



Terms of Reference

BRIDGES UNESCO MOST Sustainability Science Coalition

Overview and Definitions

i. As defined in the relevant documents referenced in the decision of the Intergovernmental Council (IGC) of UNESCO's Management of Social Transformations (MOST) programme to endorse the establishment of a "UNESCO MOST Sustainability Science Coalition" (hereinafter, "**BRIDGES**") (MOST/IGC/2021/5, item 7 of the agenda, point 3), the "purpose of BRIDGES is to operationalize the UNESCO Sustainability Science (SuS) Guidelines in a variety of contexts, by connecting diverse communities of knowledge and action throughout societies in project-based activities. BRIDGES aims to harness the capabilities of higher education and research institutions to serve [...] in transdisciplinary efforts together with international councils of science, intergovernmental science programmes, research and educational networks, as well as key local and national partners from public and private sectors, and from civil society" (MOST/IGC/Bureau/2020/5, p.3).

ii. The three founding partners of BRIDGES are the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Council for Philosophy and Human Sciences (CIPSH) and the Humanities for the Environment Global Observatory Network (HfE) (hereinafter, the "**Sponsoring Organizations**"). The Sponsoring Organizations led the two-year process for the establishment of BRIDGES (2019-2021). In March 2021, BRIDGES was finally established as a sustainability science coalition of the MOST Programme. iii. At its first meeting of 25 May 2021, pursuant to its Decision 4 (cf. Annex 6 Decisions of the BRIDGES General Assembly, 25 May 2021), BRIDGES established an **Interim Executive Group** (2021-2023). The Interim Executive Group is composed of the Sponsoring Organizations and is currently the provisional governing body of BRIDGES, in consultation with the IGC Bureau of MOST. iv. The new proposed governance structure

for BRIDGES shall consist of a **General Assembly**, an Executive Committee (to be renamed “**Governing Council**”), and a Secretariat, to be renamed “**International Program Office**”¹.

1. Purpose

- 1.1. BRIDGES is a coalition of intergovernmental, governmental and non-governmental organizations, institutes, and formal networks in UNESCO’s Management of Social Transformations programme (MOST) established as per the terms of the decision of the MOST Intergovernmental Council (IGC), Agenda Item 7, on 31 March 2021 (MOST/IGC/2021/5).
- 1.2. BRIDGES shall discharge the functions set forth in the decision of the MOST Intergovernmental Council (IGC), Agenda Item 7, on 31 March 2021, as well as those to be determined by the BRIDGES General Assembly.

2. Governance

2.1. The BRIDGES General Assembly (GA)

2.1.1. Mandate and Functions

The General Assembly (GA) provides a platform for broad consultation and approves BRIDGES’ core agenda, strategies, activities and structures as proposed by the Governing Council.

The General Assembly is in charge of long-term strategic decision-making and the executive governance of BRIDGES as proposed by the Governing Council, including approval of new members of BRIDGES, and the election of the members to the Governing Council.

Fundamental changes or additions to the defined mandate and functions of BRIDGES require approval of the BRIDGES General Assembly.

The BRIDGES General Assembly shall meet in ordinary session every two years and its meetings shall be convened by its Chair. The Chair may also convene extraordinary sessions of the BRIDGES General Assembly in case of matters that need to be dealt with by the BRIDGES General Assembly before the next ordinary session.

The BRIDGES General Assembly shall be chaired by the Chair of the Governing Council.

¹ The MOST IGC’s decision to endorse the establishment of BRIDGES as a “UNESCO MOST Sustainability Science Coalition” (MOST/IGC/2021/5, item 7 of the agenda, point 3) defines this operational structure as “A Secretariat, located in and supported by a relevant partner institution tasked with all coordination functions as defined above, and liaising on a regular basis with the MOST Secretariat” (MOST/IGC/2021/3, paragraph 15a). To avoid confusion with the MOST Secretariat, the terminology of *International Program Office* has been chosen for the operational structure described in the foregoing passage at the request of SHS and the MOST secretariat. The IPO will coordinate with the MOST Secretariat and assessment will be made to ensure coherence and synergies in the work of the Sponsoring Organizations.

