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Operational activities of the United Nations  
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follow-up to policy recommendations of the  
General Assembly and the Council

### **Implementation of General Assembly resolution [75/233](#) on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system**

#### **Report of the Secretary-General**

##### *Summary*

Submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 75/233 and 72/279, the present report provides an update on the system-wide implementation of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR) and the reform of the United Nations development system (UNDS).

This report presents progress made in consolidating the UNDS reform and implementing QCPR mandates. In a year unlike any other, it shows that as the COVID-19 pandemic wrought devastation across the world, the United Nations family mobilized swiftly, leading a comprehensive and coherent response that addressed global health and socioeconomic impacts, setting out a broad policy agenda in support of the most vulnerable communities, countries and regions, and expanding the provision of life-saving humanitarian assistance. The response thus far has been assessed positively by programme country governments. The report also highlights progress made in solidifying the reinvigorated RC system, in advancing agreed changes at the regional level and strengthening multi-country offices; and implementing Funding Compact commitments.

Looking ahead, the new QCPR places a strong emphasis on what is expected of the reformed UNDS during the Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs. It focuses on countries in particularly vulnerable situations and on a number of areas that are critical to recovering better and accelerating progress towards 2030. This report outlines an initial way forward on these new mandates, centred on a whole-of-system response, on transformative integrated policy-advice and on strengthened support on financing and the means of implementation.

\* [A/76/50](#).

This report shows that we have come a long way since the start of the reforms, with 2020 demonstrating that the UN development system is rising to the challenge. At the same time, it is clear that the reforms continue to mature and areas remain where a more concerted effort is needed from all parties. The forthcoming review of the functioning of the Resident Coordinator system provides an opportunity to address some of those areas, so as to continue to strengthen the offer of the UNDS to better support country action on SDG implementation.

The report draws on the findings of surveys administered by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs between December 2020 and January 2021, addressed to programme country Governments and headquarters of United Nations entities. Inputs were sought from across the system, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and its individual entities. Financial data was primarily sourced from the database and reporting system managed by the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination. I thank the Department of Economic and Social Affairs for their ongoing efforts in supporting the QCPR and its implementation.

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## I. Introduction

1. 2020 stands out as the most challenging year in the history of the United Nations. As the COVID-19 pandemic took hold, the newly repositioned United Nations development system (UNDS) faced its first litmus test, coming together to support developing countries amid a crisis. The reinvigorated resident coordinator (RC) system and the new generation of United Nations country teams (UNCTs) rose to the challenge, leveraging assets from across the UN system to provide effective, immediate support to countries across the globe and address the widespread impacts on people's lives, especially women and youth. The response – at all levels – was unprecedented. While its full value will only be evident over time, the system has already succeeded in supporting Governments to tackle simultaneously the immediate health emergency and the pandemic's devastating socioeconomic impact, and to expand life-saving humanitarian assistance as pressures on communities increased. This rapid, targeted, whole-of-system UN response consolidated confidence in the historic reforms we have undertaken since 2017.
2. Even as the UN system mounted an unprecedented response to the human crisis, we continued to advance key reform areas. We have worked to make good on our promises to strengthen our offer in countries in special situations and in different contexts, particularly in relation to the support multi-country offices provide to small island developing states (SIDS), and rolled out agreed changes at the regional level. We have seen progress also in strengthening collaboration across our work on development, peacebuilding and humanitarian response. The UNDS has continued to strengthen transparency, accountability and reporting, developing new tools to track and report on our contribution to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We have made progress on delivering against the Funding Compact, including our commitment to more efficient and effective UN operations and Member States commitments to change the way in which operational activities are funded.
3. There is no going back. We must complete the reforms and scale up and accelerate results on the ground at a time of dire challenges for humanity. Adopted amidst the pandemic, the 2020 QCPR (A/RES/75/233) provides a strong foundation to complete the repositioning of the UN development system. The QCPR is policy-focused and captures the General Assembly's expectations of the UNDS in supporting governments to recover better from COVID-19 and redouble our efforts towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. It demands action in three key areas.
4. First, we must fully root, and, where needed, reinforce the reforms in specific areas. We need to move faster in effecting the transition of mindsets and skillsets in each entity of the United Nations development system, including by aligning agency-specific policy, planning and programming in support of an integrated response. We must ramp up our pursuit of a new model for country configuration – more tailored to the needs and priorities on the ground. We must continue to build on the momentum created for more efficient UNCT operations and deliver on the targets we all set for ourselves in the Funding Compact. And we must proceed in our efforts to strengthen transparency, accountability and reporting on all we do, together, in support of sustainable development.
5. Second, as the world emerges from this crisis, we must build, without wavering, on the achievements of our reform efforts. We must mobilize and strengthen the capacities of resident coordinators, whose leadership at the country level is now firmly taking hold, and the new generation of UN country teams to help countries shape a recovery that is truly transformative and accelerates progress towards the SDGs during the Decade of Action. To do so, we must step up our support in critical areas highlighted in the 2020 QCPR. That includes action on poverty eradication, social protection, quality education and universal health coverage, together with support for the urgent and equitable rollout of COVID-19 vaccines. We must strengthen rights-based and gender-responsive approaches across our work for stronger improvements in gender equality, disability inclusion and youth action, and enhance our investments in data support, defining baselines grounded in improved data, and capacities to leave no one behind. We must bring our support for climate action, the energy transition, digital transformation and the conservation of biodiversity to the next level to accelerate the shift to inclusive, sustainable and resilient economies. We must tailor our support more effectively to countries in special situations and those experiencing conflict or fragility.

6. Third, we must leverage the reforms to help mobilize the knowledge and means of implementation needed to drive a just transition and economic transformation and deliver impact at scale to leave no one behind. This will require advancing the initiative on Financing for Development in the era of COVID-19 and beyond to incentivize , more ambitious action on the range of policy options for debt relief and liquidity and a reform of the international debt architecture that emerged through an open and broad-based consultative process; delivering on my Financing Strategy and supporting the rollout of Integrated National Financing Frameworks. It also requires working more closely with international financial institutions and regional development banks, further boosting UNDS capacities on economics and financing, delivering more broadly on our convening and partnerships potential and strengthening our work in the area of technology and digitalization.
7. The new QCPR cycle begins at a time when Member States, through the Declaration on the Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary (A/RES/75/1), have emphasized the need to reinvigorate multilateralism so it delivers more effectively and inclusively. Delivering on the promises of the 2030 Agenda is an essential aspect in this regard and, in many ways, will determine the credibility of multilateralism in the years to come. To enable transformative multilateral action, we need a UNDS that is a provider of global public goods, fit-for-purpose, inclusive and networked at country, regional and global levels.
8. I am pleased to see the UNDS leadership is working to put the reforms into practice to respond to the guidance from the General Assembly. Likewise, Member States, whether at the global or national levels, are taking steps to ensure we have a fit-for-purpose UN. But all of us have more to do. I count on Member States support in the upcoming review of the Resident Coordinator system, which will allow to course correct and take further action, where necessary, to deliver on the promise of the reforms: a UNDS that can rise to the challenge and support Member States to deliver on their commitments to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

## **II. Maximizing the effectiveness of the new Resident Coordinator system**

9. At the heart of the reforms approved by the General Assembly in 2018 was the promise of a more cohesive, effective and accountable response from the UNDS at the country level, through a reinvigorated resident coordinator system and a new generation of UNCTs. The 2020 QCPR reinforces the criticality of this shift as the world seeks to accelerate action towards the SDGs.
10. Evidence to date confirms the positive trend reported last year and suggest that our efforts are coming to fruition. In the midst of the disruption caused by the COVID-19 crisis, the leadership and coordination by our Resident Coordinators (RCs) have been significantly strengthened; and the relevance and alignment of UNCT response continued to improve to the satisfaction of host Governments. Overall, we are beginning to see more cohesive support by UN country teams, with those entities based outside countries progressively increasing their contributions to the system-wide response.
11. Feedback from governments also indicates that UNDS collective response to the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis was well attuned to countries' priorities and needs – with tangible results that are captured in more detail in the complementary Report by the Chair of the UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) on the Development Coordination Office.<sup>1</sup> In addition, I am pleased to see that more collaborative arrangements in UN country teams are translating into more efficient business operations, helping us to maximize the percentage of our expenditures that support programmatic activities. As the reforms mature and our data systems across UN entities are fully harmonized, we will have an even better understanding of the full extent of the benefits that are accruing to the countries we support and the people we serve.
12. At the same time, it is clear that we must continue to move forward with the same level of attention and ambition to ensure we maximize the impact of the changes made. In particular, we must continue to invest in strengthening our skillsets and strategically deploying our convening power to help countries leverage financing, technologies and expertise and expand partnerships for development at unprecedented scale. We

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<sup>1</sup> Link to be inserted

must ensure that the enhanced macroeconomic capacities in RC Offices (RCOs) lead to a visible shift in our ability to support the SDGs across all their dimensions, with economic transformation at the centre, and an acute understanding of national budgets and fiscal space. We must start to see more concrete changes in our footprint in countries, by tailoring UNCT configurations to meet country priorities as mandated by the General Assembly. This is receiving close attention, with the roll out of Cooperation Frameworks well advanced. And we must consolidate the new RC system, including through full implementation of the dual reporting lines in UNCTs and ensuring entity-specific Country Programme Documents are derived from Cooperation Frameworks.

