



unesco

INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION
(of UNESCO)

Fifty-ninth Session of the Executive Council
UNESCO, Paris, 30 June–3 July 2026

Items 4.2.1 and 4.5 of the Provisional Agenda

**UPDATE ON PROGRESS
OF REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT PROCESSES**

Summary

This document presents the update on progress in the implementation of the [IOC Resolution A-33/3](#) (Governance, programming and budgeting matters of the Commission: Resolution adopted by the IOC Assembly at its 33rd session in 2025). It also presents issues for consideration with regard to the UNESCO80 reform process.

Action Plan in Response to the IOS Evaluation of the IOC Strategic Positioning: Update on Implementation is presented in document [IOC/EC-59.4.2.1.Doc\(2\)](#) under the same agenda item.

Action taken to address the specific recommendations on the working methods of the IOC Governing Bodies and the consistent use of the distinct visual identity of the IOC in communications and publications are covered under agenda items [4.2.2](#) and [4.2.3](#), respectively.

Decision proposed is referenced Dec. IOC/EC-59/4.2.1 in the Revised Provisional Action Paper [IOC/EC-59/AP Prov.Rev.](#) The document will be examined by the sessional Financial Committee and the conclusions reflected in the Draft Resolution that the Financial Committee will be submitting to the Executive Council for adoption under item 4.5 in accordance with paragraph 15 of the Draft Revised Guidelines for the Preparation and Consideration of Draft Resolutions ([IOC/INF-1315](#)).

UNESCO General Conference Resolution

1. In 2023 the Executive Board of UNESCO agreed on an increase of the IOC share of UNESCO's regular budget. In 2025, the General Conference of UNESCO at its 43rd session, having considered document [43 C/64](#), adopted 43 C/Resolution 85 in which it recalls *that by means of 216 EX/44 the Executive Board recommended that the General Conference at its 42nd session agree to an increase in the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission's (IOC) share of the UNESCO regular budget of [1%], not to be decreased by transfers of funds to other parts of the budget and that a baseline be identified and agreed for IOC's share of UNESCO's regular budget under document 42 C/5 and future C/5 documents and that no reduction to this baseline be made in the future unless agreed by the General Conference; and recommit to 216 EX/Decision 44 in order to ensure that IOC receives no less than 3% of the available overall regular budget.*
2. Recognizing that *'the IOC is established as a body with functional autonomy within UNESCO, with the IOC Assembly being the principal organ under the IOC Statutes adopted by the General Conference at its 30th session'*, the General Conference took note of IOC Assembly [Resolution A-33.3.II](#) on the Draft Programme and Budget for the first biennium (2026–2027) of the 2026–2029 quadrennium (43 C/5) and decided *'to include in document '43 C/5 Approved' the relevant elements of the IOC Results Framework, as determined by the IOC Assembly'*.
3. In November 2025, the General Conference also took note of the IOC Assembly Resolution A-33/3.III on the assessment of governance and management processes and invited the UNESCO Director-General *'to contribute to the full implementation of the ... IOC functions as established in its Statutes as well as the tasks assigned to the IOC Secretariat, including by the delegation of authority to the Executive Secretary of IOC, when applicable'*.
4. The General Conference invited the Executive Secretary of IOC *'to submit draft sections relating to the ... IOC in Volumes 1 and 2 of future draft Programme and Budget documents (draft C/5 documents) to the IOC Assembly'* and invited the Director-General *'to forward the IOC Assembly's recommendations... to the Executive Board for transmission to the General Conference as part of the C/6 document.'*

Operationalization of the IOC Results Framework including Resource Mobilization

5. Following the endorsement of the IOC Results Framework by the 33rd Session of the Assembly and the subsequent inclusion of relevant elements into the 43 C/5, the Secretariat took steps to operationalize the Framework through the development of an internal working document 'the Secretariat Implementation Plan'. The Plan has been developed as a living document to guide the Secretariat's operational translation of the High-Level Objectives and the Sub-Objectives contained in the Medium Term Strategy and Results Framework as part of its day-to-day activities. It contains a series of work packages with measurable deliverables, timelines and responsibilities for implementation as well as monitoring and reporting roles and responsibilities.
6. The Assembly having requested the IOC Executive Secretary *'to intensify proactive efforts to obtain further voluntary contributions, including from private sector donors and other partners, ... and explore options to facilitate processes for funding partnerships, including the establishment of additional financial arrangements as foreseen in the IOC Statutes'*, the Secretariat pursued the following three lines of action.
7. First, several initiatives have been taken in the recent year to mobilize increased and sustained resources for critical priority areas for the IOC, notably ocean observations and data, capacity development, and climate resilient sustainable ocean planning and management in SIDS.
8. Second, in order to focus resource mobilization efforts on supporting collectively agreed priorities set by the IOC Assembly, resource mobilization priorities have been identified in alignment with the Results Framework. These priorities will be the focus of extrabudgetary resource mobilization for financial and in-kind resources. The resource mobilization packages each span

