identified manner, without jeopardising peace operations.**
-

Finding : The annual DPPA work plan process is rarely used for adaptation midyear in response to changing contexts, although it has potential to serve this purpose if treated as a 'living document' owned by the divisions. There is additional scope for DPPA divisions to use the workplan for adjusting priorities and planned activities during implementation, rather than seeing the workplan process primarily as a reporting tool for donors. Despite the admirably concise nature envisaged for the workplan reporting template, DPPA faces the ubiquitous risk that the focus of operational reporting drifts towards reciting generic activities, rather than specific valued results.

Recommendation 6:

- ⇒ **To counter the natural tendency towards activity reporting, DPPA might consider requiring divisions to introduce each section of their reports with a headline statement and two-line summary, to draw attention to the most valuable result generated, or the most significant risks identified and managed, and why this work was significant.**
-

Overview of DPPA resources and their allocation in practice

Finding : It is difficult to obtain a summary of the financial resources available to DPPA in its peacemaking, peacebuilding and conflict prevention mission. DPPA's extra-budgetary resources are obtained by the Department under the MYA, while its regular budget allocation from the UN General Assembly is managed separately. An overview of the various regular budget and extra-budgetary funds, and the total amount available to the Department would be a useful addition to DPPA's reporting, if this is feasible.

Recommendation 7:

- ⇒ **DPPA should consider whether it is possible to provide a summary overview of the annual financial resources available to DPPA in its peacemaking, peacebuilding and conflict prevention mission, including regular budget and extra-budgetary funding, and noting those resources that fall outside DPPA's Strategic Plan.**
-

Finding : DPPA's allocation of funds under the MYA is aligned with the Strategic Plan.

Recommendation 8:

- ⇒ **DPPA should focus financial reporting under the MYA on value creation and 'return on investment', rather than the rate of expenditure of allocated funds.**
-

Finding : DPPA's reporting obligations are multi-layered. In addition to its reporting under the Strategic Plan 2020-2022, the Department's core budget is subject to reporting under the UN regular budget framework approved by the UN General Assembly, which is not directly connected to the objectives set out in the Strategic Plan 2020-2022. Each year around \$700 million is allocated from the UN regular budget to SPMs managed by DPPA, along with \$11 million in extra-budgetary funds. DPPA supports, guides, and oversees SPMs, but it does not report directly on their resources and results in the Strategic Plan Results Framework or in DPPA's own Annual Reporting. This means that the value-for-money offered by the SPMs managed by DPPA is not contained in a single report. DPPA's public MYA reporting already provides relatively detailed examples of selected SPM results in narrative form, but does not feature a summary cost/benefit overview. The SPMs report

separately to the UN General Assembly (albeit in a format primarily focussed on results based budgeting and planning for UN staffing and other expenditure, rather than on value-creation).

Recommendation 9:

- ⇒ **DPPA should consider whether it can report a summary view of the cost/benefit provided by the conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding work of SPMs managed by the Department. An aggregated one-stop view of SPM achievements in accessing, engaging, and influencing relevant actors would help strengthen DPPA's value-for-money claim, even if these results must first be carefully de-identified and aggregated to avoid jeopardising ongoing peacemaking efforts.**
-

Finding : It is not possible to obtain a one-stop global view of the combined resources of key entities within the peace and security pillar, because reporting is divided among multiple UN entities, mandates, funding streams and reporting obligations. However, this Mid-Term Review identified interest from key stakeholders in gaining this kind of summary view, in a one-stop format .

Recommendation 10:

- ⇒ **DPPA should consider whether support for the UN peace and security pillar might be strengthened if a holistic view could be provided of the combined resources of SPMs, DPPA, the joint DPPA-UNDP programme, and UN Peacebuilding Fund.**
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1. Objectives and scope of this review

The UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) commissioned an independent Mid-Term Review to assess:

- i) the progress made by DPPA in the first 17 months of its 2020-2022 Strategic Plan, from 1 January 2020 to 31 May 2021, and
- ii) how well DPPA's strategic planning tools have served the Department to date.

The review was requested to include concrete recommendations for improvements to both implementation and results reporting, while also factoring in changes in operating context due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This is the first review of its kind under DPPA's present Strategic Plan, which is itself the first DPPA Strategy statement since the Secretary-General introduced reforms to the peace and security pillar of the UN, merging the former Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) into one new Department, and reinforcing the close connections between the former DPA and the former Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO - now renamed the Department of Peace Operations, DPO).

The **supporting research and analysis** for this review was conducted in June and July of 2021, relying primarily on review of documents and publications supplied by DPPA, interviews with senior DPPA staff from all Divisions, targeted additional document requests, and consultations with key external stakeholders.

The **Terms of Reference** for this review call for a stocktaking of DPPA's key achievements and gaps at the midpoint of the Department's three-year Strategic Plan, factoring in changes in operating context because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and assessing how well DPPA's strategic planning tools served the Department in this dynamic context. The Terms of Reference also request an examination of how the Department captures and reports on results, along with recommendations for improvements wherever this might be feasible. The Terms of Reference are focussed on DPPA's Strategic Plan 2020-2022, and do not extend to the Department's performance under the 'Strategic Framework' that accompanies the UN General Assembly's allocation of funds to DPPA under the UN regular budget.

The **primary audience** for the report is the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Rosemary A. DiCarlo, along with senior directors and staff within DPPA. The findings and recommendations of the Mid-Term Review are intended to serve as a basis for decision-making by DPPA leadership, in order to improve DPPA's performance and impact as outlined in the Strategic Plan. This report has been written with a broader audience in mind, including stakeholders, donors, counterpart organisations and researchers.

2. Implementation of the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan to date

2.1 A changing operational context for DPPA

DPPA's Strategic Plan 2020-2022 has been implemented in a **dynamic environment characterised by external and internal changes**. The trends and shocks affecting DPPA's work during the first half of the strategy period included ongoing geopolitical tensions, worsening conflict trends, constraints on UN resourcing and staffing, and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. These external changes were accompanied by multiple internal adaptations for the Department as it implemented the Secretary-General's reforms of the peace and security pillar. These elements are discussed below.

Geopolitical and conflict trends

DPPA's 2020-2022 Strategic Plan covers a period of **increasing tension** in international affairs, with the multilateral system under pressure, and the Security Council's response to armed conflict at times hindered by differences and tensions between its members. The rise of populist and authoritarian political leaders around the globe coincided with a decreasing level of trust between governments and their peoples and restrictions on women's rights and civic space. At the international level, rising geopolitical tensions continue to challenge international cooperation as envisaged in the UN Charter, including the collective security system.

Armed conflict saw increasing attacks on humanitarian workers and civilians amongst other breaches of International Humanitarian Law, along with drone warfare, indiscriminate bombardment, and cyber-attacks against civilian targets. Displacement caused by conflict and by environmental and economic factors moved waves of people across national and regional boundaries, while non-state actors exploited disorder through indiscriminate terrorist attacks, creating greater instability.

All of these tensions were exacerbated by the unchecked spread of the **COVID-19 virus** and the global pandemic in 2020-2021. The pandemic multiplied risks and previously existing inequalities and risks for vulnerable groups and populations affected by conflict, notably for women and girls, children generally (especially unaccompanied minors), detainees, displaced people and refugees, minority groups, the elderly and people with disabilities.

Constraints on UN Resourcing

The COVID-19 pandemic global outbreak in 2020 also coincided with constraints on the UN's funding position due to **delays in regular budget contributions** by some Member States which prevented the Department from filling a number of critical vacant positions.

Despite these constraints on hiring, DPPA continued to advance its peacemaking work, thanks to Member States' voluntary contributions to DPPA's Multi-Year Appeal fund, which received \$35.9 million of the \$40 million requested in 2020. The MYA funding mechanism enabled DPPA to maintain a flexible and rapid risk-response, continuing its conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding work, despite cuts made under the regular budget.

Reform of the UN peace and security pillar

Another major feature of DPPA's operational context in 2020 was the Secretary-General's three major reform tracks covering the peace and security pillar, development system, and management paradigm of the Organisation.

The peace and security reform involved the restructuring of DPA, DPKO and PBSO, as well as related cultural changes. A single political-operational structure under Assistant Secretaries-General with regional responsibilities, with dual reporting lines to the Under Secretaries-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and for Peace Operations, link DPPA and DPO. The restructuring also included a merger of DPA and PBSO where the latter is to act as a 'hinge' connecting the whole peace and security pillar with the rest of the UN system, especially the development agencies, while still retaining a direct reporting line regarding the Peacebuilding Fund from the Assistant-Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, to the Secretary-General.