### A. A performing reinvigorated resident coordinator system

13. Ensuring “empowered, strategic, effective and impartial leadership through the resident coordinator system”, as instituted in General Assembly Resolution 72/279 and reinforced by the 2020 QCPR, is central to more effective support from the UN development system. Today, more than ever, I am convinced that this is the only way to go and the evidence shows that this new leadership is taking shape on the ground.
14. Since 1 January 2019 when the new RC system was put in place, Governments are now seeing (see figure I) resident coordinators with strengthened leadership (81%), impartiality (67%), coordination capacity (73%) and focus on common results (78%).<sup>2</sup> Seventy-eight per cent see the resident coordinator as genuine entry point to access the UN system at country level. At the same time, some Governments (13% – 26%) still consider it too soon to determine if the resident coordinator’s capacity has been strengthened.

Figure I.

#### Resident coordinator strengthening following the repositioning

	Response distribution			Trend	
	%, 2020			%	
	Great or moderate extent	No change	Too soon to tell	2019	2020
Compared to before 1 January 2019, to what extent has the Resident Coordinator displayed strengthened/increased					
Authority	77	7	16	59	77
Leadership	81	6	13	65	81
Impartiality	67	7	26	59	67
Capacity to coordinate UN activities in support to your country’s development priorities	73	10	17		73
Focus on common results of the UN system	78	6	16		78
Coherence in UN activities, reducing duplication of efforts	69	12	19		69
Ability to serve as an entry point for easy access to UN offer/ expertise across the UN System	78	9	13		78

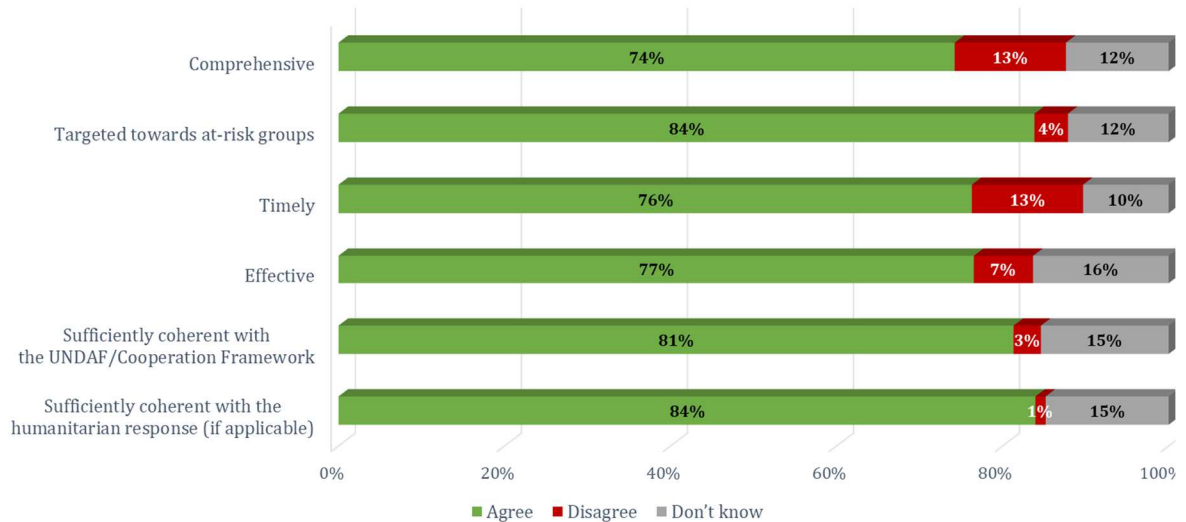
15. In addition, 88 per cent of programme country Governments consider the RC to be effective in leading the UNCT and 79 per cent consider the RC to have sufficient prerogatives to effectively fill his or her mandate. Both reflect a substantial increase since 2019. Furthermore, eighty-five per cent of Governments recognize that RCs have helped leverage partnerships for national SDG achievement and 76 per cent agree that resident

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise stated, data in the present report have been compiled by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Additional data on a complete list of indicators of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review are available in the monitoring and reporting framework that accompanies the present report and is accessible through the website of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of the Economic and Social Council ([www.un.org/ecosoc/en/oas-qcpr](http://www.un.org/ecosoc/en/oas-qcpr)).

coordinators have contributed to enhancing synergies between humanitarian, development, and peace-related interventions.

16. The added value of newly empowered RCs and fully staffed RCOs has been evident during the response to the COVID-19 crisis. Ninety-one per cent of Governments agree that RCs ensured a coherent UN response to the pandemic. Governments positively evaluated our response against six indicators, with over 80 per cent indicating that it succeeded in targeting at-risk groups and was undertaken in coherence with the humanitarian response and the Cooperation Frameworks (see figure II).

Figure II  
**The COVID-19 socioeconomic response of the UNDS has been:**



Note: Based on 101-104 responses to each sub-question.

17. The report from the Chair of the UNSDG provides greater detail on the progress made in 2020 in equipping the Resident Coordinator system to meet needs and expectations. While these findings are encouraging, it will be important to monitor the evolution of responses from programme country governments in the areas outlined above over the coming years. Furthermore, feedback from programme country governments, UN entities and RCs have highlighted areas where continued refinement is needed. These include boosting RCO capacities, in conjunction with UNCTs, particularly in terms of macro-economic analysis and partnership with international financial institutions; strengthening the RC pool, including through RC career planning and improving opportunities for mobility within the Secretariat and across agencies, funds and programmes, bringing further clarity to the support role of DCO, and improving support and administrative services.

## **B. A new generation of United Nations country teams that delivers**

### **1. Strengthened alignment, relevance and effectiveness**

18. In proposing the shift to a new generation of UNCTs, I was convinced that only a more collaborative, accountable and demand-driven UN presence could ensure the type of transformative support that could help countries achieve the SDGs. We are now well advanced in this transition and welcome the 2020 QCPR call for United Nations country teams to more effectively contribute their expertise, tools and platforms, as agreed in the Cooperation Frameworks or equivalent planning framework, to advance the 2030 Agenda.
19. Feedback from programme country Governments in 2019 and 2020 shows that Governments overwhelmingly agree (91%) that since the launch of the repositioning reform in 2018, UN Country Teams are more relevant to

their development needs and work more collaboratively (77%), including in the COVID-19 response context (see figure III).

Figure III.  
**United Nations country team relevance**

	Response distribution			Trend in target response	
	% , 2020			%	
	Closely or very closely aligned	Somewhat aligned	Not aligned at all	2019	2020
Overall, the activities of the UN and your country's development needs and priorities are	87	13	0	81	87
All things considered, how effective has the UN been in developing national capacities	Effective or very effective	Ineffective or very ineffective	Don't know	2019	2020
	90	5	5	83	90
Whether/how the relevance of the UN to your country's development needs has changed since 2018:	More or much more relevant	Less or much less relevant	Don't know	2019	2020
	91	6	3		91
Since the repositioning of the UN development system in 2018, the UN system currently works together	More or much more collaboratively	Neither more or less collaboratively	Less or much less collaboratively	2019	2020
	77	21	2	70	77

20. In addition, there has been other tangible progress since last year, as 90 per cent agree that the UN has been effective or very effective in developing national capacities. UNCT support is most positively viewed in the areas of technical support (99%), leveraging partnerships (90%), and evidence-based and integrated policy advice (89%) (see figure IV). Its support is viewed positively but slightly less so, with regard to statistical capacities (83%), financing for development (82%) and South-South and triangular cooperation (79%). Only two-thirds of countries consider support for integrated national financing frameworks (INFFs)<sup>3</sup> to be adequate, reflecting an area for improvement (see chapter V for more detail on this issue).

Figure IV.  
**Effectiveness of United Nations country teams' support**

	Response distribution			Trend in target response	
	% , 2020			%	
	Agree	Disagree	Don't know	2019	2020
To what extent does your country agree or disagree that the UN adequately provides:					
Technical support in line with national needs and priorities	99	0	1		99
Support to leverage partnerships in support of national development priorities	90	5	5		90
Evidence-based policy advice that is tailored to national needs and priorities	89	5	5	87	89
Joint integrated policy advice that is tailored to national needs and priorities	88	6	6	78	88
Support for statistical capacities and data collection, analysis & management	83	10	6		83
Support to financing for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	82	14	4		82
Support for peer-to-peer learning exchanges, South-South & triangular cooperation	79	15	6		79
Support for integrated national financing frameworks	67	17	15		67

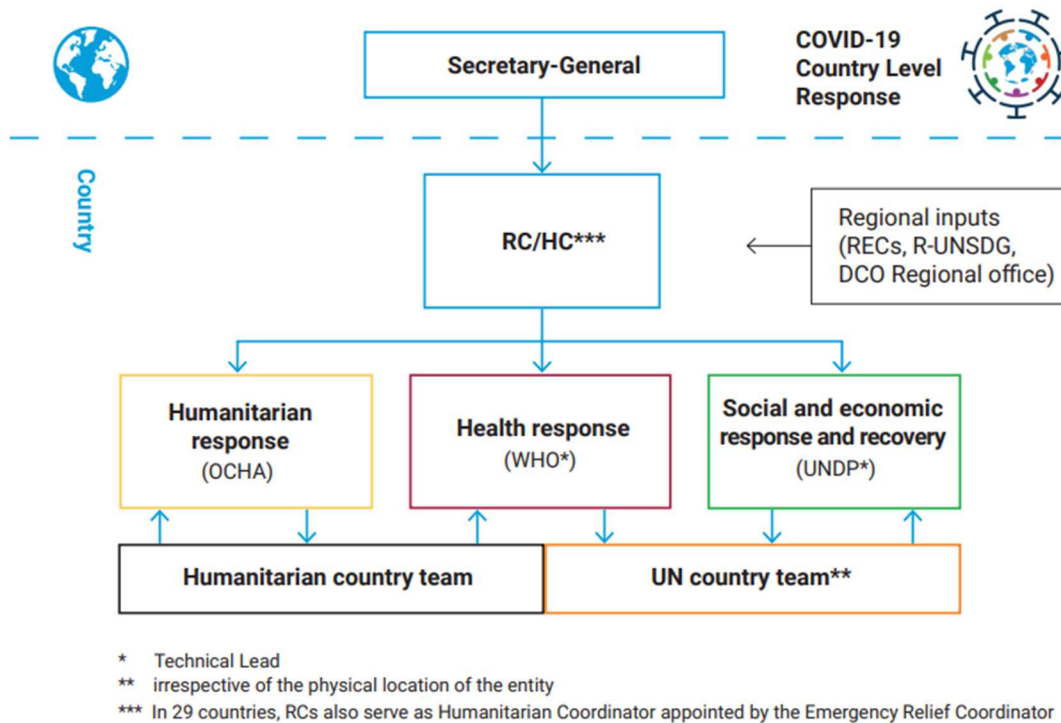
21. As stated, the COVID-19 crisis was in many ways a stress test for the reformed UN development system. I was pleased to see the UNSDG stepping up like never before to respond with the urgency and coherence more