2.1.2. Membership

The BRIDGES General Assembly (GA) shall consist of scientific institutions and organizations as well as entities that are sponsored by organizations or institutions, such as networks or programmes, knowledge institutions such as libraries and museums; think tanks; science, cultural and heritage foundations; indigenous, traditional and local knowledge communities; governmental agencies and authorities; intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and other organizational/institutional entities that prioritize promotion of sustainability knowledge and action in line with the vision, spirit, and principles of the coalition (hereinafter “**Members**”).

Members must therefore have legal standing or be part of an organisation or institution with legal personality that must guarantee the member entity’s compliance with BRIDGES’ rules, decisions and principles.

Institutions, organizations or sponsored entities wishing to become Members must request admission to the BRIDGES International Programme Office (as defined in Section 2.4 below). In their request, membership applicants shall agree to adhere to the vision, spirit, and principles of BRIDGES as outlined in the documents submitted to the MOST IGC as the basis for the decision referred to in paragraph 1.1 above (see Annexes 1-3 to this ToR). The International Program Office shall then review the application while ensuring that conditions are met according to the criteria set forth by the Governing Council (as defined in Section 2.2 below) and issue a recommendation on whether to accept the membership application. Selected applications are then submitted by the International Program Office to the Chair of the Governing Council not later than six weeks before the next ordinary session of the Governing Council for its review on a non-objection basis. The Chair shall submit the Governing Council’s recommendations of new member before the next ordinary session of the BRIDGES GA, for its approval.

The Governing Council shall set forth (and amend as appropriate) criteria for the acceptance of admission requests for Membership. The criteria for membership will be made available on the BRIDGES website.

Upon their appointment, each member of the BRIDGES General Assembly shall notify the BRIDGES International Program Office of the names of its designated representative not later than two weeks before each session of the BRIDGES General Assembly.

Members in the BRIDGES General Assembly that wish to withdraw from membership shall notify the International Program Office who will submit the information to the Chair of the BRIDGES General Assembly in writing.

2.1.3. Observers at the sessions of the BRIDGES General Assembly

Individuals and institutional/organizational entities that are not members of the BRIDGES General Assembly but that wish to collaborate with BRIDGES in the development or delivery of

its programmes and activities or that involve BRIDGES as a key partner in other major sustainability science initiatives regionally, nationally or internationally may participate as observers in sessions of the BRIDGES General Assembly. Requests for such participation must be submitted to the International Program Office four weeks in advance of the session of the BRIDGES General Assembly at which they wish to participate, for review by the Executive Director of the International Programme and then, for final approval by the Chair of the General Assembly, not later than one week before the session in question.

2.2. The Governing Council (GC)

2.2.1. Mandate and Functions

The Governing Council (GC) is the decision-making structure working under the authority of the BRIDGES General Assembly.

The GC proposes to the BRIDGES General Assembly strategic and scientific direction of BRIDGES and supports timely decision-making processes to advance the BRIDGES Coalition's agenda, strategies, activities and structures. It oversees the execution of every day decision-making in executive governance of BRIDGES. The GC also oversees the work of the BRIDGES International Program Office. The GC meets in ordinary sessions twice a year, as convened by its Chair. The Chair may also convene an extraordinary session of the GC.

The GC is empowered to address pressing time-sensitive questions that require resolution between ordinary sessions of the General Assembly, when there is not sufficient time to call an extraordinary session of the General Assembly, and which shall be reported to the General Assembly, for its review.

Fundamental changes or additions to the defined mandate, mission and functions of BRIDGES require review of the Governing Council and approval of the BRIDGES General Assembly.

The Chair of the Governing Council will be the UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences.

The Chair of the Governing Council, with the support of the Executive Director of BRIDGES, shall work to ensure close coordination and collaboration between the BRIDGES Governing Council, the MOST IGC and the MOST Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) to ensure harmony with the existing strategy of MOST and to offer advice and suggestions in relevant strategic discussions within the MOST IGC and UNESCO.

2.2.2. Membership

The Governing Council shall consist in total of 12 voting council members, consisting of six (6) *ex officio* members and (6) six members elected by the BRIDGES General Assembly according to principles of gender balance and geographical distribution representing the global scope of the coalition according to the criteria set out in Annex 5.