While the merger of formal structures entered into force on 1 January 2019, the implementation of these changes is an ongoing process at the time of reporting.

COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic moved quickly **from a local, to national, and then global threat** in 2019 and 2020, placing pressure on already fragile relationships between populations and their governments, and between regional and global political powers. COVID-19 threatened to accelerate this erosion of trust, and to obstruct efforts to prevent and resolve conflict.

The outbreak of COVID-19 also presented a serious threat to electoral processes globally, with many countries rescheduling or postponing elections scheduled for 2020 at the national and local level, including a number of countries in which the UN was already providing electoral support in response to identified risks (such as national elections in Armenia, Bolivia, Ethiopia and Malawi; local elections in Papua New Guinea-Bougainville, Paraguay and Solomon Islands).

The pandemic presented additional challenges for UN peacemaking around the world as the ability of envoys and mediators to meet the parties, convene talks and travel was severely curtailed.

2.2 DPPA's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic required DPPA to **rapidly adapt its working methods**. The Department adjusted its annual planning and reporting cycle during 2020 in response, requiring Divisions to plan and report on a quarterly rather than annual basis to promote rapid adaptation and reallocation of resources. Using the Strategic Plan to guide their planning, DPPA divisions rose to this additional challenge, developing quarterly work plans, which enabled DPPA to closely monitor the impact of the pandemic on the implementation of activities and the attainment of strategic objectives.

DPPA quickly **re-prioritized and re-allocated MYA funds** to match the needs in 2020-2021, reducing planned travel and staff deployments, and moving projects to modes of engagement compatible with the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a

result, DPPA's annual budget under the MYA was trimmed in 2020 from \$45million to \$40million, and it is expected to remain at that level until the end of the current Strategic Plan, in 2022. Staff interviewed for the purposes of the Mid-Term Review noted that it was fortuitous that the COVID-19 operational adaptations coincided with an unrelated freeze on UN hiring, meaning that DPPA's capacity to engage with relevant actors and networks was not entirely crippled by the constraints in filling vacant staff positions.

Identifying the potential for COVID-19 to exacerbate conflict patterns, DPPA supported the **analysis and response** of over 30 Special Political Missions (SPMs) and 100+ UN Country Teams, assessing the impact of COVID-19 on conflict dynamics, and proposing actions to foster inclusive peacemaking and prevent violence in the context of the pandemic. DPPA's COVID-19 risk analysis in 2020 was captured in a new risk register document,¹ which included DPPA's recognition of the impact of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable members of conflict-affected populations, frequently women or children (especially girls). In response, DPPA continued to push for implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, including through gender responsive analysis, targeted efforts to support women's meaningful participation and to address conflict-related sexual violence, and dedicated funding despite the constraints imposed by COVID-19.

DPPA's COVID-19 response included **briefings** to the Security Council on the peace and security implications of the pandemic, weekly briefings to the Secretary-General's Executive Committee on the political impact of COVID-19, together with the development of scenarios on the impact of COVID-19 outbreaks on local and regional conflict dynamics, in collaboration with the UN inter-agency Field Support Group on COVID-19. As part of this effort, DPPA also produced a tracker on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mandate implementation in UN field missions, including daily updates and periodic analytical notes. Increasing engagement with international financial institutions including the World Bank allowed DPPA to help shape global responses to the significant socio-economic impacts of the pandemic.

DPPA re-configured its services to enable the smooth **functioning of Security Council** processes and those of its subsidiary organs, despite the restrictions on travel and in-person meetings. This logistics and communication challenge was efficiently addressed, including the provision of online simultaneous translation, providing the Security Council and subsidiary bodies with a digital format for meetings that had only ever been conducted in-person previously. In-person field assessments for Security Council representatives were also replaced with immersive virtual briefings, allowing the Security Council to view the impact of ongoing conflicts using digital tools.

The **Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire** on 23 March 2020 was supported by DPPA efforts in the UN Headquarters and in fragile and conflict affected areas, and subsequently received endorsement from over 180 Member States, as well as regional organisations, religious leaders, and a broad range of international and local civil society organisations.² In support of this drive for a global ceasefire, DPPA monitored developments on the ground, including steps to stop fighting, initial gestures of support, and unilateral ceasefires announced by conflict parties. A collaborative project with six academic institutions and non-government organisations provided a transparent view of the global

¹ See the sub-section on of part 3.1 of this report, on 'Risk Management and the Strategic Plan', below

² DPPA MYA Annual Report 2020

response to the Secretary-General's global ceasefire call, tracking key developments as they took place.³

While the call for a global ceasefire received strong endorsement from a broad range of actors, in practice some of the underlying drivers of conflict remained dominant, and prevented the call for a global ceasefire reaching its full potential. As noted by Under-Secretary-General Rosemary A. DiCarlo during an interview, the support of conflict-sponsoring powers was required in order for conflict parties to step back from the use of force during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Building on pre-existing efforts, DPPA promoted the safe **use of digital technologies** for conflict prevention and resolution. For example, DPPA was able to provide early training to mediators on digital process design and facilitation as they moved their operations on-line, and developed guidance on the use of social media in mediation. As a result, DPPA and SPMs successfully designed and implemented new hybrid models of mediation, combining inclusive in-person and digital interactions. As the advantages of these new hybrid models and digital tools become apparent, it is expected that they will likely become part of the prevention toolbox, even after the pandemic subsides. However, the Department also developed a clear awareness of those aspects of its prevention engagements which depend on direct engagement with counterparts.

DPPA also successfully pivoted to offer many of its **training and learning opportunities online**. It also increased its capacity to operate in conflicts involving the malicious use of digital technologies, by training UN staff on the use of good offices and other peacemaking techniques in conflicts where cyber capabilities are extensively used by the conflict actors and other parties, in addition to courses on issues such as drafting, conflict analysis, political economy analysis, and data-analytics.

DPPA in collaboration with UNDP, OHCHR, UN Women, UNESCO, UNOPS and WHO developed an operational guide on **conducting elections under COVID-19 restrictions**,⁴ which served as a practical guide for UN electoral advisers. DPPA also reconfigured its interventions during 2020 and 2021 to minimise staff travel and exposure while continuing to provide support to these and other electoral projects in the field. This adaptation allowed DPPA to support the Under-Secretary-General to fulfil her role as the UN focal point for electoral assistance matters, pursuant to the mandate given by the UN General Assembly.

³ The tracking tool can be accessed at: pax.peaceagreements.org/static/covid19ceasefires. See DPPA Annual Report MYA 2020 at p.15

⁴ See WHO, '*Public Health Considerations for elections and related activities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic*' 10 December 2020, available at <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-elections-2020-1>

2.3 Implementation of the Strategic Plan's risk-response model

The ultimate goal of DPPA's Strategic Plan 2020-2022 is to prevent conflict and sustain peace, underpinned by a rapid and flexible response to conflict risk. In pursuit of this goal, DPPA often acts in a supportive role, to influence settings away from violence. This approach is encapsulated by a '**risk-reduction**' model in DPPA's Strategic Plan.

In 2020-2021, DPPA demonstrated that it is well-positioned to fulfil its conflict prevention and sustaining peace mandate, launching flexible and timely risk-responsive initiatives thanks largely to the voluntary contributions of Member States under the Multi-Year Appeal (MYA).

For example, in 2020 alone, **DPPA's Standby team of mediation advisors** deployed on over 95 occasions, in approximately two-dozen contexts, despite the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵ The DPPA Mediation Standby Team can be deployed anywhere in the world within 72 hours, addressing a range of issues related to peace negotiations. This enables DPPA to effectively support other UN bodies, UN Country Teams, and regional or sub-regional organisations regarding peacemaking or conflict prevention needs.

Taking into account other engagements of DPPA staff and advisors, DPPA successfully **deployed teams or individual experts** (virtually and in-person) a total of 188 times during 2020 in response to requests, an increase of more than one third compared to 2019 (139 deployments of staff or advisors). On average, this means that DPPA was providing risk-responsive interventions for conflict prevention and peacemaking more than 15 times each month. And in 72 per cent of cases in which DPPA received a request for electoral assistance in 2020, DPPA was able to field a coordinated response within four weeks, in line with response times for electoral support in 2019, despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

The available evidence for the Mid-Term Review of the DPPA Strategic Plan 2020-2022 suggests that the Department's risk-responsive posture continues to deliver 'impact on the ground' as intended by its Strategic Plan. DPPA's strategic risk-response approach forms an essential part of the Department's contribution to peacemaking globally.

