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Department of  
Economic and  
Social Affairs



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United Nations Institute for Training and Research

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# Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence Towards the Sustainable Development Goals

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**UNDESA and UNITAR Massive Open Online Course**

Learning Guide

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## Background

This Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) was developed by the Division for Sustainable Development Goals and the Division of Public Institutions and Digital Governance of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). The objective of the self-paced e-learning course is to strengthen the capacity of National Stakeholders to design, adapt and implement integrated and coherent plans and policies and improved decision making among national stakeholders (policy makers, senior planners, civil society, academics and private sector) involved in recovery planning (i.e., Covid-19) and rebuilding towards SDGs implementation.

With its recovery focus and attention to advancing systems thinking and co-creation skills among national stakeholders, this e-learning course on ‘Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence Towards the SDGs’ serves as timely compliment to the growing suite of e-learning courses on integrated approaches across the UN system, such as the UN Sustainable Development Group’s ‘Primer on the SDGs’ hosted by the UN Staff System College, and its e-course on ‘Integrated Approaches to Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support for the SDGs’ hosted by UNICEF/UNDP.

The e-learning course builds on UNDESA and UNITAR's partnership throughout 2019 by jointly organizing regional workshops where many participating countries shared case studies and discussed challenges encountered in the formulation and implementation of integrated and coherent policy plans. It also builds on the implementation of UNDESA Development Account project “Implementation of national sustainable development strategies in selected countries in Africa and Latin America” that was implemented in three (3) representative countries in Costa Rica, Egypt and Ethiopia between 2016-2020.

The overall objective of this project is to strengthen the capacity of Member States to design, adapt and implement Integrated and coherent policy plans and improved decision making among national stakeholders (policy makers, senior planners, civil society counterparts and academics) involved in COVID-19 recovery planning, rebuilding and SDGs implementation.

## Target audience

The course is open to everyone. However, the main target audience of this self-paced e-learning course is senior policy makers from Planning Ministries, line ministries, civil society organizations, academia, and the private sector.

At the end of the course participants will be able to get a certificate of completion provided that they have met the certification requirements described in the “Certification and feedback” section.

## Overall course learning objectives

Following the completion of the course, participants will be able to

1. Define key building blocks of an integrated recovery planning and policy coherence exercise towards transformational change in the SDGs, with particular emphasis on building back better in the wake of shocks such as the Covid-19 pandemic;
2. Map, analyze and engage effectively with key stakeholders in the national priority-setting process;

3. Apply elements of systems thinking to assess and map intersectoral interactions, and identify nationally relevant "leverage points" (or "accelerators");
4. Apply back-casting and scenario planning approaches to identify strategic policy options for achieving recovery objectives and for identifying robust policies and adaptive actions to ensure resilience to shocks;
5. Provide examples of tools and methods used for integrated planning and policy coherence;
6. Conduct institutional readiness assessment on institutional policy coherence against SDG requirements.

## Overall course structure

Module 1. Introduction to Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence towards SDGs

Module 2. Mobilizing Stakeholders to Envision Success

Module 3. Systems Thinking to Understand Connections and Leverage Points

Module 4. Back-casting and Scenario Analysis to Identify Strategic Policy Options and Transformative Policy Pathways

Module 5. Coherent and Adaptive Implementation of Transformative Policy Pathways

## Learning methodology

This self-paced e-learning course is developed in English and consists of five modules. Each module is developed around the overall learning objectives, as well as second-level learning objectives specific to each module. The modules are supported by an objective multiple-choice quiz (summative assessment) that is conducted prior to taking the lesson (ex-ante) and after taking the lesson (ex-post). The former will not be graded and serves only to provide a baseline of the learner's knowledge prior to taking the lesson. Net estimated study time for all modules is between 10-12 hours including all theory and assessments.

## Module 1. Introduction to Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence Towards the SDGs

*Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence Towards the SDGs* is a stepwise approach and set of tools for systems thinking and co-creating policy solutions. It is a participatory process for understanding interlinkages within a system, identifying leverage points for transformative change, and creating coherent strategies, plans and policies for building back better during disaster recovery, enhancing long-term resilience, and transforming progress toward the sustainable development goals (SDGs). This module provides an introduction to the approach and sets the stage with the fictional case of Mollisland, a country that is recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic and is about to embark on its first Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence exercise.