<sup>3</sup> The UNDS is currently assisting some 70 countries in developing INFFs.



frequently seen in humanitarian response. Within a few weeks, the UNSDG sent clear strategic guidance to UNCTs, which ensured immediate and integrated support to countries that put longer-term development objectives front and centre from the outset of the emergency health and socioeconomic response (see figure V). Data confirms a positive assessment by Governments on the response from our Country Teams.

Figure V  
COVID-19 country-level response



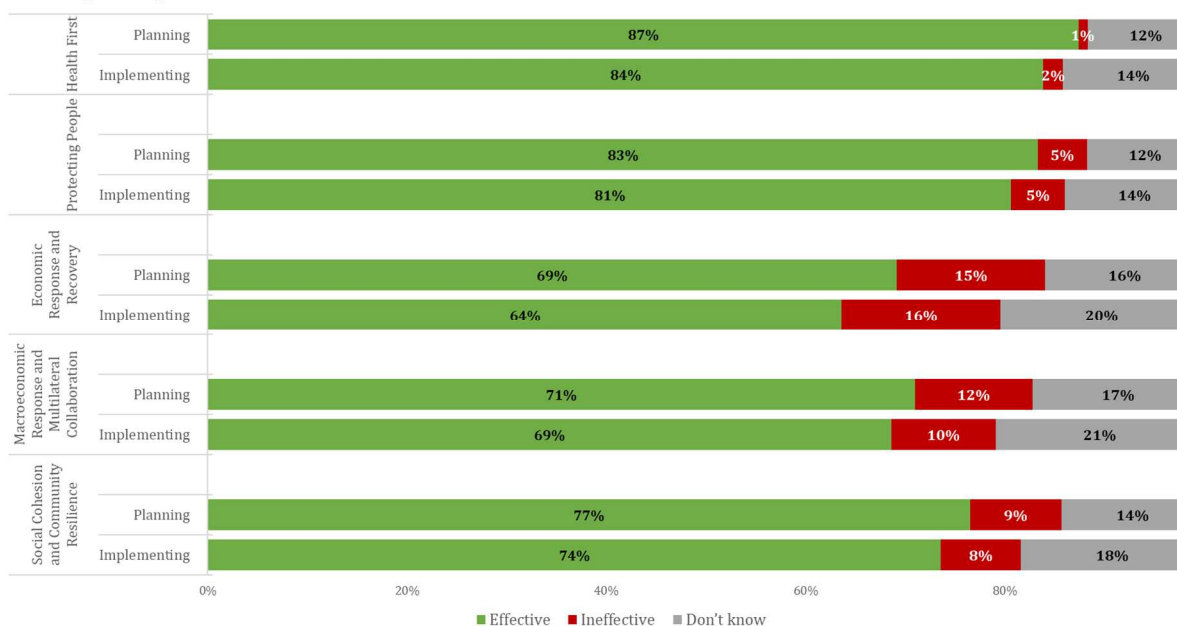
Source: UNSDG, United Nations framework for the immediate socioeconomic response to COVID-19, April 2020.

22. In April 2020, as UNCTs and RCs rallied around World Health Organization (WHO) to support the health response, the UNSDG launched the UN Framework for the immediate socioeconomic response along with the global humanitarian plan. It mobilized the UNDS under the coordination of RCs and the technical lead of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and leveraged the wider system in support of the socioeconomic work. At the core of the response were the socioeconomic impact assessments conducted by country teams, followed by 121 socioeconomic response plans (UN-SERPs) covering 139 countries and territories to support Governments with a rapid, coherent and well-coordinated UNDS response.
23. Feedback from programme country Governments on the planning and implementation of the socioeconomic response has been encouraging. The majority of respondents to the DESA surveys agree on the effectiveness of the planning and implementation across the different response pillars (see figure VI). Notwithstanding the repurposing of \$3 billion by 126 UNCTs and the mobilization of an additional \$2 billion, including some \$75 million through the Multi-Partner Trust Fund for COVID-19 Response and Recovery, UN Socio-Economic Response Plans remain less than half funded.<sup>4</sup> This funding gap stands out starkly when juxtaposed against the \$18 trillion mobilised by advanced economies for COVID-19 response and recovery and closing this gap remains a priority for programme countries and UN system efforts.
24. Responses by national partners also shed light on areas where we need to improve our efforts, particularly the macroeconomic response and multilateral collaboration. Although we have strengthened our capacities in this area, as well as our cooperation with international financial institutions as part of our support to the COVID-19

<sup>4</sup> <https://data.uninfo.org/Home/ProcessIndicators>

response, there is clearly a need to go further. Reasserting the critical role of the UN in economic affairs and international financing for sustainable development is essential and requires continued investment and perseverance. We are moving in the right direction.

**Figure VI**  
**Effectiveness of the implementation of countries' COVID-19 socioeconomic response plans across the five response pillars**



Note: Based on 98-107 responses to each sub-question.

25. The overview of the contribution of the UNDS to country-level results set out in the report of the Chair of the UNSDG provides, for the first time, a sense of the concrete results to which the UNDS has contributed during the COVID-19 crisis. It shows that the UNDS has made a tangible and significant contribution to national efforts to minimize the socio-economic impacts of the crisis and to lay the ground for a recovery that accelerates SDG implementation.
26. As recommended in the 2020 QCPR, in 2021 UNSDG will analyse lessons from the pandemic and the response plans at national, regional and global levels to better prepare for future crises and ensure a sustainable, inclusive, rights-based, gender-equal recovery and response. Under the leadership of my Special Advisor on Reforms, a report on the early lessons and evaluability of the COVID-19 multi-partner trust fund is planned for release in April 2021.

## 2. Coherent and integrated cooperation frameworks

27. The 2020 QCPR welcomed the Cooperation Framework as the most important planning and implementation instrument for UNDS country-level development activities. Eleven Cooperation Frameworks were developed in 2019 and began implementation in 2020. Thirty-two are expected to begin implementation during the course of 2021; and 31 are expected to be designed this year for implementation beginning in 2022. By the end of 2021, more than half of UNCTs will have replaced previous UN Development Assistance Frameworks with Cooperation Frameworks. The majority of the UN Socioeconomic Response Plans are set to end on 31 December 2021, with the UN response to COVID-19 being subsumed under the Cooperation Framework.
28. Ninety-two per cent of programme country Governments agreed that the Cooperation Frameworks have enabled them to ensure that UN operational activities effectively address and respond to national priorities, up from 89 per cent in 2019 (see figure VII), and 78 per cent of Governments see improved focus on common results compared to 74 per cent in 2019.

Figure VII  
**United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework**

Programme country Governments' responses	Response distribution			Trend in target response	
	% , 2020			%	
	Agree	Disagree	Don't know	2019	2020
The UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework has enabled the Government to ensure UN activities are effectively addressing/responding to national priorities, including the SDGs:	92	4	5	89	92
There has been an improved focus on common results among UN agencies (i.e. results achieved from UN entities working together) in the last year:	78	10	12	74	78
Since the repositioning of the UN development system in 2018, UN entities derive their country programmes from the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF):	74	2	25		74

United Nations entities' responses	Response distribution		Trend in target response	
	% , 2020		%	
	Yes	No	2019	2020
Have specific measures been taken at headquarters level to simplify and harmonize your agency-specific programming and reporting instruments in light of the Cooperation Framework guidelines?	60	40		60
Is it a requirement that outcomes be copied verbatim from the Cooperation Framework (UNDAF) into your entity's country programming document?	35	65		35