2.4 Implementation of DPPA's strategic objectives

DPPA is performing soundly in the implementation of its strategic goals, based on the evidence available for this Mid-Term Review of the 2020-2022 Strategy. In 2020, the Department reported that it met or exceeded more than 79 per cent of its own performance measures under the Strategic Plan, and is on track to deliver similar performance in 2021.⁶

This success rate would arguably be higher if some performance measures which fall outside DPPA's control were removed from the tally. Excluding those results which fall outside DPPA's sole or primary influence, this review estimates that the Department is meeting or exceeding its targets for 81 per cent of performance measures under **Goal 1** (on conflict prevention and sustaining peace); 87 per cent of performance measures for **Goal 2** (on

⁵ DPPA Annual Report MYA 2020 at p.25

⁶ See DPPA Annual Report MYA 2020 at p.9

partnerships) ; and 87 per cent of performance measures for **Goal 3** (on institutional effectiveness). Given the constraints imposed on the Department in 2020 and 2021 by the COVID-19 pandemic, this is a significant achievement.

Table: DPPA's performance against strategic goals:

Reported performance to date	DPPA Ultimate Aim: Reduce the risk of violence, promote sustained peace ⁷	
DPPA records show 79 per cent of annual performance measures were met or exceeded in 2020	Three Main Goals	Seven Sub-Objectives
	1. Contribute to preventing and resolving violent conflict and building resilience	1.1 Action-oriented analysis 1.2 Inclusive peace-making 1.3 Catalysing sustained peace ⁸
	2. Strengthen partnerships for conflict prevention and resilience	2.1 Support to UN bodies and organs 2.2 Strengthened partnerships at the regional, national and local level ⁹
	3. Achieve a learning, innovative working culture that takes forward the vision of the Secretary-General	3.1 DPPA is a learning, innovative and flexible department 3.2 DPPA has a collaborative work culture and an enabling work environment

3. DPPA's Strategic Planning Tools in Practice

3.1 The Strategic Plan 2020-2022 in practice

Finding : Evidence reviewed for this Mid-Term Review indicates that the Department's 2020-2022 Strategic Plan is useful in aligning DPPA effort, clarifying strategic logic through the Department's *'Theory of Change'*, and communicating the value of DPPA's work to outside audiences.

Recommendation 1:

⇒ **DPPA should consider developing a more operationally-focused *'Theory of Change'* for its next strategy cycle, better reflecting the process through which DPPA**

⁷ Summarised from the DPPA 2020-2022 Strategic Plan.

⁸ Author's paraphrase. The original language from the DPPA Strategic Plan 2020-2022 frames sub-objective 1.3 as 'Sustained Peace: DPPA's peacebuilding engagements across the pillar and UN system catalyse efforts to address socio-economic and other grievances and risks. They are undertaken in partnership with Governments and relevant actors such as the World Bank and other international financial institutions. Sustainability informs priority areas of support to dialogue and coexistence initiatives, peace processes, and basic services'. See DPPA Strategic Plan 2020-2022 at p.22-23.

⁹ This process is described as 'Expanding and deepening its (DPPA's) engagement regional and sub-regional organisations, international financial institutions and other stakeholders, as well as with Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams'. DPPA Strategic Plan 2020-2022 at p.24

identifies risks of conflict, reaches relevant actors and networks, engages them in dialogue, and exerts influence for peace. Additional benefit might also be obtained if each Division were to formulate a ‘Theory of Change’ or strategic logic as part of its workplan, supporting the whole-Department strategic logic.

DPPA’s 2020-2022 Strategic Plan is the Department's first statement of strategy since the structural reforms introduced to the peace and security pillar by the Secretary-General came into force on 1 January 2019. If successful, the Strategic Plan will be seen to have communicated the mission, vision, and values of DPPA, setting clear objectives, establishing priorities, aligning effort and resources, and affirming the significance of the Department’s peacemaking, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding work.

Evidence reviewed for this Mid-Term Review indicates that **the Department's 2020-2022 Strategic Plan is serving its purpose well**. Senior managers and staff within DPPA state that the document is useful in aligning effort and clarifying the strategic logic through the Department’s ‘Theory of Change’. Some staff use the document as a ready reference for linking new initiatives, division work plans, and projects with existing strategy commitments, while others refer to the document primarily at DPPA reporting milestones. All staff interviewed agreed that the document is useful for communicating the value of DPPA’s work to outside audiences, and some also commented that the Strategic Plan has proven useful in building a sense of shared identity among staff.

While the DPPA Strategic Plan does of course serve a ‘political’ purpose in promoting Member State support for DPPA, it is fundamentally more important that the Strategic Plan helps to ensure the strategic alignment of DPPA’s own Divisions, and of the senior managers who direct them. This Mid-Term Review identified a risk that some senior managers within DPPA may regard the Strategic Plan as primarily a document intended for outside audiences, rather than being an operationally-focused document to be used in navigating DPPA through complex environments towards its key objectives. This risk is discussed further in the section below dealing with reporting obligations under the Strategic Plan.

The strategic logic of DPPA (Theory of Change)

For those DPPA managers who see the Strategic Plan as primarily for external audiences, greater levels of engagement might be obtained by emphasising those elements of the Plan that relate to operational priorities and decision-making, rather than internal capacity-building: the ‘impact on the ground’ of which the Strategic Plan speaks. In its next strategy period, DPPA might choose to perhaps direct more attention towards the central ‘risk-response’ logic also apparent within the current Strategic Plan, without neglecting of course the essential capability and culture elements of an effective organisation.

This would mean that a future iteration of DPPA’s Theory of Change might consider directing less attention to DPPA’s own resources, analysis, collaboration, partnerships, culture, learning, and innovation, which are primarily inwardly-focussed. While acknowledging the importance of these pre-requisites for organisational success, a more operationally-focussed Theory of Change might better reflect the outward-facing process through which DPPA identifies risks of conflict, reaches relevant actors and networks, engages them in dialogue, and exerts influence for peace, as summarised in the table below:

Table: Moving DPPA focus from internal to external.

2020-2022 Theory of Change / Strategic Logic	Possible re-focus to more fully reflect DPPA's operational risk response
<p>« If DPPA deploys the full range of its resources based on cross-cutting analysis, in collaboration with others within the UN system and in partnerships with regional, national, and local stakeholders, drawing on an internal culture shaped by a commitment to learning and innovation, it will contribute to the prevention and resolution of violent conflict and to sustainable peace. »</p>	<p>If DPPA maintains strong capability (analysis, systems, partnerships, and a collaborative culture of learning and innovation), it will be able to identify risks of conflict, reach relevant actors and networks, engage them in dialogue, and exert influence for the prevention and resolution of conflict and more sustainable peace.</p>
<p>Focus of the argument: Inward.</p> <p>DPPA's capability is the focus, and there is no reference to operational engagements.</p>	<p>Focus of the argument: Outward</p> <p>DPPA's operational engagements are the focus. DPPA's capability is a prerequisite for success.</p>
<p>Author's paraphrase of 2020-2022 Logic:</p> <p>Resources + analysis + collaboration + partnerships + culture + learning + innovation = DPPA's contribution to the prevention and resolution of violent conflict and to sustainable peace.</p>	<p>Alternative formulation:</p> <p>Capability + risk response + networks + engagements + influence = DPPA's contribution to the prevention and resolution of violent conflict and to sustainable peace.</p>

Aligning the strategic logic of DPPA Divisions

DPPA staff interviewed for the Mid-Term Review noted that while the Department has articulated its own Strategy and a Theory of Change at the whole-organisation level in the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan, additional benefit might be obtained if each Division were to formulate a corresponding theory of change or strategic logic at the divisional level, perhaps as part of its workplan. This would allow each Division to articulate a strategy relevant to the specific geography or mandate in question, based on sound conflict analysis and reinforced through collegial peer review, while demonstrating alignment with DPPA's global strategy and Theory of Change.

This process is likely to increase the level of 'ownership' of the DPPA Strategy at the divisional level, but would of course only work effectively if each Division's strategic logic remains congruent with the central logic of DPPA. In practice, there is little risk of the exercise introducing any divergence between the DPPA Strategy and the approach taken by

its divisions because the articulation of strategic logic will make starkly evident any differences, forcing a rapid and incisive strategic alignment.

Aligning DPPA & DPO strategy

Finding : The Secretary-General’s 2019 reform of the UN peace and security pillar means that DPPA and DPO are now aligned by a common vision statement, collaboration between Executive leadership, a shared set of objectives, a shared regional structure, and an emerging shared risk management approach, while retaining their distinct mandates and responsibilities.