### Learning objectives

Following the completion of the module, participants will be able to:

1. Define what Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence is

2. Set the context for why the Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence is critically important for disaster recovery, transformative change and resilience building
3. Define opportunities for applying Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence approaches and tools
4. Describe key approaches and tools for Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence for recovery, resilience and transformation

## **Structure**

The content of Module 1 includes:

1. What is an Integrated Recovery Planning and Coherence exercise
2. Why, when and where Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence is important
3. What kind of opportunities exist for Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence are the national level
4. Course structure and steps for an Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence exercise
5. Contextual Narrative: Mollisland's Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence Exercise for Covid-19 Recovery

## **Module 2. Mobilizing Stakeholders to Envision Success**

No matter the planning context, be it for building back better in recovering from a disaster such as the Covid-19 pandemic, and/or updating a national development plan for transformative change toward achieving the SDGs, mobilizing stakeholders to envision what medium and long-term success looks like in recovery or SDG planning is a crucial first stage. This module provides practical guidance for identifying and better understanding stakeholder interests and how to undertake an initial stakeholder engagement to create a shared vision of success to guide an Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence exercise.

### **Learning objectives**

Following the completion of the module, participants will be able to:

1. Map, analyze and engage effectively with key stakeholders in the national priority-setting process;
2. Design a consultative process to develop an integrated strategy.

## **Structure**

The outline for Module 2 includes:

1. Why multi-stakeholder engagement is so important
2. Identifying and mapping stakeholders for recovery, resilience and transformation
3. Preparing for and managing stakeholder engagement
4. Initial stakeholder engagement to create a shared vision of success to guide the Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence exercise
5. Contextual Narrative: Update on Mollisland's Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence Exercise for Covid-19 Recovery

6. Activity and homework assignment: Analysing stakeholder interests and power relations

## Module 3. Systems Thinking to Understand Connections and Leverage Points

Systems thinking is an analytical and participatory approach for understanding the connections among issues and identify important leverage points and bottlenecks for progress. This module provides stepwise guidance for doing systems thinking as part of an Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence exercise. It describes practical tools including Iceberg Analysis, Cross-Impact Analysis and Causal Loop Diagrams for identifying important policy drivers and leverage points for accelerating progress towards national priorities and the SDGs during recovery from disasters such as pandemics and economic crises.

### Learning objectives

Following the completion of the module, participants will be able to:

1. Explain a systems thinking approach and its steps;
2. Apply elements of systems thinking to assess intersectoral interactions;
3. Identify nationally relevant "leverage points" (or "accelerators") and build interaction maps;
4. Provide examples of tools and methods used by other countries for integrated planning and policy coherence.

### Structure

The participants will learn about what a system thinking approach is and its steps, including:

- Step 1: Gathering contextual information and training stakeholders for doing systems thinking
- Step 2: Selecting and analysing entry points for systems analysis
- Step 3: Creating causal loop diagrams to identify leverage points/accelerators
- Step 4: Mapping stakeholders and institutions
- Contextual Narrative: Update on Mollisland's Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence Exercise for Covid-19 Recovery
- Activity and homework assignment: Analysing interactions among national priorities and the SDGs using a cross-impact matrix.

## Module 4. Back-casting and Scenario Analysis to Identify Strategic Policy Options and Transformative Policy Pathways

Building on the insights from systems thinking (Module 3), this module describes methods for creating and using scenarios in a participatory manner to identify strategic policy options and transformative policy pathways for building back better during recovery and accelerating progress towards national priorities and the SDGs. A back-casting process is described in this module for creating a policy options matrix and identifying strategic policy options, all informed by a shared vision of medium and long-term

success (Module 2) and an thorough understanding of the system (Module 3). A participatory scenario planning process is then outlined for stress-testing strategic policy options, to improve the efficacy, coherence and robustness of policies and thereby create transformative policy pathways for achieving medium and long-term objectives.

## **Learning objectives**

Following the completion of the module, participants will be able to:

1. Describe four levels of engagement and best practices for meaningful engagement processes in the Map out strategic policy options and potential pathways for recovery and acceleration planning, including understanding the stakeholder and institutional landscape
2. Explain the process for building scenarios about plausible futures, including how to ensure that the scenarios are internally consistent
3. Use scenarios to test the coherence of policy pathways, including how to identify policy pathways that are robust across multiple plausible futures and to be able to identify signposts (indicators) for action necessary to recover from disaster, build forward better and accelerate progress toward the SDGs
4. Use scenarios to stress test policy pathways to assess opportunities and risks that multiple plausible futures pose to the achievement of SDGs and identify robust and triggerable actions to adapt to a multi-hazard risk landscape