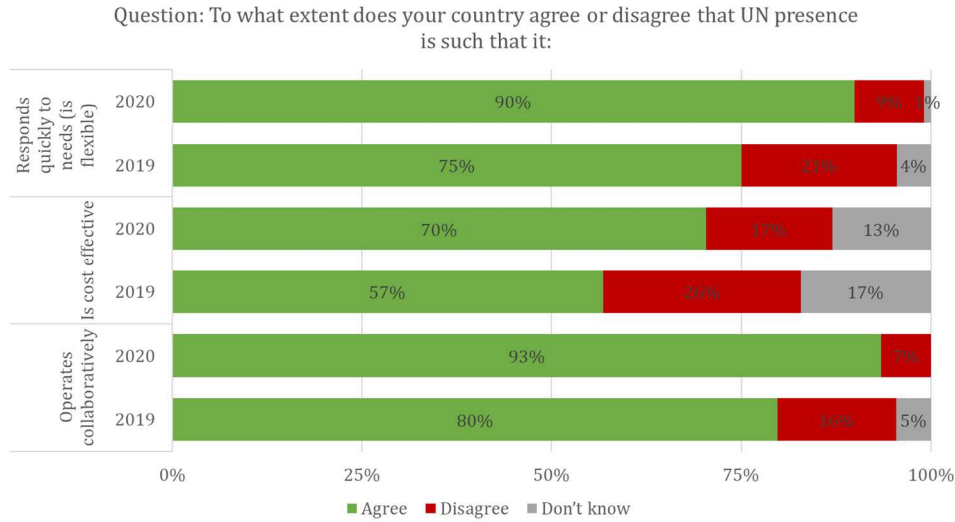
29. At the same time, 65 per cent of UNDS entities still have no formal requirement to derive their country programme outcomes from the Cooperation Framework, according to the UNDS entities' headquarters survey. And 40 per cent have yet to take any action to harmonize their agency-specific programming with Cooperation Framework guidance and practice. This is an area that requires urgent attention from Principals of the UN development system and respective governing bodies. It is encouraging to see, for example, that as of February 2021, country programme documents (CPDs) presented at Executive Board sessions of UNFPA, UNICEF and UNDP will be accompanied by at least an advanced draft of the Cooperation Framework or agreed results framework. There is evident momentum to continue to transform the UN development system in bold ways, but this window of opportunity is closing fast. Decisive action by Member States across governing bodies will accompany and support alignment efforts by each UN entity.

### 3. Tailored country configuration

30. In our joint efforts to reform the United Nations, we shared a vision for a new approach to country configuration by the UN development system – one that ensures a tailored, dynamic and responsive presence that is reviewed periodically to respond to specific country needs and priorities on the basis of the Cooperation Frameworks. General Assembly resolution 72/279 also underscores the importance of designing UN Country Teams that are capable of drawing on the expertise and assets of all United Nations development system entities, including specialized agencies without physical presence. While we have set the necessary foundations, including accountabilities and planning tools, and the overall feedback received from countries has improved, we are still to see more significant changes in country configuration by UN entities.

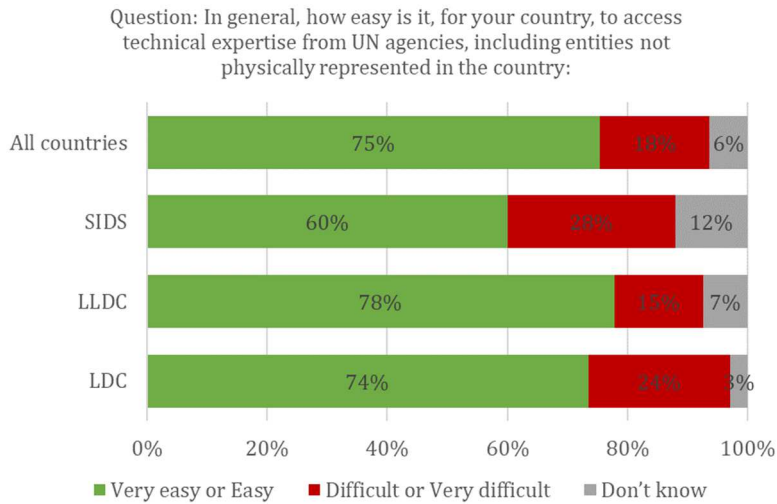
31. We are starting from a good position. In 2020, 90 per cent of countries considered the UN presence to be responsive to country needs and priorities and working collaboratively (see figure VIII). And the share of countries that considered the UN presence to be cost-effective increased significantly from 57 to 70 per cent between 2019 and 2020.

**Figure VIII**  
**Effectiveness of UN country configuration**



32. While 75 per cent of programme country Governments found it easy to access UN support from entities not physically present in their countries, nearly one in five found it difficult or very difficult to do so. This rate rose to around one in four and higher among SIDS and LDCs (see figure IX), indicating serious gaps in our effort.

**Figure IX.**  
**Access to UN technical expertise located outside the country**



33. In 2020, the vast majority (87%) of programme country Governments, indicated that the UN presence is adequately tailored to their challenges and priorities, significantly up from 76 per cent in 2019. A similar proportion of Governments (85%) agree that UN staff presence has the right mix of capacities and skills to support their country's development.

34. Efforts continue on the side of the UNDS to make further progress in this area. Most countries that designed a Cooperation Framework in 2020 saw greater involvement from UN entities with limited or no country footprint, greatly improving access to the UN offer, irrespective of physical presence. DESA, for example, supported 22

CCAs covering 48 countries. Regional commissions are now members of 49 country teams, up from 40 in 2019. Several country teams report<sup>5</sup> that structured country team configuration dialogues help to tap the best, most relevant UNDS capacities to deliver on the Cooperation Framework and facilitate more integrated support to programme countries.

35. Yet, we still have not seen a sufficient shift in our ability to update the existing footprint on the basis of changing national needs and priorities. I am convinced that there is a much greater potential in this regard. As a key deliverable in 2021, I am therefore asking the UNSDG to develop a clear process to inform the decision with host governments on the configuration of UNCTs and ensure they are fit for purpose to deliver Cooperation Framework results. In tandem, DCO will monitor and analyze supply and demand from UNDS entities that have a light footprint at country level and regularly report on their activities to inform UNSDG members' individual and collective action. Action to enhance staff mobility across agencies and duty-stations is important in this regard. Host governments also have a key role to play on this important priority.

#### **4. Consolidating more robust accountabilities at the country level**

36. In the second half of 2019, the UNSDG rolled out across the globe the new responsibilities and accountabilities of UNDS entities vis-à-vis resident coordinators and country teams, in line with General Assembly resolution 72/279, and we have made good progress but significant challenges remain.
37. DCO survey data from late 2020 indicates growing familiarity with the new accountability arrangements – with 89 per cent of resident coordinators and country team members confirming they were familiar or somewhat familiar with implementation of the UNDS Management and Accountability Framework (MAF) (see figure X). Further positive indications include that 14 UN entities have realigned provisions in job descriptions of their country representative to clearly define the relationship with the resident coordinator<sup>6</sup> and 12 have entities now request input from RCs on country representative performance appraisals (see figure XI).<sup>7</sup> When RCs and country team members assessed each other's compliance with the MAF, less than 10 per cent were considered non-compliant. Most respondents (89%) considered that the guidance provided by individual entities was largely or somewhat consistent with the new accountabilities as set out in the MAF.

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<sup>5</sup> Monitoring by DCO of countries that have conducted configuration exercises.

<sup>6</sup> WFP, WHO, UNODC, UNDP, UNHCR, ILO, FAO, IOM, UNAIDS, UNICEF, UNOPS, UNRWA, UNEP

<sup>7</sup> WFP, UN-Women, UNESCO, UNDP, UNHCR, ILO, FAO, IOM, UNFPA, UNAIDS, UNICEF, UNOPS

Figure X

**Country chapter of the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF)**

Resident coordinator and UNCT member respondents	Response distribution		
	%, 2020		
	Familiar	Some familiarity	Not familiar
Degree of familiarity with the country-level chapter of the MAF - Total	64	31	4
Degree of familiarity with the country-level chapter of the MAF - Resident coordinators	94	5	1
Degree of familiarity with the country-level chapter of the MAF - UNCT members	60	36	4
Degree of familiarity with the country-level chapter of the MAF - UNCT members not present in country	57	34	9
	Familiar of very familiar	Moderately or somewhat familiar	Not very familiar or not at all familiar
Degree of familiarity with the MAF implementation at country level - Total	49	40	12
Degree of familiarity with the MAF implementation at country level - Resident coordinators	78	18	3
Degree of familiarity with the MAF implementation at country level - UNCT members	43	44	13
Degree of familiarity with the MAF implementation at country level - UNCT members not present in country	46	31	23
	Entirely or largely compliant	Somewhat or mixed compliance	Non-compliant
Assessment of Resident Coordinator MAF compliance by UNCT Members	58	33	8
Assessment of UNCT member MAF compliance by Resident Coordinators	29	62	9
	Entirely or largely consistent	Somewhat consistent	Not consistent or no guidance
In your view and experience, to what extent is the guidance you have received from your entity HQ and/or Regional Offices consistent with the MAF?	58	29	13
	Resident coordinators	UNCT members	
Experienced inconsistency in guidance that has been provided by entity headquarters	65	20	
	Entirely or largely free and able	Somewhat free and able / Mixed freedom/ability	Limited freedom/ability or not free at all.
To UNCT Members: To what extent do you feel free and able, according to policies, directions and mandates received from your entity, to implement and comply with the MAF?	59	31	10

Source: Development Coordination Office, 2021 based on a survey of the Management and Accountability Framework conducted in 2020.

Figure XI.