The Secretary-General’s reform of the peace and security pillar in January 2019 created a *de facto* merger between the regional divisions of former DPA and DPKO, forming a single political-operational structure with regional responsibilities, guided by a common vision statement. Some DPPA staff interviewed for this Mid-Term Review noted that despite this re-structure, by June 2021 there was no common Strategic Plan for the two Departments that make up the peace and security pillar. DPPA is guided by its 2020-2022 Strategic Plan, while DPO follows a set of objectives entitled ‘Secretary-General’s Initiative on Action for Peacekeeping’.¹⁰ While some staff see this as a missed opportunity to ensure strategic alignment between DPPA and DPO, others insist that the two Departments should not be expected to have a joint strategy, because they rely on separate UN mandates, resources and funding streams.

This Mid-Term Review noted however, that the two Departments are aligned through a common vision statement which lists key priorities, through strong collaborative leadership at the Executive level, and through a shared set of objectives and reporting framework under the Secretary-General’s reforms, described as the ‘Reform Benefits Tracker’.¹¹

In 2021 DPPA and DPO are also working on a shared organisational risk assessment, which is intended to generate a joint risk register and risk treatment plan.¹² Given that the formulation of sound strategy is closely linked to the consideration of both risk and long-term vision, the Mid-Term Review concludes that the two Departments are already working to ensure strategic alignment in pursuit of their global mandates for peace.

Risk management and the Strategic Plan 2020-2021

Finding : The bulk of attention in DPPA’s May 2020 risk register is devoted to the COVID-19 pandemic, for good reason. In most cases the risk definition is very broad and incorporates multiple risk factors into a single risk, which is likely to make the assessment of gravity and likelihood more complex for DPPA staff and management.

¹⁰ Secretary-General’s Initiative on Action for Peacekeeping. See <https://www.un.org/en/A4P/>, and https://reform.un.org/sites/reform.un.org/files/vision_of_the_un_peace_and_security_pillar.pdf, at p. 1

¹¹ See <https://reform.un.org/content/peace-and-security-reform> , <https://undocs.org/A/75/202>, and https://reform.un.org/sites/reform.un.org/files/vision_of_the_un_peace_and_security_pillar.pdf

¹² DPPA Annual Report MYA 2020 at p. 63. The joint DPPA-DPO risk management initiative was not examined as part of this Mid-Term Review.

Recommendation 2:

⇒ **Noting the approval of the UN Secretariat-wide risk register in July 2020, and bearing in mind DPPA’s ongoing work to assess and manage risks on an organization-wide basis and in conjunction with DPO,¹³ additional benefit might be gained by DPPA systematically covering additional categories of organisational risk, and directing attention to the most significant identified risk factors.**

Acknowledging the **close link between strategy and risk**, especially given the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, this Mid-Term Review briefly examined DPPA’s risk management approach.

The enterprise risk register provided by DPPA for this Mid-Term Review was dated May 2020, and relates to the portfolio of DPPA projects funded by the Multi-Year Appeal, although the principles would be relevant to the entire range of DPPA projects, including those funded through the regular budget. DPPA’s enterprise risk management document for the MYA addresses the risks posed by the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, including COVID-related implications for DPPA’s political, reputational, operational, managerial and financial position. These COVID-19 related risks were collectively ranked as ‘critical’ and ‘expected’ in May 2020, and a number of risk mitigation measures were set out.

The bulk of attention in DPPA’s May 2020 risk register is devoted to the COVID-19 pandemic, for good reason. In addition to these COVID-related risks, the DPPA risk register acknowledges ongoing risks to DPPA’s financial position, to the successful implementation of the Women Peace and Security Agenda (WPS), and to DPPA’s three strategic goals. In most cases the risk definition is very broad and incorporates multiple risk factors into a single risk, which is likely to make the assessment of gravity and likelihood more complex for DPPA staff and management.

Less attention appears to have been directed towards the following categories of risks, which might be expected to feature more prominently in future enterprise risk registers of this kind:

- **Reputational risks** that might diminish DPPA’s standing and effectiveness
- **Physical risks** to the security of staff, consultants and equipment
- **Operational risks** preventing the completion of planned activities
- **Cyber risks** associated with DPPA’s data and communication systems
- **Legal risks** encountered by DPPA when working across multiple jurisdictions¹⁴

Noting the approval of the **UN Secretariat-wide risk register in July 2020**, and bearing in mind DPPA’s ongoing work in 2021 to assess and manage risks on an organisation-wide basis and in conjunction with DPO,¹⁵ additional benefit might be gained by DPPA systematically covering all categories of organisational risk, and directing attention to the most significant identified risk factors. Ensuring a stronger approach to assessing and managing risks would also help advance the UN’s peace and security reform.

¹³ DPPA MYA Update 2021 at p.58

¹⁴ Political risks are treated as assumptions in the current MYA risk framework.

¹⁵ DPPA MYA Update 2021 at p.58

3.2 The DPPA Results Framework in practice

Finding : DPPA's robust and functioning Results Framework supports the Department's requirement for transparency, accountability, and a strong value-for-money claim under the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan.

Recommendation 3:

⇒ **DPPA should consider providing a one-page 'dashboard' view of its performance against strategic goals, combining both qualitative and quantitative assessments, while avoiding the temptation to reduce all of the Department's work to mere numbers.**

Recommendation 4:

⇒ **DPPA should improve on the relevance of indicators where feasible, focusing attention on DPPA's impact on the ground.**

DPPA's Results Framework serves multiple purposes, tracking the implementation of the 2020 - 2022 Strategic Plan, enabling reporting against the 'benefits tracker' associated with the Secretary-General's reforms, and providing data to other parts of the UN peace and security pillar for the purposes of their own reporting.

In addition to the challenge of these multiple end-use demands, DPPA's Results Framework must continue to meet the expectations of Member States by creating monitoring systems to substantiate the value of long-term and often intangible conflict prevention results such as trust-building, dialogue and peacemaking, in an evolving institutional context, and at increasingly frequent intervals. Interviews conducted for this Mid-Term Review universally acknowledged the difficulty of identifying and obtaining suitable evidence, especially regarding DPPA's conflict prevention objectives. This task is not straightforward, and DPPA is to be commended for embracing the challenge and creating a robust and functioning results reporting system to track the implementation of the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan.

The Mid-Term Review found that **DPPA's Results Framework supports the Department's requirement for transparency, accountability, and a strong value-for-money claim.**

Without the Result Framework, DPPA would be solely reliant on anecdotal evidence drawn from specific interventions and peace processes, which are useful as illustrations and case studies, but do not provide a good basis for determining performance on a whole-organisation scale. The metrics and indicators in the Results Framework strengthen DPPA's reporting, and position DPPA well to continue demonstrating the value of the Department's global mandate for peacemaking and conflict prevention.

The **Results Framework effectively mirrors the DPPA Theory of Change** as expressed in the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan, helping the Department to maintain a coherent and persuasive statement of its effectiveness in complex environments. If DPPA were to re-formulate its theory of change to place more emphasis on operational results as suggested earlier in this report, then the structure of the Results Framework would also need to adapt to reflect these changes.

Scope for a dashboard view of performance

The current Results Framework was introduced in 2020 to track the implementation of the 2020-2022 Strategic plan, with baselines drawn from DPPA's operational data in 2019. The first 18 months of the Strategic Plan in 2020-2021 has provided DPPA with an opportunity to test what can be feasibly measured, and to identify those metrics that are most meaningful in practice. DPPA may now wish to consider consolidating some indicators to reduce reporting burden and data overload for readers, while maintaining the utility of the Results Framework for strategic purposes.

Where it is not possible to reduce the number of data points collected, DPPA's reporting of that data might still be streamlined by aggregating related measures together into a **simplified 'traffic light' or dashboard format for reporting**, while avoiding a simplistic over-reliance on quantitative indicators. This kind of aggregation would enable DPPA to provide a one-page view of its performance against each of its three strategic goals, focussed at the systemic level. Where an individual performance measure remains particularly salient for DPPA's strategy, the Department could of course direct greater attention towards that measure, as might be the case for data that demonstrates the risk-responsiveness that is foundational to DPPA's entire strategy.

To take the example of the Results Framework's treatment of Goal 1 of the Strategic Plan, in place of the four-page view provided by the 20 performance measures in DPPA's Results Framework, DPPA might consolidate these metrics into an aggregated and simplified view with only five traffic light indicators to help provide a dashboard view of areas where there may be an emerging risk of under-performing:

Text Box: Example of a dashboard report format for Goal 1 of the Strategic Plan

Goal 1: Prevent and resolve violent conflict and build resilience

DPPA's conflict prevention peacemaking and peacebuilding work is:

1. Informed (% of relevant targets attained or on track)
2. Inclusive (% of relevant targets attained or on track)
3. Responsive (% of relevant targets attained or on track)
4. Sustainable (% of relevant targets attained or on track)

By providing a snapshot view of this kind for all three goals, DPPA may be able to generate a one-page summary of performance, and reduce the burden of communicating the Department's performance under the Strategic Plan. This may also help build support to move DPPA towards a forward-looking adaptive system that confirms at intervals whether or not the Department is still moving in the right direction, rather than documenting in detail the Department's recent history.