The 6 ex officio members are set forth below:

- (a) The Executive Director of BRIDGES, who is eligible for re-appointment by the General Assembly for a limit of four subsequent terms of office;
- (b) The President of the MOST Intergovernmental Council;
- (c) A high-level representative of UNESCO (ADG/SHS or the person exercising ADG/SHS functions), who acts as the Chair of the Governing Council and of the General Assembly;
- (d) A high-level representative of CIPSH (President or a designated high-level representative);
- (e) A high-level representative of Humanities for the Environment (President or a designated high-level representative); and
- (f) A high-level representative of a leading scientific organization of global scope unanimously selected by the three Sponsoring Organizations.

The 6 elected members are selected and appointed by the BRIDGES General Assembly as set forth below:

- (a) Five to be appointed according to the criteria set out in Annex 5: *The BRIDGES Governing Council² — Guidelines for Representation*. A baseline requirement for appointment to the Governing Council is that all selected organizations/institutions/programs/entities must deliver high-quality knowledge in the area of humanities-led sustainability science or be non-academic stakeholders delivering community-inclusive/co-produced sustainability services and impacts in society of a comparably high calibre; and
- (b) A high-level representative of one of the organizations that financially supports BRIDGES implementation capacity (through funding of **BRIDGES Knowledge and Action Hubs** or the IPO) who shall not be staff of the BRIDGES **hubs or IPO**.

The Governing Council's 6 elected members shall serve for a term of three years. An elected member of the Governing Council shall not be eligible for immediate reelection after completing two consecutive terms. Each member of the Governing Council shall designate a high-level representative to participate in the meetings of the Governing Council.

2.2.3 The Steering Committee

The 6 *ex officio* members shall serve as the Governing Council's Steering Committee, with the Chair of the Governing Council presiding.

The Steering Committee may take decisions on matters requiring action between meetings of the Governing Council, as an extraordinary measure, if there is not sufficient time to address a matter of pressing importance by waiting until the next scheduled ordinary meeting of the

² Previously described as Executive Committee in the first draft of Terms of Reference/Rules of Procedure circulated for the BRIDGES Inaugural General Assembly, 24-25 May 2021.

Council, or if an extraordinary meeting of the Council cannot be scheduled in time

2.2.4 Transitional measures and evaluation of governance

For the inaugural term of the Governing Council starting in 2024, the BRIDGES General Assembly shall appoint the 6 elected members on the basis of a list of prospective members proposed by the Steering Committee.

The inaugural Governing Council will convene its first meeting three months after its confirmation and election by the BRIDGES General Assembly. Until this time, the Interim Executive Group is empowered by the General Assembly to fulfil all the functions of the Governing Council.

In 2031, the executive governance and operational management of BRIDGES shall be evaluated, by an external independent expert body selected pursuant to UNESCO's internal rules and regulations. Amendments to these Terms of Reference and operational as well as governance structures of the Coalition may be proposed by the Governing Council to the BRIDGES General Assembly as a result of this evaluation in light of BRIDGES' evolved or changing role in the sustainability science domain internationally. Such amendments shall be submitted to the BRIDGES General Assembly for approval.

2.3 The BRIDGES International Program Office

2.3.1 Mandate and Functions

The **BRIDGES International Program Office** will serve as the Secretariat for BRIDGES and will be established by the Governing Council at the end of the inception phase of BRIDGES (2021-2024). The BRIDGES International Program Office shall prepare the agenda of each meeting of the BRIDGES Governing Council and of the BRIDGES General Assembly, in consultation with the MOST Secretariat. This agenda shall be submitted for approval to the Chair of the General Assembly, who also chairs the Governing Council, two weeks in advance of each session of the respective body.

The International Program Office also oversees compliance with agreements/memoranda of understanding regarding contributions of in-kind or financial resources from the **BRIDGES Knowledge and Action Hubs** and the IPO to BRIDGES.

The BRIDGES International Programme Office shall be led by an Executive Director (ED) and 1-2 deputy directors appointed by the ED among the members of the **BRIDGES Knowledge and Action Hubs**. The deputy directors represent the ED and discharge his/her governance duties when necessary. Deputy directors should be selected on the basis of geographical and institutional diversity and balance, and require approval of the Chair of the BRIDGES General Assembly (who also chairs the Governing Council).