**United Nations development system entities' implementation of the country MAF**

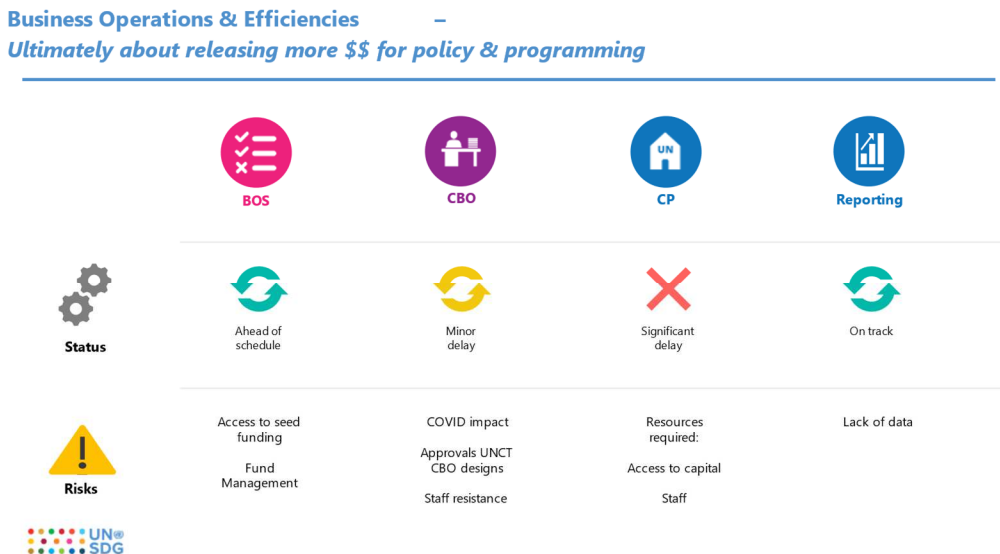
United Nations entities respondents	Yes	No
Do the job descriptions of your Country Representatives include provisions that recognize the country representative's relationship vis-a-vis the UN Resident Coordinator under the new Management and Accountability Framework?	74	26
Does your entity require formal inputs from the UN Resident Coordinator to Country Representatives' performance appraisal?	63	37
Has your entity changed the job description of country representatives to ensure that they report to the Resident Coordinator on their individual activities and on their respective contributions to the collective results of the UN development system towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda at the country level, on the basis of the Cooperation Framework/UNDAF?	53	47
Does your entity recognize reporting obligations to the UN Resident Coordinator for the following field activities?		
Planning	75	25
Resource Mobilization	69	31
Programme Implementation	75	25

38. There are, however, areas that demand priority attention. First, there is a need for UNCT members not present in-country to become more familiar with the new accountability arrangements. Second, there is a need for strengthened compliance by UNDS entity headquarters with the accountabilities set out by the General Assembly, including clear and consistent guidance to teams in the field. Only 12 UNDS entities indicated that they did not recognize reporting obligations to the resident coordinator on planning, resource mobilization, and programme implementation.
39. Based on lessons from implementation to date, I am requesting the UNSDG to take the necessary steps to ensure the new UNCT accountabilities fully take root on the ground and that internal policies and provisions – such as the UNDS MAF and individual guidance to entity policies – are updated as required. The UNSDG is also working on the alignment of accountability arrangements at the regional and global level, which will help facilitate further progress. Continued attention by governing bodies will also be necessary to enable the behavioural change expected from the UN development system.

### C. Delivering effective and efficient business operations

40. Simplification and harmonization of business operations has been a long-standing request of the General Assembly in the QCPR resolutions, and an expected return as the implementation of the UNDS reforms generates more collaborative ways of working. In its resolution 72/279, the General Assembly endorsed a set of system-wide improvements that could potentially yield efficiencies.<sup>8</sup>
41. Underpinned by work on three enabling principles (‘costing and pricing’, the principle of ‘client satisfaction’ in inter-agency service delivery, and the statement of ‘mutual recognition’, extensive efforts have been undertaken by the UNSDG and by UN Country Teams to rollout business operations strategies (BOS), provide services through common back offices (CBOs) and global and regional shared service centres, establish common premises and ensure enhanced reporting on results and efficiency gains. Overall, we are on track to deliver on two of these four areas and are largely on track on a third. We are, however, off track on establishing common premises (see Figure XII). The COVID-19 crisis and associated restrictions have made advancing this work more challenging but, in some instances, especially on establishing common premises, there are specific obstacles that will need more time to be overcome.

Figure XII  
**Status of business operations reforms**



<sup>8</sup> See explanatory note No. 10 on efficiencies, available at [www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/files/en/qcpr/10\\_%20Efficiencies%20in%20UNDS%20repositioning.pdf](http://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/files/en/qcpr/10_%20Efficiencies%20in%20UNDS%20repositioning.pdf)

42. Despite these constraints, we are making steady progress towards the projected gains in the order of \$310 million by 2022. Annual efficiency gains are estimated to have increased by 57% between 2019 and 2020 to USD 100.7M. This represents an achievement of at least 32% of estimated efficiency savings by 2022 (USD 310M) though the actual figure may be significantly higher, as only one-third of entities currently have policies or mechanisms for measuring efficiency gains. Planned improvements in efficiency measurements and reporting this year, will enhance our ability to capture gains across all entities and further strengthen our ability to monitor and secure efficiency gains in 2022 and beyond. Operationalizing the enablers
43. Dedicated efforts under the leadership of the UNSDG Business Innovations Group have resulted in new or updated policies, mechanisms and processes. Three system-wide enablers were adopted that can facilitate a step change in operations effectiveness and cohesion across the UN on the ground.
44. By the end of 2020, eight UN entities, including those with the largest country footprints, had signed the costing and pricing principles.<sup>9</sup> Almost all UNSDG members have now signed the mutual recognition statement,<sup>10</sup> which allows UNDS entities to leverage each other's policies and practices for faster and more scale-efficient operations.
45. UNDS entities reported solid progress in 2020 on internal policies to leverage mutual recognition in business operations, particularly in procurement, administration and human resources, though less so in the case of information technology and finance (see figure XIII). Related to this, every UNDS entity with a physical presence in 50 or more countries confirmed that they had reviewed or were about to review the business operations services they could offer to, or purchase from, other UNDS entities. In the same survey, WFP highlighted its 'Humanitarian Booking Hub', which is currently used by ten entities and has played an important role in facilitating logistics for the UN system's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure XIII  
Policies or procedures enabling mutual recognition

	Response		Trend in target	
	% , 2020		%	
Does your entity have any policies or procedures that enable mutual recognition of another entity's policies and procedures in the following areas?	Yes	No	2019	2020
Procurement	91.3	8.7	75.0	91.3
Administration	73.7	26.3	55.6	73.7
Human Resources	76.2	23.8	50.0	76.2
Logistics	68.4	31.6	52.6	68.4
Information and Communications Technology	61.1	38.9	50.0	61.1
Finance	66.7	33.3	50.0	66.7

#### 1. Roll-out of UNCT business operations strategies

46. UNCT business operations strategies frame collaboration on operational services and arrangements at country level as a way to reduce cost and eliminate duplication of efforts. At the same time, they help create impetus

<sup>9</sup> FAO, IFAD, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN Women, and WFP

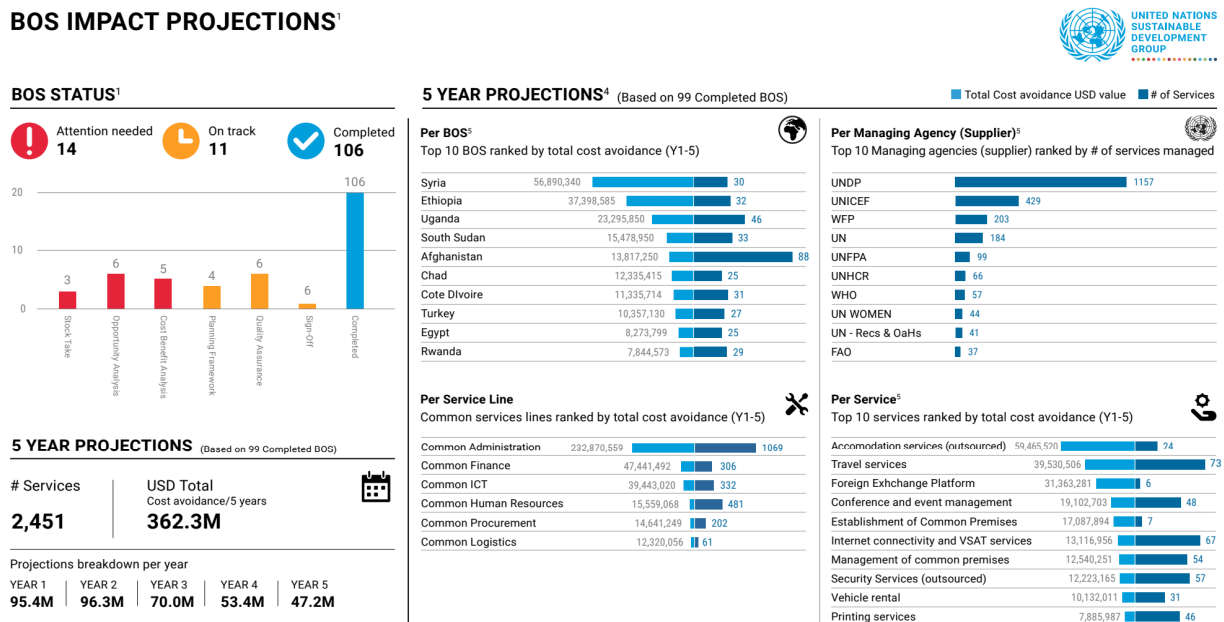
<sup>10</sup> The entities that have signed the statement include, the UN Secretariat and 20 Heads of UN Entities.



for more common services, through immediate increases in collaboration among the UN organizations and by helping to prepare the ground for common back offices in the future.