Improving on the relevance of indicators

DPPA's Results Framework contains 48 performance measures that draw on 57 separate indicators (or 69 indicators if one counts the various sub-categories of gender-related metrics). Of these 57 indicators, 36 are raw numbers showing the total number of 'outputs' produced in a given year, such as the number of seminars, workshops, publications, visits, or contacts with relevant stakeholders. **DPPA complements these quantitative measures with extensive qualitative reporting**, including case study examples, to ensure that readers understand the subtlety of DPPA's discreet peacemaking, peacebuilding and conflict prevention role.

While continuing to use these quantitative indicators, DPPA should exercise caution to ensure that incentives are not created for inefficiency by treating increased activity as a measure of value in itself. As DPPA progresses further in its strategy implementation, some of these raw numbers could be improved upon by relating them more strongly to DPPA's strategic logic, using relative measures such as percentages, degree of coverage, or change over time, especially regarding risk responsiveness, networks, timeliness, quality, or flexibility.¹⁶ Where certain 'raw' numbers have proven useful in communicating the work of DPPA to stakeholders in the past, these indicators should be maintained, even if they are imperfect.

More priority or attention could be directed to DPPA's impact on the ground, and less towards internal UN processes or the operational context itself. Some indicators featuring in the DPPA Results Framework focus attention on the context, or on factors outside the Department's control, rather than on the value created through DPPA's work. For example, indicators that assess the gender composition of conflict-party delegations in mediation processes are not in DPPA's power to control. DPPA has been working with UN Women over the last year to support consultations on the UN WPS monitoring framework, which will strengthen efforts to better measure progress toward the WPS agenda.

Some reported **indicators might benefit from being refined** to better measure the intended result. For example, DPPA reports on the level of satisfaction expressed by Member States benefitting from the services provided by the Security Council Affairs Division (SCAD), but the ultimate goal of the work carried out in this case is to ensure the procedural integrity and effectiveness of the Security Council Processes, which then helps reinforce the standing and authority of DPPA's peacemaking mission. Although one aspect of procedural integrity is indeed excellent service, the current 'client satisfaction' indicator could be complemented or replaced by a more direct and global measure of procedural integrity, such as an unqualified annual compliance audit of Security Council processes and systems against accepted criteria. If this approach were taken, SCAD would also be able to draw attention to the impressive progress made in ensuring timely publication of UN reporting on the practice and procedure of the Security Council in the *Repertoire*.

Some of DPPA's most valuable work goes beyond the three-year frame of the Strategic Plan. DPPA's role in conflict prevention requires the careful cultivation of relationships over the long term, often preceded by months or years of patient work to overcome reluctance

¹⁶ Additional recommendations for refining indicators were advanced in the Value-for-Money Assessment of the DPPA MYA in November 2020. See https://dppa.un.org/sites/default/files/vfm_assessment_dppa_multi_year_appeal_1.pdf at p.36 and following.

on the part of key actors to engage with the UN, simply to gain access to the right people and networks. DPPA staff offered confidential examples of engagements, including one project in which four years of DPPA effort were required to obtain an open door with the right interlocutors, followed by two additional years of careful preparation by DPPA, which eventually allowed a senior UN representative to intervene based on signs of escalating conflict.

Significant outcomes such as documented peace agreements, unilateral declarations or ceasefires to which DPPA and the wider UN has contributed are such examples.

Highlighting hidden results

Finding : DPPA does not fully report on significant but hidden interim results such as the cultivation of trusted networks with key actors, and the quiet but substantial support provided by DPPA to UN Resident Coordinators, Country Teams, Development Coordination Offices, SPMs, and other partner organisations. Senior DPPA staff consider that these kinds of results are routine activities rather than results, and advised against seeking to quantify these aspects of DPPA's work.

Recommendation 5:

⇒ **Given the significance of interim results such as trusted access and engagement with the right actors, DPPA should examine whether it might be possible to report on the value of these hidden results more adequately, in an aggregated and de-identified manner, without jeopardising peace operations.**

In addition to more prominent and documented results, DPPA's work for peace generates valuable intangible or hidden results, whether interim or final. These include timely contacts with State and Non-State actors, the establishment of resilient networks and collaborative partnerships, the cultivation of discreet channels of communication with the right actors, support to UN Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams, and collaboration with the other pillars of the UN. In order to achieve its intended 'impact on the ground', DPPA must invest intensively in creating trusted relationships, partnerships, and networks ahead of time, so that it is well positioned when a crisis arises or a conflict risk is identified.

Simply counting the number of these contacts or partnerships made by DPPA is not illuminating, but there is merit in better valuing DPPA's ability to create networks and 'anticipatory relationships' that encompass actors necessary for effective dialogue towards conflict prevention or peace. Despite the complex fragmentation of armed groups and conflict actors, each arena of conflict contains a limited number of key conflict actors, intermediaries, and supporters, so it should be possible to assess in rough terms the relative level of DPPA's preparedness and the sufficiency of the Department's networks and partnerships in each context.

Other significant but sometimes hidden results occur within the UN system itself, such as DPPA's work to ensure the procedural integrity of UN Security Council and subsidiary organ processes, or developing compromise language for UN Secretariat working papers on

sensitive subjects such as decolonisation. DPPA's in-house work to foster organisational learning, innovation, strategic planning, and evaluation also create significant, if sometimes hidden value for the Department's mandate. Staff interviewed for this Mid-Term Review affirmed the central importance of these ongoing efforts to build a learning, innovative, flexible and collaborative culture, as outlined under DPPA's third strategic goal.

In the field and when working with agencies from across the UN system, DPPA's hidden interim results include the essential work of the Department's staff to advise UN agencies regarding political pitfalls and sensitivities on the ground, and even mediating where needed between the different development actors present in conflict-affected environments. This critically important field work is accompanied by other valued results when DPPA quietly supports and accompanies high-level field visits by the Security Council and UN senior management, "backstops" SPMs,¹⁷ advises on country-specific political processes bilaterally or through inter-agency task forces, or develops DPPA guidance and technical support for peace mediation teams in the field.

In addition, **DPPA creates significant value when it responds to requests for quiet support from regional organisations** carrying out mediation mandates, without seeking to encroach upon or compete with their lead role. This includes the Department's efforts to strengthen preventive dialogue with regional partners, and initiatives to expand the range of regional organisations and partners with which DPPA successfully engages in support of peace.

Noting the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan's statement that 'DPPA's success will be measured by impact on the ground'¹⁸, and taking into account DPPA's underpinning risk-reduction model from the Strategic Plan, **there appears to be additional scope for recognising and reporting the value of DPPA's otherwise hidden results.**

3.3 The DPPA Annual Workplans in practice

Finding : The annual DPPA work plan process is rarely used for adaptation mid-year in response to changing contexts, although it has potential to serve this purpose if treated as a 'living document' owned by the Divisions. There is additional scope for DPPA Divisions to use the workplan for adjusting priorities and planned activities during implementation, rather than seeing the workplan process primarily as a reporting tool for donors. Despite the admirably concise nature envisaged for the workplan reporting template, DPPA faces the ubiquitous risk that the focus of operational reporting drifts towards reciting generic activities, rather than specific valued results.

Recommendation 6:

⇒ **To counter the natural tendency towards activity reporting, DPPA might consider requiring divisions to introduce each section with a headline statement and two-line**

¹⁷ 'Backstopping' is a metaphorical term that derives from the net or barrier (the backstop) behind the batter in a game of baseball (USA), or the person standing behind the batter in a game of rounders (UK). The function of a backstop is to prevent the ball leaving the ground if it is not cleanly hit. In simple terms 'backstopping' means 'practical support and assistance', and it appears to be used as a 'catch-all' phrase. See <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/backstop>

¹⁸ DPPA 2020-2022 Strategic Plan at p.16

summary, to draw attention to the most valuable result generated, or the most significant risks identified and managed, and why this work was significant.