2.3.2 The Executive Director of Bridges (ED)

The BRIDGES General Assembly shall appoint an Executive Director (ED) from a Member institution, and funded by the member institution, to lead the BRIDGES International Program Office under the oversight of the Governing Council. The ED shall oversee the staffing and operational capacities of the BRIDGES International Program Office to ensure the implementation of the decisions of the BRIDGES General Assembly and the BRIDGES Governing Council. The ED supports the Chair of the Governing Council in facilitating close coordination and collaboration among the BRIDGES Governing Council, the MOST IGC and the MOST Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC). The ED position shall be renewable every two years thereafter by decision of the BRIDGES General Assembly. The ED is eligible for re-appointment by the BRIDGES General Assembly for a limit of three subsequent (two-year) terms of office, for a total of 4 terms of office.

In consultation with the Steering Committee, the ED may undertake *ad hoc* activities and initiatives in the name of the BRIDGES Coalition, including exploration and implementation of collaborations with new partners and/or prospective member organizations/institutions/networks in the spirit of both the BRIDGES principles and the approved proposal to establish BRIDGES as a UNESCO MOST Sustainability Science Coalition (see Annexes 1-3).

The ED is mandated to undertake regular fundraising efforts and/or negotiations with potential partners and/or sources of support to aid the BRIDGES mission, in line with the ethical provisions set out in the BRIDGES principles (Annex 7). This will be done in close consultation with the Sponsoring Organizations and the Chair of the Governing Council.

The ED shall regularly inform the Steering Committee, who shall inform the Governing Council, of the above activities and notable developments that result from them. UNESCO staff coordinates with the BRIDGES International Program Office and will perform their functions pursuant to UNESCO's rules and regulations.

The ED reports to the Governing Council, through the Chair of the BRIDGES General Assembly and the Steering Committee, and supports the Governing Council's functions for the implementation of its decisions.

Because the BRIDGES **Knowledge and Action Hubs** contribute materially to the International Program Office's implementation role, the ED is further supported by the BRIDGES **Knowledge and Action Hubs**, ensuring that staffing and other capacities contributed by the host institutions of BRIDGES **Knowledge and Action Hubs** are provided in support of the International Program Office's implementation mandate as specified in the applications to host hubs approved by the Governing Council.

A first ED was appointed by the BRIDGES General Assembly at its Inaugural Session (May 25, 2021) and whose mandate has been extended until May 25, 2026.

2.4 Other entities in support of BRIDGES mission

A global network of national, regional and thematic entities with legal standing, entitled **Knowledge and Action Hubs**, was established by the Interim Executive Group during the inception phase and will be augmented during the following years by additional hubs covering themes and regions not already represented. All hubs contribute, when requested by the Executive Director, with implementation capacities enabling the BRIDGES mission to be carried out at an international scale appropriate for a coalition anchored in a global intergovernmental programme such as MOST. These Hubs may also be members of BRIDGES subject to the membership requirements set forth above.

The capacities of the BRIDGES **Knowledge and Action Hubs** support the International Program Office, as defined in the proposals submitted by member organizations to the MOST secretariat and approved by the appropriate BRIDGES governance organs. Such capacities include human and technical resources, financial support for organization of international meetings and participation of BRIDGES officers at high-level events pertinent to the sustainability science domain, as well as at governance meetings for the coalition.

As noted in the First Call for Expressions of Interest to Host the International Secretariat of the [...] BRIDGES Sustainability Science Coalition (22 June 2021), “The primary purpose of the...Hubs will be to support the activities of the BRIDGES Coalition, both strategically and operationally, at the international level” (Annex 4, p. 7).

A BRIDGES Scientific Committee will be established by the Governing Council and shall report to it at each session; its purpose is to evaluate projects seeking BRIDGES endorsement. As stipulated in the MOST IGC’s decision to endorse the establishment of BRIDGES as a UNESCO MOST Sustainability Science Coalition, “The MOST SAC will be directly involved, through a designated focal point, in BRIDGES project assessment. Furthermore, the SAC will be provided, annually, with a report on scientific issues arising from the implementation of BRIDGES and given the opportunity to bring its observations thereon to the attention of the BRIDGES General Assembly” (Annex 3: MOST/IGC/2021/5, item 7 of the agenda, point 3, paragraph 16a).