47. The global roll-out of business operation strategies that began in October 2019 is on track for full implementation by all UNCTs by the end of 2021. At the end of 2020, 78 UNCTs had an improved Common business operation Strategy in place, with a dedicated online platform and continual monitoring of country-specific data. Thirteen UN entities have developed internal guidance and communicated to their country offices to engage in these efforts at country level. Over 1,500 personnel across UNSDG entities have received in-depth training through in-person and virtual engagements. This is further supported by an online certification course that DCO developed on behalf of the UNSDG in partnership with the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC), which will be mandatory for all heads of operations in UN country teams beginning in 2021.
48. Several high impact common services, identified for collaboration, could yield significant cost avoidance, quality improvement and social impact if done jointly. These include fleet management, accommodation services, solar energy solutions, scaling disability inclusion in UN premises, web/digital platforms, and recruitment services.
49. The impact of UNCT business operation strategies is expected to be realized over a period of three to five years of implementation as common services are established and utilized by UN entities at country level. Projected efficiency gains over a period of five years is currently estimated at \$362 million (see figure XIV).

Figure XIV  
Business Operations Strategies impact



1 As of March 29th 2021. 2 Final stages of BOS process. 3 Early stages of BOS process. 4 Recurrent benefits over 5 years. Based on 99 Completed BOS. 5 Top 10.

## 2. Providing services through common back offices and global and regional shared service centres

50. Common Back Offices help drive efficiency and cohesion by providing a range of location-dependent operations, including services at country level. They generate efficiency gains by creating volumes of scale by removing duplication of processes, services and efforts at country level and by consolidating services reflected in business operations strategies and a range of additional services under a single service provider.

51. Travel restrictions and other limitations resulting from the pandemic have delayed the roll-out of common back offices and plans to establish Common Back Offices in all UNCTs by 2022. Following UNSDG approval in August 2020, the roll-out plan for Common Back Offices has engaged 10 UNCTs in its first phase, and will engage another 20 in its second phase in 2021. All UNCTs are expected to have established Common Back Offices in the remaining countries by 2024 based on the lessons learnt during the early roll-out phases. In tandem, changes implemented during 2020 in the operations of the Resident Coordinator system – with the shift of select human resources and administrative services to Secretariat service providers such as UN Office at Nairobi - have yielded gains in the order of \$5.2 million.
52. The UNDS has also continued to identify opportunities to consolidate global and regional shared service centres, allowing both vertical integration of operations within UN system entities and the ability to leverage mutual recognition policies across them. In 2020, around 40 per cent of UNDS entities reported having established global service centres, and a further 5 per cent plan to do so, with similar rates for established and planned regional service centres. Encouragingly, in 2020, nearly two-thirds of UN system entities reported using global or regional service centres of other entities, and over 40 per cent have plans for further rationalization of business operations (see figure XV). For example, UNHCR and WFP are currently planning to create a Digital Solution Centre that will use robotic automation for high-volume manual transactions and processes. This centre will also include plans to automate additional processes that can be aggregated globally.

Figure XV  
Established global and regional shared service centres

	<i>Response distribution</i>		<i>Trend in target response</i>	
	<b>% , 2020</b>		<b>%</b>	
	Yes	No	2019	2020
Does your entity use an established global or regional service centre of other UN entities?	65.2	34.8	47.8	65.2
Has your organization developed plans for further investing in intra-agency rationalization of business operations?	40.9	59.1	33.3	40.9

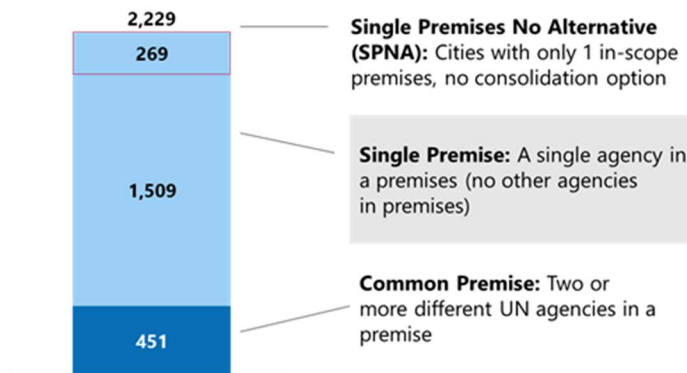
### 3. Establishing common premises

53. Meeting the ambitious target of achieving 50% of UN common premises housing more than one entity by 2021 is proving challenging and will require further efforts.<sup>11</sup> At the end of 2020, the UN system was located across 2,229 office premises in 131 countries. Of these, 269 single premises cannot be consolidated because they are the only UN presence in their respective duty stations. Another 451 are already common premises (see figure XVI).<sup>12</sup> As such, only 23% of UN office premises across the 131 countries in which the UN development system is present can currently be deemed to be common premises.

<sup>11</sup> Resolution 72/279 welcomed measures to advance common business operations, where appropriate, and with the target of 50 per cent common premises by 2021. In 2017 a superficial baseline count had identified more than 2,900 UN premises worldwide of which only 16 per cent were common premises.

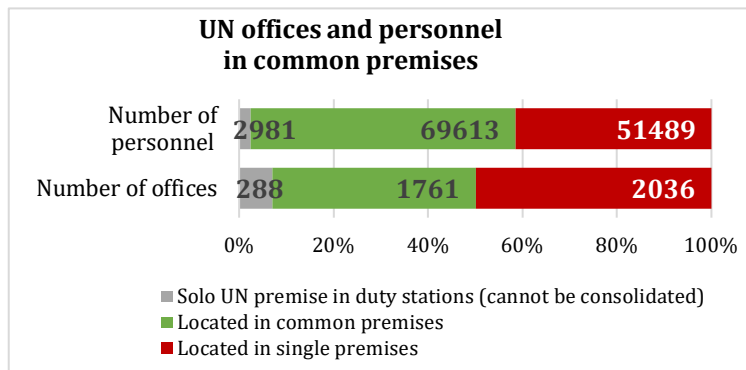
<sup>12</sup> Based on the assumed minimum of two single premises combining into one common premise and assuming 2020 premise and office populations.

Figure XVI  
UN common premises



54. It is encouraging that over half of UN offices (54 per cent) are located in common premises and over 40 per cent of UN staff work in common premises (see figure XVII). There was a slight increase in the number of UNIC-RCO co-locations (in the same premises) from 27 in 2019 (61%) to 28 in 2020 (64%). We will continue to examine the effects of the integration of the UNICs into RC offices - which has proven challenging to date in some areas - and I will recommend any necessary adjustments in the upcoming review of the RC system. Yet, at the current rates of consolidation, the target of 50% of common premises would be reached only after the end of the 2020 QCPR cycle. We must take action to course-correct and, in doing so, we will need to address remaining structural bottlenecks, none of which are insurmountable. These include large, one-time costs often associated with building design and construction/refurbishment and breaking long-term leases; and the difficulty in certain locations to identify new premises that can accommodate a large number of entities and meet all standards for safety and security, accessibility for persons with disabilities, and environmental and energy efficient infrastructure and fitouts.

Figure XVII  
UN common premises



55. I am determined to continue to work with Principals across the UN development system and Member States to overcome these bottlenecks. Capital investments by Member States and other private sector partners are particularly crucial to enable faster progress in reaching the 50 per cent common premises target. Recent examples by the Governments of Senegal, Egypt, Uzbekistan, Guyana, Vietnam and Kazakhstan, among others, of capital or in-kind investments to support common premises demonstrate that significant progress is possible in this area count on the support of all host governments, including in-kind support.

#### 4. Reporting on system-wide efficiency

56. Thanks to strong leadership by Principals of the UN development system, including the co-chairs of the UNSDG Business and Innovations Group (BIG), we have made unprecedented progress on enhancing transparency and reporting on system-wide efficiency gains. This entailed significant effort within agencies themselves, given that only 33 per cent of entities had a specific policy or system in place to measure the efficiencies. Overall, less than 40 per cent (9/23) report to their governing bodies on efficiency gains resulting from business operations strategies, common premises or other sources.<sup>13</sup>
57. A dedicated Efficiency Reporting Task Team was established in 2020 with 16 UNSDG entities, including the UN Secretariat,<sup>14</sup> to refine estimates, methods, and completeness of information that the UN can provide to Member States each year and is expected to make significant progress over the course of 2021. This has helped strengthen our ability to report collectively and start measuring efficiency gains within the context of the UN development system repositioning.
58. The data is encouraging. Efficiency gains are estimated at over \$64 million for 2019, the first year of repositioning, and \$100 million for 2020, including both quantified time savings and cost-avoidance estimates. These gains are an aggregation of efficiencies across different UN entities, countries, and processes. They translate into faster response and more effective delivery of support to countries for achieving the 2030 Agenda. Actual gains may likely have been greater than what was captured since reporting is not complete for all UN entities and data collection mechanisms vary in maturity and implementation.
59. The greatest share of efficiency gains has come from UN entity-specific actions (66%). Gains from UNCT business operations strategies saw a 300% increase (\$7.3 million – \$23.1 million) between 2018 and 2020, while bilateral initiative produced further gains, for example, fleet management (WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA); the Humanitarian Booking Hub (WFP, UNHCR); and Global Shared Service Centres (GSSCs). This signals a much-welcomed shift in the operational models of the UN development system.
60. We are making progress, but the road ahead remains challenging. To fully deliver on the targets set as part of these reforms and, most importantly, on the expectations from Member States, I am determined to continue to move ahead full steam, working hand in hand with the leadership across the UN development system. I am particularly grateful to UNICEF and UNFPA for agreeing to assume the leadership of the UNSDG Business Innovations Group, with the ambition to help us take this workstream to the next level. The support and encouragement of respective governing bodies and host governments will remain key. UN entities will continually seek and review efforts to increase efficiency and effectiveness and to simplify business practices in collaboration with the the High-Level Committee on Management. With a more transparent system and regular reporting on efficiencies, Member States are better positioned than ever to ensure that resources allocated for sustainable development are used in the most effective and efficient manner.