DPPA uses an annual workplan template to enable Divisions to prioritise work and report on progress, complementing the quantitative indicators collected against each Strategic objective through its Results Framework. At the end of 2020, DPPA harmonised the production of 2021 MYA project proposals and the annual workplan process, helping to align and streamline these related tasks. For the first time, this allowed the Department to get a more detailed, granular estimate of MYA funds required for each expected accomplishment under the Results Framework.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic forced DPPA to quickly adapt its strategic planning tools, including the annual workplan process. In 2020, DPPA management ensured a flexible adjustment to the risks of COVID-19 through a shortening of the usual annual planning and reporting cycle, which moved to a quarterly basis.

The workplan reporting template provided for this Mid-Term Review has two parts. The first asks DPPA teams to report against two issues of importance for DPPA by providing a short (up to 300 words) statement on progress in the implementation of the ‘Women, Peace and Security’ agenda, and another (up to 250 words) on the identification of risks and corresponding mitigation measures. The second part of the workplan template asks Divisions to report (in 2,000 words or less in total) against each of the seven strategic objectives under DPPA’s 2020-2022 Strategic Plan, which allows for around 250-300 words per objective.

An impressionistic view of the contents and emphasis of DPPA workplan reporting can be gained from the wordcloud graphic below, compiled from all the divisional reports submitted against DPPA workplans for 2020.

Graphic: Informal ‘wordcloud’ representation of DPPA workplan reporting for 2020



The annual work plan is rarely used for adaptation mid-year in response to changing contexts, although it has potential to serve this purpose if treated as a ‘living document’ owned by the Divisions. **There is additional scope for DPPA divisions to use the workplan for adjusting priorities and planned activities during implementation**, rather than seeing the workplan process primarily as a reporting tool for donors. This may require adapting the workplan template and process to more closely resemble the informal working methods used by divisions to set, track, and adjust priorities on a weekly and monthly basis.

Despite the admirably concise nature envisaged for the workplan reporting template, DPPA faces the ubiquitous **risk that the focus of operational reporting drifts towards reciting generic activities, rather than specific valued results**. To counter this, DPPA might consider requiring divisions to introduce each section with a headline statement and two-line summary, to draw attention to the most valuable result generated, or the most significant risks identified and managed, and why this work was significant.

DPPA could potentially highlight the value of its partnerships and networks by placing additional emphasis on this section of the workplan report. These results capture the important work of the Department in cultivating trusted relationships, partnerships, and networks over the long term, including with conflict parties and relevant local, regional and multilateral actors, including the sometimes overlooked women-led elements of civil society. Other significant but sometimes hidden results such as the backstopping of SPMs could also be highlighted in the annual workplan reporting.

A strategically-focussed editorial process following the first submission of draft reports may help to DPPA staff to better highlight their key results, and more clearly state their own contribution by applying ‘plain language’ principles of writing. This should ideally:

- **Eliminate indirect language** (e.g. passive voice)
- **Introduce a ‘so what?’ statement** to explain why a reported result is significant to DPPA’s peacemaking mission and strategy, and
- **Make a clear claim of DPPA’s contribution**, in which Divisions describe the significance of DPPA’s role in broad terms.

3.4 Overview of DPPA resources and their allocation in practice

Finding : It is difficult to obtain a summary of the financial resources available to DPPA in its peacemaking, peacebuilding and conflict prevention mission. DPPA’s Strategic Plan extra-budgetary resources are obtained by the Department under the MYA, while its regular budget allocation from the UN General Assembly is managed separately. An overview of the various regular budget and extra-budgetary funds, and the total amount available to the Department would be a useful addition to DPPA’s reporting, if this is feasible.

Recommendation 7:

DPPA should consider whether it is possible to provide a summary overview of the annual financial resources available to DPPA in its peacemaking, peacebuilding and

conflict prevention mission, including regular budget and extra-budgetary funding, and noting those resources that fall outside DPPA's Strategic Plan.

Finding : DPPA's allocation of funds under the MYA is aligned with the Strategic Plan.

Recommendation 8:

- ⇒ **DPPA should focus financial reporting under the MYA on value creation and 'return on investment', rather than the rate of expenditure of allocated funds.**

Finding : DPPA's reporting obligations are multi-layered. In addition to its reporting under the Strategic plan 2020-2022, the Department's core budget is subject to reporting under the UN regular budget framework approved by the UN General Assembly, which is not directly connected to the objectives set out in the Strategic Plan 2020-2022. Each year around \$700 million is allocated from the UN regular budget to Special Political Missions (SPMs) managed by DPPA, along with \$11 million in extra-budgetary funds. DPPA supports, guides, and oversees SPMs, but it does not report directly on their resources and results in the Strategic Plan Results Framework or in DPPA's own Annual Reporting. This means that the value-for-money offered by the SPMs managed by DPPA is not contained in a single report. DPPA's public MYA reporting already provides relatively detailed examples of selected SPM results in narrative form, but does not feature a summary cost/benefit overview. The SPMs report separately to the UN General Assembly (albeit in a format primarily focussed on results based budgeting and planning for UN staffing and other expenditure, rather than on value-creation).

Recommendation 9:

- ⇒ **DPPA should consider whether it can report a summary view of the cost/benefit provided by the conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding work of SPMs managed by the Department. An aggregated one-stop view of SPM achievements in accessing, engaging, and influencing relevant actors would help strengthen DPPA's value-for-money claim, even if these results must first be carefully de-identified and aggregated to avoid jeopardising ongoing peacemaking efforts.**

Finding : It is not possible to obtain a one-stop global view of the combined resources of key entities within the peace and security pillar, because reporting is divided among multiple UN entities, mandates, funding streams and reporting obligations. However, this Mid-Term Review identified interest from key stakeholders in gaining this kind of summary view, in a one-stop format.

Recommendation 10:

- ⇒ **DPPA should consider whether support for the UN peace and security pillar might be strengthened if a holistic view could be provided of the combined resources of the SPMs, DPPA, the joint DPPA-UNDP programme, and UN Peacebuilding Fund.**

DPPA Resources

This Mid-Term Review found that **it is difficult to obtain a clear overview of all the resources, both regular and extra-budgetary funds, on which DPPA relies.** The challenge of integrating different accounting systems, reporting methods, and lines of responsibility applied to the funds on which DPPA relies complicate the picture so that DPPA reports in different ways regarding different funds, without being able to present a consolidated view of the whole.

The **key sources of DPPA funding and their relevance to the DPPA Strategic Plan 2020-2022** may be summarised as follows:¹⁹

- **The approximate \$700 million annual ‘regular budget’ for the work of SPMs:** DPPA is the lead Department overseeing the SPMs and is closely involved in all major budgetary decision for these missions, but the mandate for SPMs is considered to be technically separate from DPPA’s own Strategic Plan, because (with the exception of \$11 million in extra-budgetary funds) the SPMs are funded by the UN regular budget allocation approved by the UN General Assembly. When viewed through the lens of UNGA mandates and UN funding approvals, senior DPPA staff noted that DPPA’s Strategic Plan 2020-2022 does not apply in any way to the funding obtained from the UN regular budget for SPMs.²⁰
- **The \$45 million annual ‘regular budget’ allocation to DPPA:** Senior DPPA staff strongly advised that it would be technically incorrect to suggest these funds should be applied in accordance with DPPA’s Strategic Plan 2020-2022, as the regular budget allocation is structured around a separate ‘Strategic Framework’ approved by the UN General Assembly. This separate framework translates the mandates assigned to DPPA into a programme of work, and loosely reflects the DPPA organigramme rather than DPPA’s Strategic Plan 2020-2022. DPPA’s regular budget allocation is considered as the ‘core’ funding mechanism for DPPA, and must be applied according to the terms approved by the UN General Assembly.
- **DPPA’s \$40 million Multi-Year Appeal fund (voluntary contributions made to DPPA by Member States):** The application of these extra-budgetary funds is tracked against the Department’s high-level strategic objectives set out in the Department’s Strategic Plan 2020-2022.

The UN Peacebuilding Fund and the UNDP-DPPA Joint Programme is related to DPPA’s conflict prevention and peacemaking role, but does not feature clearly in DPPA’s reporting on resources and results under the Strategic Plan 2020-2022, and this Mid-Term Review was not requested to examine the role of these funds.