## **Structure**

The outline for Module 4 includes:

1. Back-casting to identify strategic policy options
  - Basics of back-casting (ABCD method, VISIS approach, others)
  - Step 1: Clarifying the desired future
  - Step 2: Understanding the system
  - Step 3: Brainstorming to create a policy options matrix
2. Scenario planning to identify Transformative Policy Pathways that are coherent, robust and adaptive
  - What a policy pathway is
  - Basics of scenario planning
  - Step 4: Creating scenarios to explore the future
  - Step 5: Using scenarios to identify transformative policy pathways that are coherent, robust and adaptive
3. Contextual Narrative: Update on Mollisland's Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence Exercise for Covid-19 Recovery
4. Activity and homework assignment: Creating a policy options matrix and testing for efficacy and robustness

# **Module 5. Coherent and Adaptive Implementation of Transformative Policy Pathways**

Implementation of transformative policy pathways is, by necessity, an adaptive process that must enable coherence and coordination among institutions, both horizontally and vertically. This module describes what it means for implementation of policy pathways to be coherent, strategic, robust and adaptive and explains how to feed the results of an Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence exercise into national plans, UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and SDG Roadmaps developed through MAPS country engagements. This module also describes the interface with finance and national budgeting processes and how to monitor policy signposts for triggering adaptive actions that help ensure resilience to shocks and stresses and thereby, help accelerate progress toward national priorities and the SDGs.

## Learning objectives

Following the completion of the module, participants will be able to:

1. Describe what it means for implementation of policy pathways to be coherent, strategic, robust and adaptive
2. Explain how to feed the results of an Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence exercise to existing national processes, including national plans, UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Plans, Common Country Analysis, and SDG Roadmaps developed through MAPS country engagements
3. Identify the way forward in aligning the results of Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence exercises in finance and national budgeting processes
4. Identify the way forward in enabling institutional coherence and coordination for implementing policy pathways that are coherent, strategic robust and adaptive
5. Describe how to monitor policy signposts (indicators) for triggering adaptive actions that help ensure resilience to shocks and stresses and policy signposts for triggering actions necessary to accelerate progress toward the SDGs

## Structure

The outline for Module 5 includes:

1. Summary of the Stages for Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence Towards the SDGs
2. Next Steps for Coherent and Adaptive Implementation
  - a. Communicating and Mainstreaming Transformative Policy Pathways
  - b. Fostering institutional coherence and coordination
  - c. Costing and financing of transformative policy pathways
  - d. Establishing processes for monitoring, evaluation and learning for adaptive implementation
3. Final Activity: Readiness assessment on institutional arrangements for policy coherence

## Certification and feedback

Each of the five modules is followed by a quiz (ex-post assessment) to test the participant's understanding of core content. Three attempts are allowed per quiz. The attempt with the highest score is retained as the grade for the module. Each attempt proposes 10 questions drawn at random from the respective question bank. For each question, the correct responses add up to 1 point. Each incorrect response is penalized individually by -0.1 point. Participants need to obtain a minimum of 7 points out 10 points for the module quiz to complete the assessment requirements. Ex-ante assessment questions



are not graded. Practice questions ("knowledge checks") asked during the interactive lesson modules as a form of practice and are not graded either.

Participants interested in obtaining a **certificate of completion** must pass all 5 quizzes. Those participants who pass 4 out of 5 quizzes will receive a **certificate of participation**.

Participants will be requested to complete a feedback form which can be accessed through the link in the 'Course Evaluation' section on the course home page.

## Technical requirements

Browser:

- The course works best with Firefox 3.6 or higher (download for free at <http://www.mozilla-europe.org/en/firefox>)
- The course is also compatible with Google Chrome (download for free at <https://www.google.com/intl/en/chrome/browser/>)
- It is **not recommended** to use Internet Explorer for technical reasons
- Note JavaScript & Cookies must be enabled

Software:

- Adobe Acrobat Reader (download for free at <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>).
- Adobe Flash Player (download for free at <http://get.adobe.com/flashplayer>)
- Microsoft Excel (Windows or Apple version) or Open Office version (download for free at <http://www.openoffice.org>)

Platform: Windows 95, 98, 2000, NT, ME, XP or superior; MacOS 9 or MacOS X

Hardware: 64 MB of RAM, 1 GB of free disk space

Modem: 56 K

- Speakers/headphones are required.