### III. Tailoring the UN response to specific country and regional contexts

61. The 2020 QCPR highlights the need to tailor UNDS support to programme countries based on their specific circumstances; to continue to strengthen our offer in multi-country offices (MCOs); to fully leverage the potential of our regional assets; and to enhance cooperation, collaboration and coordination among humanitarian, development and peace actions. This request goes to the heart of the UNDS reforms and speaks directly to our ability to better support all countries to advance towards the SDGs.

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<sup>13</sup> ILO, UNCTAD, UNDP (incl. UNV and UNCDF), UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIDO, UN Women, WFP

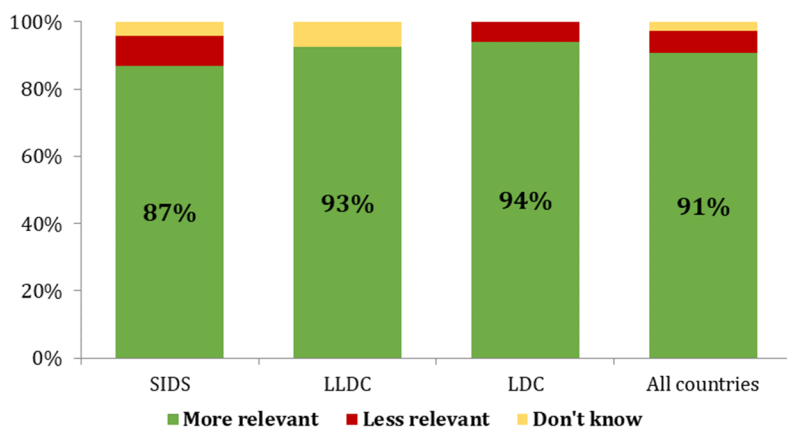
<sup>14</sup> The entities include: FAO, ILO, IOM, UN Secretariat, UN Women, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNOPS, WFP, WHO

62. In recent years, we have made important progress. We are seeing the UNCTs responding better to the specific development needs of LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS since the reforms got underway and making good progress in connecting our global convening and policy-support functions to our work on the ground, particularly in important areas highlighted by programme country Governments and the QCPR, such as financing. We have moved rapidly to boost our presence and our offer to support SIDS through the MCOs. The foundations are also now in place to maximize the impact of our regional assets. And we are seeing greater returns on our efforts to strengthen collaboration and coherence across UN operations in fragile contexts.
63. Overall, I am pleased with the progress being made. However, there are concrete areas where we must go further. The share of development funding going to LDCs, including the LDC Technology Bank, needs to be increased. The multidimensional vulnerability index that is being developed will need significant socialization alongside concrete steps to increase access to finance for vulnerable middle-income countries (MICs). Our offer through MCOs requires ongoing attention to ensure the new arrangements have practical impact on the ground. Similarly, the new regional arrangements are part of a longer term repositioning exercise and greater attention is needed over the course of the QCPR cycle to ensure the new structures are translated into improved contributions to results. And to strengthen collaboration and coherence across UN operations in fragile contexts, there is clearly a need for a more systematic approach and for financing behaviour to change to incentivize a more integrated and cohesive approach.

### A. Countries in Special Situations

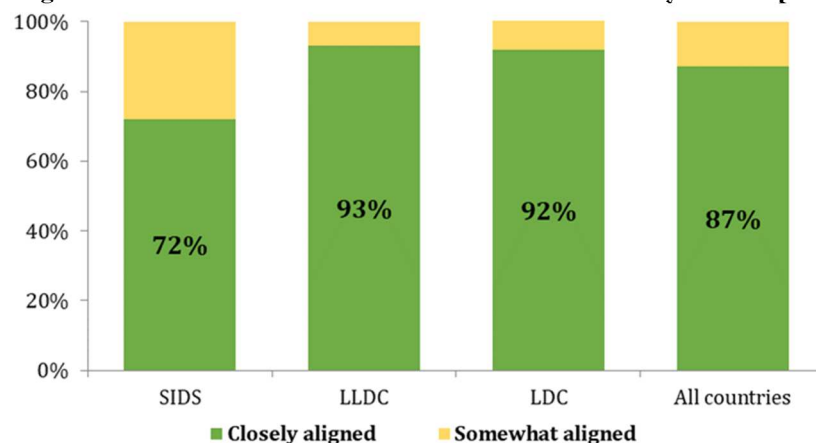
64. The ability of the UNDS to support the specific needs and priorities of countries in special situations as they pursue structural transformation will provide a strong indication of whether or not we are delivering on the promise of the reforms and the directions provided by the 2020 QCPR. Encouragingly, the results of the latest survey from DESA shows that we are moving in the right direction.
65. Of all groups, the Governments of LDCs and LLDCs have the highest positive assessment of relevance and alignment of UNDS efforts with national needs. As shown in figure XVIII, 94 per cent of LDCs and LLDCs consider that the UN has become more relevant to their country’s development needs in the past three years, compared with 91 per cent of all programme countries.

Figure XVIII  
**Change in the United Nations’ alignment with national needs over the past three years**



66. It is noteworthy, however, that only 72 per cent of SIDS Governments consider UN activities to be aligned with their country’s development needs and priorities (see figure XIX). Furthermore, only 17 per cent of SIDS report having received an annual results report from the resident coordinator and UNCT, compared to 47 per cent in all programme countries.

Figure XIX

**Alignment between the activities of the UN and the country's development needs and priorities**

67. With UNDS expenditures in programme countries increasing by over 40% over the past five years, it is encouraging to see increases by 83 per cent in LDCs, 54 per cent in SIDS, 32 per cent in LLDCs, and 32 per cent in Africa (see table 1). From a per capita perspective, LDCs and LLDCs have the highest per capita UNDS expenditures at \$15.51 and \$14.76, respectively, followed relatively closely by the SIDS at \$12.33 and Africa at \$10.26. Middle income countries (MICs) come far below at \$2.85 per capita.

Table 1

**Expenditures in country groups**

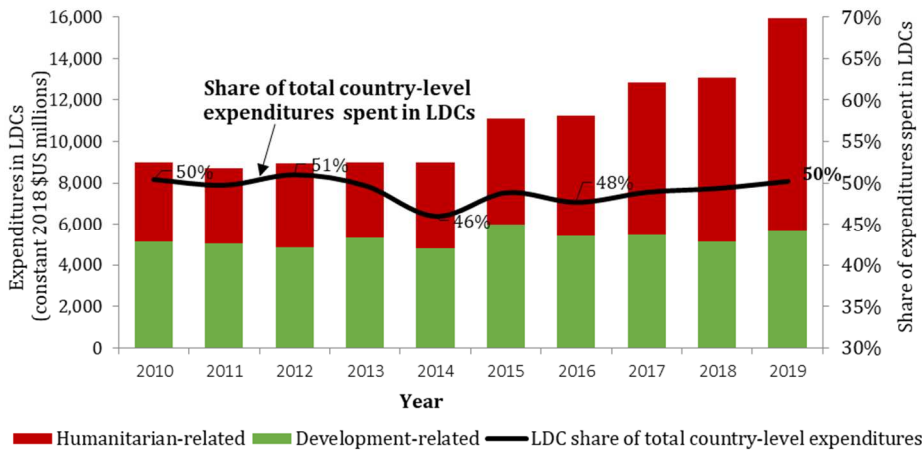
Country group	Number of countries	Total expenditure (USD million)	Average expenditure per country (USD million)		Five-year trend in expenditures (real terms)	Expenditure per capita
			2019	2014		
LDCs	47	15,656	333	185	+83%	\$15.51
LLDCs	32	7,511	235	182	+32%	\$14.76
SIDS	48	809	17	11	+54%	\$12.33
Africa	55	13,070	238	180	+32%	\$10.26
MICs	105	15,716	150	118	+26%	\$2.85
<b>All programme countries</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>30,448</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>+41%</b>	<b>\$4.84</b>

Note: The country groups in the table are not mutually exclusive.

68. While these trends are positive in and of themselves, the breakdown in funding between humanitarian and development assistance provides another perspective. Of the \$15.6 billion spent in LDCs in 2019, for instance, 64 per cent was for humanitarian assistance activities, while 36 per cent was spent on development activities (see figure XX). In fact, development-related expenditures in LDCs have essentially remained flat over the past decade. This underscores the urgency also for the UNDS to implement steps to prioritize allocation to LDCs as requested by the General Assembly.