several elements of the ocean science value chain, thus involving a range of IOC programmes and regional Sub-commissions in a single joint effort. A resource mobilization plan will be developed in the second semester of 2026 to document detailed resource mobilization priorities including in-kind and financial needs, potential donors, processes for decision making for opportunistic resource mobilization, and set out actions (including internal coordination) to achieve and track progress towards targets over the next biennium. The Plan will also contain more detailed communications materials for the objectives and expected outcomes of identified 'bundles' of work packages that can be used directly in discussions with donors.

9. Third, in line with the decisions and resolutions of the 33rd Session of the IOC Assembly in relation to resource mobilisation, and the Action Plan arising from *The Evaluation of the Strategic Positioning of IOC-UNESCO* ([IOS/EVS/PI/197](#)), the IOC Secretariat, in cooperation with the UNESCO Partnerships Division, is undertaking an analysis to optimise financial arrangements and modalities to support implementation of its programme of work. The analysis will explore options for (i) mobilizing additional resources (e.g. core voluntary contributions or an investment plan approach), and (ii) optimizing existing financial mechanisms for receipt and management of funds (e.g. Special Account, Funds in Trust projects Multi Partner Trust Funds) to maximise the effectiveness and impact of IOC's work. The analysis will eventually inform the use of Article 10.4 of the IOC Statutes to attract additional funding to the Commission to ensure effective and continuing delivery of its global and regional programmes, including the Ocean Decade. The first results of this analysis will be presented to this session of the Executive Council (EC-59).

Optimization of Resource Use – Analyses of Secretariat Supported Sub-Groups

10. The Assembly having expressed concern that some functional areas of the Commission's mandate remain 'critically vulnerable' and having emphasized its commitment to making IOC fit for purpose by ensuring efficient and effective governance and management process through a clearly defined accountability framework compliant with the IOC Statutes, the Secretariat undertook an exhaustive analysis of IOC working groups, task teams, groups of experts in terms of their alignment with IOC's mandate, effectiveness, impact and resource requirements.

11. An inventory of 172 sub-groups was established in consultation with Heads of Section and Sub-Commissions, covering primary and secondary subsidiary bodies, formal expert groups and task teams, joint initiatives with partner organizations, and international networks supported by the Secretariat. Given the diversity of these structures, the analysis was designed as qualitative rather than comparative, reflecting the differing mandates, outputs and operational contexts of the sub-groups.

12. A common analytical framework was developed drawing on internal consultations, feedback from IOC Officers and the Intersessional Financial Advisory Group (IFAG), and relevant literature. This framework assessed sub-groups against four criteria: (i) resource requirements (in terms of Secretariat time and financial inputs); (ii) outputs and broader impact (including both tangible deliverables and less formal contributions to processes and stakeholder engagement); (iii) alignment with IOC strategic objectives; and (iv) operational considerations such as mandates, timelines and Member State expectations. This approach enabled a structured but flexible assessment of performance and relevance across the portfolio.

13. The analysis highlighted a need for greater coherence, transparency and strategic alignment across sub-groups to meet the priorities defined by Member States. Key general recommendations included: (i) improving the physical/online accessibility and ease of interpretation of Terms of Reference; (ii) incorporating systematic and regular reviews of TORs; (iii) ensuring that the creation of new sub-groups is matched to available resources; and (iv) strengthening coordination (e.g. between global and regional sub-groups) to reduce duplication of effort. Opportunities were identified to merge or better align sub-groups working on similar themes across Sections and Sub-Commissions, while also enhancing regional representation in global groups. Additional recommendations emphasized the importance of systematically recording and tracking the use of

sub-group outputs and ensuring that their work contributes effectively to capacity development and ocean literacy objectives, for example through inclusion of Early Career Ocean Professionals in all sub-groups.

14. At the regional and sectional levels, several targeted observations were made for further discussion with Member States. These include the potential restructuring or consolidation of sub-groups with overlapping or overly broad mandates, for example in areas such as capacity development, ocean literacy, and marine spatial planning. Further discussion with Member States and partners to improve coordination across regions and with global programmes was identified as a priority action.