The complexity in the allocation and accounting methods for DPPA’s regular budget, extra-budgetary funds, and SPM funds is also reflected in the way that DPPA communicates publicly to stakeholders about its resources. The Department’s quarterly and annual reports, and its updates on the annual \$40 million MYA fund do not report on the \$45 million obtained by DPPA each year via the UN regular budget, nor the more than \$700

¹⁹ See [DPPA 2020-22 Strategic Plan, at page 31](#)

²⁰ Funding for SPMs includes around \$700 million UN regular budget allocated by the General Assembly (2020), supplemented by \$11 million of extra-budgetary funds. See RB Budget reporting regarding SPMs, UNGA A/75/6 (Sect 3) 20-05968, 23 April 2020, at page 69ff.

million of regular budget funding annually for the peacemaking work of SPMs, each of which is approved by the UN General Assembly. For the time being, **there is no single DPPA report that provides a consolidated picture of the resources on which the Department relies, or how they are allocated under the Strategic Plan 2020-2022.**

Senior staff within DPPA advised that it would be inappropriate for DPPA to present a consolidated 'whole Department' view of resources and strategy implementation, because **the DPPA Strategic Plan 2020-2022 has no administrative authority over the regular budget funds on which the Department relies.** Each of DPPA's funding streams is provided on different terms, set by different actors: the MYA falls under DPPA's own authority, while the regular budget funding to DPPA and to SPMs relies solely on the mandate granted to DPPA by the UN General Assembly pursuant to Article 17 of the UN Charter. DPPA managers interviewed for this Mid-Term Review presented a variety of different views about whether the Department could or should present an integrated view of all resources applied to DPPA's peacemaking, peacebuilding and conflict prevention work, in particular regarding the significant work and resources of the SPMs.

Leaving aside the technical and administrative distinctions, this review does not recommend that DPPA should attempt to report in detail on the application of all of these various funds against each strategic objective under the Strategic Plan 2020-2022, for purely practical reasons. This effort would impose significant additional costs on the Department, for minimal benefit. DPPA has attempted to carry out this kind of reporting in the past, but the exercise required DPPA's operational staff to manually prepare timesheet reports showing how their time was allocated on a percentage basis to multiple relevant objectives, which was burdensome and inefficient, and delivered no operational or strategic advantage for the Department's work.

Despite the technical and organisational challenges, **it is clear that DPPA will be better positioned to successfully execute its strategy if it can align all available resources in support of that strategy,** and will then also be able to more clearly communicate a global picture of its value. If administrative or procedural obstacles remain insurmountable, the Department may of course choose to expressly exclude reporting on certain funding streams which are covered by the UN budget planning and reporting processes.

DPPA Reporting on resource allocation

If DPPA is to maintain its focus on conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding impact on the ground, **the reporting burden imposed on the Department's operational teams should ideally be minimised** to the extent possible, and wherever feasible, data that is also useful for operational decision-making should be prioritised over data which is compliance-oriented. At present, data is gathered to support reporting under several lines of accountability under the regular budget, the DPPA Strategic Plan 2020-2022, the Multi-Year Appeal, and the Secretary-General's reform benefits:

- Reporting on the use of DPPA's regular budget funds
DPPA contributes to a separate data-collection and reporting process for the UN regular budget accountability requirements, which is conducted annually, gathering performance data regarding the preceding year.

Under the UN regular budget reporting system, results are grouped into five categories and 25 subcategories that unfortunately do not match the logic of the DPPA's Strategic Plan. A cursory review of these regular budget reporting categories shows that this system requires DPPA to quantify deliverables that relate to the internal UN machinery (e.g. delivery of seminars, workshops and training events) while much of DPPA's substantive work creating 'impact on the ground' is considered as unquantifiable under the regular budget system, and therefore effectively unreportable, including core DPPA functions such as consultations, advice and advocacy; good offices, fact-finding, monitoring & investigation missions, humanitarian assistance missions.²¹

DPPA is obliged to report under the UN regular budget system's 25 categories of deliverables, in addition to the reporting under DPPA's Strategic Plan, which features 48 different performance measures comprising more than 57 indicators. The end result of the regular budget reporting system provides an inadequate view of the peacemaking, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding contribution of DPPA, as can be seen from the compliance-oriented regular budget report of DPPA's performance in the 'prevention, management and resolution' of conflicts for 2019.²²

As with most reporting systems that focus on compliance and accountability rather than strategic objectives, the UN regular budget reporting system appears to favour 'status quo' results in which the budgeted activities, expenditure, and deliverables are exactly as expected. Based on the evidence available to the Mid-Term Review, incentives for changing resource allocations under the regular budget appear to be minimal and beyond the control of DPPA.

Apart from the 'reporting fatigue' created for DPPA management and operational teams by the mandatory regular budget results reporting system, there is a risk that some DPPA Divisions may regard the DPPA's own Strategic Plan reporting as superfluous or as primarily directed towards donors, rather than being a strategic steering and adaptation mechanism. In the view of some senior DPPA staff interviewed for this Mid-Term Review, there is no link between DPPA's Strategic Plan and the \$45 million regular budget resources obtained by DPPA each year, which weakens the authoritative influence of the Strategic Plan.

- **Reporting on Special Political Missions**

Each year around \$700 million is allocated from the UN regular budget to Special Political Missions (SPMs) managed by DPPA, along with \$11 million in extra-budgetary funds. **While the work of the Special Representatives and Special Envoys of the Secretary-General is overseen by DPPA, this strategic effort does not feature fully in DPPA's Results Framework or the various DPPA-MYA Annual Reports and Updates**, despite this work representing some of the highest value peacemaking effort supported by the Department. This means that the reader is unable to form a

²¹ Source: DPPA internal document, Explanatory presentation on regular budget categories of deliverables; See also UNGA A/75/6 (Sect 3) 20-05968, 23 April 2020, available at [https://undocs.org/A/75/6\(Sect.3\)](https://undocs.org/A/75/6(Sect.3))

²² See page 15 of the DPPA report for 2019 and budget for 2021: UNGA A/75/6 (Sect 3) 20-05968, 23 April 2020, available at [https://undocs.org/A/75/6\(Sect.3\)](https://undocs.org/A/75/6(Sect.3))

view of the significant value-for-money offered by the SPMs managed by DPPA. DPPA's public **MYA reporting provides relatively detailed examples of selected SPM results in narrative form, but does not feature a summary cost/benefit overview.** The SPMs also report separately to the UN General Assembly (albeit in a format primarily focussed on budgeting and planning for UN staffing and other expenditure, rather than on value-creation).²³

When these SPMs are seeking to avert the escalation of conflict in crisis situations, DPPA staff and senior management help develop contingency plans and scenarios, and participate in multiple related meetings and consultations. Despite the near-absence of SPMs from the Department's Strategic Plan, and the high levels of delegated authority conferred on Special Representatives and Envoys by the Secretary-General, **DPPA remains the Lead Agency for the SPMs, and supports, guides, and oversees their work.**²⁴

The significance of the SPMs to DPPA in both operational and budgetary terms **calls into question whether and how DPPA should report on the work and results of the Special Envoys and Representatives of the Secretary-General within the Department's Strategic Plan.** At present these efforts are regarded as not being readily reportable by DPPA, as they are funded by a combination of regular budget and voluntary extra-budgetary contributions from Member States, each of which has a separate reporting system.

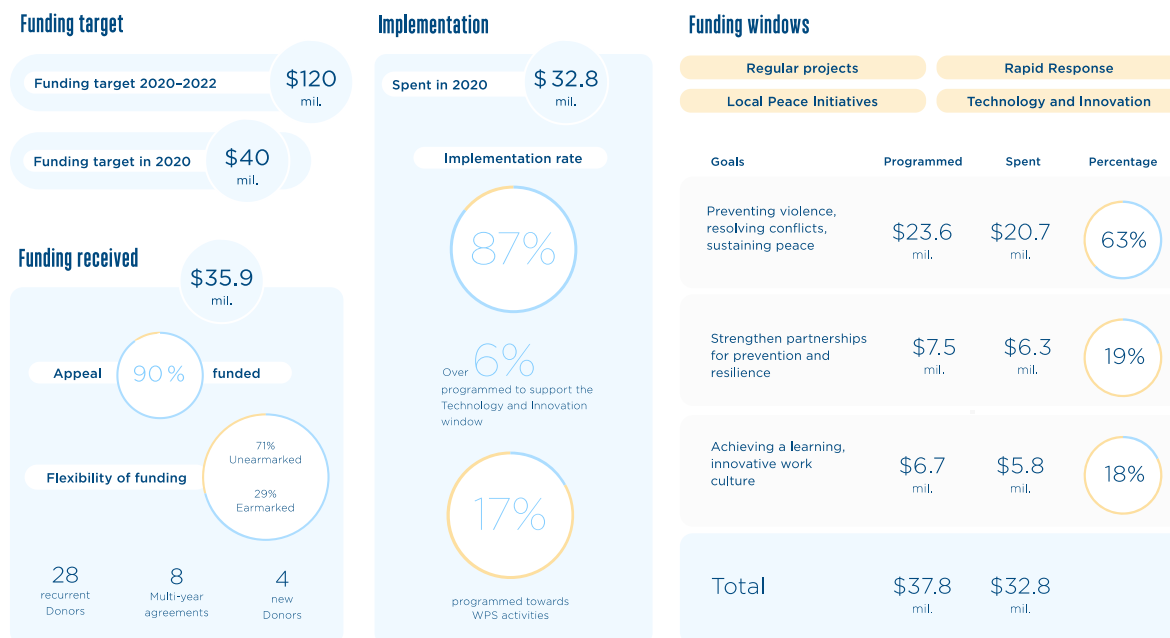
- Reporting on the DPPA Strategic Plan and the Peace and Security Reform **DPPA has effectively streamlined its reporting under the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan, the MYA, along with the peace and security reform benefits tracker,** so that the information collected from operational teams is used for multiple different reports. During the first half of the 2020-2021 Strategic plan, information has been collected from operational teams each quarter, to support reporting under DPPA's Results Framework. This information also features in DPPA's six-monthly updates against its Results Framework, and in DPPA's quarterly and annual MYA Report. Part of DPPA's Results Framework is also streamlined to provide performance information to the 'Reform Benefits Tracker' associated with the Secretary-General's reform of the peace and security pillar, which is owned by the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. Of the 48 performance measures within the DPPA Results Framework, 17 also appear in the Secretary-General's peace and benefits tracker.
- Reporting on strategic alignment in the use of MYA funds **The alignment of MYA resources with the objectives of the Strategic Plan 2020-2022 is clear.** DPPA reports on its performance against the objectives of the Multi-Year Appeal on a six-monthly and annual basis. When reporting on the use of MYA funds,

²³ See for example UNGA A/75/6 (Sect. 3)/Add.3

²⁴ See UNGA Doc A/75/6(Sect.3) Add.1 E at page 46 : 'Annex II: Lead department and mandates of special political missions 2021', and DPPA MYA Update 2021, at page 5.

DPPA uses the three goals in its Strategic Plan to show how resources are being allocated, as can be seen from the right-hand column of the graphic below.

Graphic: Reporting on strategic alignment of resources under the MYA²⁵



However, DPPA’s reporting on these MYA funds risks focussing attention on the percentage of funding allocated and spent (burn rate), rather than the results generated, as can be seen from the graphic above. Rather than reporting primarily on the ‘burn-rate’ of resources, DPPA might wish to focus more attention on the results attained.

In its annual report on the use of the extra-budgetary Multi-Year Appeal funds, DPPA also reports against total resources and expenditure over time, by year, and resources by donor, the assignment of Junior Professional Officers by each donor, and the split between MYA funding which is earmarked and unearmarked (i.e. constrained or unconstrained by a donor’s conditions). The division between earmarked and unearmarked funding in the MYA helps show the extent to which DPPA is adequately resourced for an impartial, independent and timely response to risk, which is relevant to the objectives set out in the Strategic Plan 2020-2022.²⁶

DPPA may wish to consider the potential for more precise reporting on the **cost/benefit of individual MYA projects**. This kind of project-level reporting might provide a view of how much is spent on each initiative within each division, within what timeframe, to achieve what result. When aggregated, this analysis would arguably allow DPPA to highlight outlying projects that are exceptionally cost-effective and nimble, while delivering valued results in a short time. At the other end of the scale, it may also help to identify initiatives which require extensive

²⁵ See DPPA Annual Report MYA 2020 at page 11.

²⁶ DPPA Annual Report MYA 2020 at page 69.

investment without yielding immediate results, but which may nevertheless have a strong value-justification over the longer term.

Given that DPPA manages a large portfolio of more than 100 MYA projects in each year of the 2020-2022 Strategy cycle, **a broad mapping of the entire portfolio might reveal additional patterns of cost/benefit and strategic alignment.** It may therefore be worth DPPA experimenting with prototype methods of mapping the portfolio of MYA projects against two or three simple criteria, such as cost, results achieved, or the speed of DPPA's response, even if the mapping remains approximate or indicative. This kind of method would require DPPA management to derive values for each project against its chosen criteria, which would be challenging, but not impossible if some degree of approximation is accepted.

While these portfolio mappings would remain indicative, they may still prove valuable in **helping DPPA senior management to highlight and communicate to stakeholders their own view of how DPPA's portfolio of projects is delivering significant impact for peace.** If DPPA were to begin reporting more on cost/benefit through portfolio mapping of this kind, this would arguably also help ensure strategic alignment and prioritisation at the whole-portfolio and Divisional level.

- **Reporting on different financial instruments as a whole**
Support for the UN peace and security pillar might arguably be strengthened if a **holistic view could be provided of the combined resources and activities of the SPMs, DPPA, the joint DPPA-UNDP programme, and UNPBF.**

UNDP and DPPA maintain a joint programme with its own fund. This 'Joint Programme' Fund has strategic objectives similar to DPPA's own, aiming to help Member States build national capacities for conflict prevention, but it is funded and reported on separately, and is not covered by DPPA's MYA fund or reports.²⁷ **The UN Peacebuilding Fund** also maintains its own reporting regarding its distinct fund, which again is different from DPPA's MYA fund. The **Department of Peace Operations** also maintains a separate extra-budgetary fund.²⁸

While acknowledging the differences between the funds and programmes carried out by these related UN agencies,²⁹ this Mid-Term Review identified **some interest from key stakeholders in gaining a global view of how the UN works towards peace by using these different funding instruments,** how resources are applied and shared, and the combined results delivered by this collective effort.³⁰ There may be scope here to further advance the vision of 'One UN'.

²⁷ See the comparison between the various funds provided in *Multi-Year Appeal Update* document for 2019 at page 28, and the DPPA *Multi-Year Appeal for 2020-2022*, at p.42 ff

²⁸ See the overview provided in *DPPA Manual for the preparation of projects under the 2020 Multi-Year Appeal*, October 2019 at p.1. It fell outside the scope of this review to examine these funds

²⁹ For an explanation of the differences between the MYA fund, the UNPBF and the DPPA-UNDP Joint Program Fund, see the *Multi-Year Appeal Update* document for 2019 at page 28, and the DPPA *Multi-Year Appeal for 2020-2022*, at p.42 ff. Note that the PBSO extra-budgetary funding is not discussed in these tables.

³⁰ Source: Consultations carried out for this review. It was outside the scope of this Mid-term Review to consider this 'whole pillar' view.

4. Conclusion

At its midway point, DPPA's 2020-2022 Strategic Plan is demonstrably serving the Department well, and is being soundly implemented.

Despite a turbulent operational context, with increasing geopolitical tensions, troubling conflict trends, and the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic, DPPA has shown its ability to rapidly pivot and adapt while continuing to implement its strategic objectives. The Department effectively adapted its programmes and processes to the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic and its constraints during the first half of the strategy period, re-allocating resources and applying new digital technologies to peacemaking, peacebuilding, and conflict prevention. DPPA has continued to apply the risk reduction model that lies at the heart of the Strategic Plan, and has delivered a strong performance against its own strategic objectives.

The second half of the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan offers DPPA the opportunity to further refine its strategic planning tools to remain focused on 'impact on the ground', to highlight valued achievements for peace including sometimes hidden interim results, and to ensure the alignment of resources and initiatives, both within the Department and with other agencies within the peace and security pillar. By continuing to strive for more effective peacemaking, peacebuilding and conflict prevention, DPPA upholds the vision of the United Nations as formulated by Member States in the drafting of the UN Charter: *To save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.*

Annex: Methodology

This Mid-Term Review was conducted in June and July of 2021 and designed using a light evaluation methodology involving document review, consultations, drafting, iterative feedback, and reporting. All information for the review was derived from existing documentary sources supplied by DPPA, and from interviews, as the scope of the review excluded analysis of original data. The review was guided by the principles of human rights and gender equality, and DPPA requested the reviewer to place special emphasis on DPPA's work related to Women, Peace and Security.

Consultations for this review included more than twenty interviews and meetings scheduled by DPPA, including with DPPA heads of divisions, the 45-member DPPA Planning Group, and DPPA senior leadership, along with multiple consultations with the DPPA Donor Relations team. Feedback received from key donors has also been incorporated in the report. The Mid-Term Review sought regular feedback from DPPA management during the conduct of the review and the reporting phase, to ensure the report remained focussed on issues of particular value for DPPA, including the functioning of DPPA's strategic steering tools in practice, and scope for improvements in those working methods.

DPPA supplied relevant documents at the beginning of the review, which were then supplemented by additional documents and case examples provided by DPPA divisions.