15. The analysis also identified opportunities to streamline or conclude sub-groups whose primary objectives have been achieved, while reinforcing those addressing emerging priorities, for example sub-groups focused on the BBNJ Agreement. Further consultations with relevant IOC bodies are foreseen to refine the analysis and prioritize implementation, with a view to developing actionable short- and long-term measures that balance resource constraints with the delivery of strategic objectives for discussion at the 34th Session of the IOC Assembly in 2027.

Alignment with UN80 and UNESCO80 Initiatives

16. In accordance with UNESCO General Conference Resolution 43 C/82, which requested the Director-General to present a strategic plan aligned with the UN80 initiative—aimed at identifying efficiencies, reviewing how mandates are implemented, and examining potential structural changes—the Director-General submitted the UNESCO80 Roadmap to the 224th session of the Executive Board. This followed extensive consultations with stakeholders, both within UNESCO and externally. The roadmap was adopted at the 224th session of the Board ([224 EX/Decision 12](#)).

17. Document [224 EX/12](#) contains a specific reference to the IOC under Pillar II – Mandate Implementation Review, announcing ‘a review of institutional delivery mechanisms. Particular attention will be given to the field network, category 1 institutes, and other key entities with distinct governance arrangements, such as IOC and the World Heritage Centre’.

18. The document also refers to the report of the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit ‘Review of management and administration in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([JIU/REP/2026/1](#))’. Paragraph 98 of the JIU Report holds that ‘the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, while formally under UNESCO, operates with ambiguous governance, undermining institutional clarity and impact.’

19. By its decision 224 EX/12, the Executive Board decided to establish a Member State open-ended working group under Pillar II of the UNESCO80 Roadmap (OEWG), scheduled to meet until the end of July 2026, with a view to reviewing mandate implementation across UNESCO in the context of the preparation of the forthcoming 44 C/5 Programme and Budget.

20. Pillar II of the UNESCO80 Roadmap and the UN80 process is focused on mandate review including assessment of mandates for continued relevance, comparative advantage, coherence, and institutional fitness. The ‘IOC and the Future of the Ocean’ consultation process addresses precisely this set of questions in relation to the ocean governance landscape. The ocean landscape within the UN system is complex. Multiple agencies, programmes, conventions and frameworks operate across overlapping thematic and geographic domains as evidenced by the diverse mandates of the 33 members of the UN-Oceans interagency coordination mechanism.

21. Building on the priorities identified in Phase I of the ‘IOC and the Future of the Ocean’ consultations, Phase II has undertaken a systematic mapping of this ecosystem, drawing on a review of over 1,000 programmes and projects endorsed under the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and established regional governance frameworks. Supplemented by

stakeholder interviews, this evidence-based assessment informs a comparable mandate review envisaged under Pillar II of the UNESCO80 Roadmap albeit at a higher degree of granularity than that being undertaken across the UNESCO80 process. This information will enable UNESCO Member States in the OEWG to develop a clear picture of where the IOC operates with distinctive comparative advantage, and where the current partner landscape is well served by others.

22. The Phase II findings indicate that IOC occupies a unique niche in areas that tend to be underserved by partner organizations, particularly coordination of global ocean observing systems and data infrastructure, science-to-policy tools for sustainable ocean planning and management, integrated multi-hazard early warning systems, and capacity development for data and science. These are areas closely tied to the IOC's core mandate and where its convening authority and technical credibility are widely recognized within the UN system and beyond.

23. As an Assembly-mandated, evidence-based exercise to identify where the IOC can most effectively focus its resources, where it might consider refining its approach, and where the evidence most clearly supports the case for its distinctive and valued role, the 'IOC and the Future of the Ocean' process is therefore producing information that will be an important contribution to Member State discussions as part of Pillar II of both the UNESCO80 and UN80 processes.

24. Looking forward, Phase III of the 'IOC and the Future of the Ocean' process that will be carried out between September 2026 and April 2027, will focus on consolidating the results of the first two phases, and will supplement them with additional analyses and consultations with Member State in order to develop concrete recommendations on IOC's future strategic role, with a view to informing the programme and budget for 2028–2029 and the next Medium-Term Strategy. The results of this third and final phase will be presented at the 34th Session of the IOC Assembly in 2027. This timing allows for the initial results of the UNESCO80 process, including the first outcomes of the UNESCO Member State OEWG, to inform the detailed methodological design of the Phase III consultations and for there to be regular exchanges of information on the intermediate results and findings of the two parallel processes to inform the documentation prepared for both the UNESCO and IOC Governing Bodies.