Figure XX

**Expenditures in LDCs, 2010 to 2019**



69. For LDCs, the UNDS continues to promote achievement of the Istanbul Programme of Action and preparations for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, scheduled for January 2022, have been initiated. A report on UN system support to LDCs that includes best practices and recommendations to strengthen UN effectiveness in LDC contexts is being prepared and will inform future action. The UNDS has also stepped up support to the four countries scheduled to graduate during the current QCPR cycle,<sup>15</sup> through the Inter-Agency Task Force on Graduation coordinated by the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS). I have requested the High Representative to ensure that similar support is now provided to the five LDCs (Bangladesh, Kiribati, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Nepal and Tuvalu), that were recommended for graduation by the UN Committee for Development Policy in February 2021. Furthermore, the LDC Technology Bank continues to support activities in LDCs and serve as a knowledge hub that connects LDC science, technology and innovation needs, resources and actors. With 2020 contributions to the Bank (\$2 million) slightly less than those received in 2019 (\$2.12 million), increase capitalisation of the Bank is essential. While the world lauded the achievement of this first SDG target, and continues to acknowledge the role of the Technology Bank in supporting LDCs to leapfrog, where possible, to accelerate progress towards the SDGs, financial support is far from sufficient for the Bank to effectively discharge its mandate.
70. The UNDS also continues its support to implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), including by facilitating discussions among LLDCs and with other stakeholders on the roadmap for accelerated implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, adopted by the LLDCs Group in September 2020. Activities in 2020 included addressing COVID-19 challenges and a regional dialogue on strengthening transport connectivity in the context of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) region. The second UN Global Conference on Sustainable Transport, to take place in Beijing, China, in the coming period, provides an opportunity to catalyze investment in sustainable transport in LLDCs, particularly as countries seek to stimulate an employment-intensive, inclusive and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.
71. In 2020, the UN system supported the SIDS response to the COVID-19 pandemic and helped SIDS mainstream the SAMOA Pathway and SDGs into national development processes through inter-agency consultative group meetings and regional meetings for SIDS national focal points in Asia and the Pacific, the Caribbean and the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea (AIS) regions. Commenting on the UNDS COVID-19 socioeconomic response, the Governments of the SIDS were more positive compared to all programme countries on its comprehensiveness and effectiveness, but less positive on its coherence and timeliness. Further detail as to the strengthening of the UNDS support to SIDS is included in sections B and C that follow on Multi-Country Offices and leveraging the regional value of the UNDS.

<sup>15</sup> Bhutan (2023), Angola (2024), Sao Tome and Principe (2024), Solomon Islands (2024). Vanuatu graduated in December 2020 and received support from UNDS. It is also included in the 2019 funding data presented in this section.

72. The COVID-19 pandemic emerged at a time when prospects for many African countries looked encouraging, with economic growth projected to rise from 2.9 per cent in 2019 to 3.5 per cent in 2021<sup>16</sup> and important gains registered on poverty eradication and health indicators. However, prolonged under-investment in the health sector and existing economic inequalities made Africa particularly vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19. UNDS engagement in Africa continues to be firmly anchored in the United Nations-African Union Joint Framework for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, and accounts for 42 per cent of total country-level expenditures (an increase from 40 per cent in 2015). As part of its response, the UNDS launched the Africa UN Knowledge Hub for COVID-19 to deliver a quick, efficient and coordinated response to the pandemic. This hub needs to be sustained, strengthened and updated so it can be transformed into a key tool to track the pandemic's impact in Africa and provide an interactive and participative platform for collaboration on pandemic response and broader issues for the continent's development agenda.
73. The UN is increasing attention to the specific needs of MICs, home to 75 per cent of the world's population and more than 60 per cent of the world's poor. The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced yet again the extreme vulnerability of some MICs to shocks, given their overdependence on primary commodity exports, the volatility of exchange rates and capital flows, rising inequality and weaknesses in social protection systems. Many MICs are also grappling with external challenges, in particular climate change and, for some particularly vulnerable countries, access to external finance. The COVID-19 pandemic is also expected to result in further increases in debt in MICs, placing additional burdens on them.
74. Over the past year, together with the Heads of Government of Canada and Jamaica, I have led a sustained effort aimed at mobilizing a global response to the COVID-19 crisis that would ensure that all developing countries have the fiscal space and financial support needed to protect development gains and enable a strong recovery and foundation for accelerated SDG implementation over the remainder of the Decade of Action. Progress has been made in some areas, including the extension of the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), the creation of the Common Framework (CF) for Debt Treatments, and the potential issuance of a new round of Special Drawing Rights of \$650 billion by the IMF. But more is needed to provide support to the most vulnerable, including many vulnerable middle-income countries who are excluded from these initiatives. In this regard, I will continue to urge decision-makers to take more ambitious action on debt relief and liquidity, including by expanding the DSSI and Common Framework to include vulnerable middle-income countries, reallocating unused SDRs to ensure liquidity reaches those who need it most, bringing private creditors to the table, and undertaking a reform of the international debt architecture to end the infernal cycle of debt waves, debt crises, and lost decades of development.
75. The COVID-19 crisis has further underscored the opportunity cost of maintaining gross domestic product (GDP) per capita as the key measure of development success, given its blindness to climate factors, biodiversity loss, pollution, gender inequality and vulnerability. Several country groups, individual Member States, civil society organizations and academics have long advocated to move beyond GDP in national and global metrics of progress. Towards this end, in 2021, and building on the pioneering work of UNDP,<sup>17</sup> the UN Statistical Commission and others, UNSDG will start paving a path forward by analyzing the implications of going beyond GDP as a measure of economic and social progress. In contribution to these efforts, options for a Multi-Dimensional Vulnerability Index have been developed under the lead of Resident Coordinators in MCOs and SIDS, in collaboration with DESA and OHRLLS, and in consultation with all affected Member States as well as donors. The Index will realize the long-standing ask in the SAMOA Pathway by providing a methodology for redefining eligibility to financing for sustainable development in small island developing states and to finding solutions for long-term debt sustainability. I will present my recommendations for the index to the General Assembly over the course of its 76th session, in response to the mandate in resolution 75/215.
76. It is also essential that we accelerate our offer in countries in special situations, on climate action, sustainable energy and the just transition – as outlined in greater detail in Chapter V.

<sup>16</sup> World Economic Situation and Prospects 2020, UN DESA, 13 May 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Human Development Report 2019



## **B. Operationalizing the multi-country office reviews**

77. Following the 2020 ECOSOC Segment on Operational Activities for Development, the General Assembly endorsed a number of recommendations that I put forward for the UNDS to step up its collective and individual offer to countries and territories serviced by multi-country offices. The UNSDG and DCO then took swift action to support their roll-out. Considerable progress was made in just a few months, both by realizing some important achievements and setting the foundations for longer-term improvements. I will continue to ensure that momentum and ambition remain high to meet the expectations of MCO-serviced countries, particularly SIDS.

### **1. More tailored support**

78. Efforts are underway to ensure programmatic and policy support is more tailored to countries and territories serviced by multi-country offices, drawing on the scaled-up support of the Resident Coordinator system and the full assets of the United Nations development system.

79. In 2020, the UNDS developed response plans to support countries as they confronted the health and socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. In the Eastern Caribbean, for example, a multisectoral response plan to COVID-19 aimed to support ongoing advocacy for differential treatment based on the vulnerability of island nations, helping to yield \$23.8 million, or 80% of resources requested to address the immediate health and socioeconomic needs of these countries.

80. While the UN Pacific Strategy runs until 2022, the development of the new Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for the Caribbean is on track, based on a strong multi-country common country analysis, and will be finalized when the current Development Framework expires at the end of 2021. In addition, in line with my commitment, over the past year, Resident Coordinators led the development of individual implementation plans for all countries and territories in the Pacific, and plans for the Caribbean countries and territories will be completed by May 2021. The UNDS has fully engaged in the development of these plans to tailor objectives to the specific needs of all countries and territories in MCOs.

81. Various entities of the UNDS have developed new or updated offers and programmes for small island developing states. For, example, “*Rising Up for SIDS*” sets out UNDP’s offer of support in three key pillars – climate action, blue economy, and digital transformation, all grounded in support for financing for development. FAO’s “Hand-in-Hand Initiative” aims to accelerate agri-food systems transformation and sustainable rural development in the most vulnerable countries, including SIDS. In 2020, the International Trade Commission launched a five-point action plan to support trade-related capacity in SIDS, while UNIDO developed a SIDS strategy in 2019. A number of entities, including IOM, DESA, UN Women, UNDRR, UNESCO and UNFPA, have all committed to updating or developing new policy offers for small island developing states in 2021. I commend UN entities for their actions in this area.

82. To ensure MCOs can draw more efficiently on all UNDS expertise and capacities, including those not physically present in country, I am committed to ensure that the roll-out of the MCO and regional reviews continue to intersect and proceed in tandem, with strong joint leadership of the regional economic and social commissions and regional offices of agencies, funds and programmes, through the Regional Collaborative Platforms.

### **2. Enhancing physical presence**

83. Under the leadership of Resident Coordinators, outposted Coordination Officers are now in place in the Bahamas, Dominica, Grenada, Palau, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Regional Coordination Specialists were also hired and deployed to Fiji and Barbados to strengthen regional support and relationships with regional and sub-regional intergovernmental entities. In addition, an agreement was reached with the government of the territory of the British Virgin Islands to fully fund one Coordination Officer on their territory, setting an important example for others.

84. A number of entities have taken concrete steps to strengthen or increase their expertise on the ground, and to strengthen delegation of authority to staff at country level. For example, UNICEF has upgraded and added new field office staff in both Federated States of Micronesia and Kiribati in support of the increased UN presence in the North Pacific, as well as upgrading and adding staff in Samoa and Trinidad and Tobago. UNDP has added posts in the Caribbean and the Pacific with a climate, environment and energy focus. It will also expand its Economist Network by adding and deploying national economists, including in Mauritius. IOM has built on its existing operational presence in 15 countries in the Caribbean and Pacific with new presence in Grenada and the Bahamas. WFP opened a Caribbean office in Barbados in 2018, and now has personnel in Dominica, Guyana, Jamaica and Saint Lucia as of March 2021.
85. The establishment of a new multi-country office in the North Pacific Office is on track, hosted in the Federated States of Micronesia. A dialogue is ongoing with the government on immediate and long-term arrangements for the premises of the new UN office, including common premises in a new UN House. The Resident Coordinator is expected to be in place by mid-year, and the head of office has now been recruited. Other RCO staff will be recruited following the onboarding of the Resident Coordinator.
86. Funding in the amount of \$25,000 per every MCO-serviced country/territory outside the hub was disbursed in 2020 to enhance coordination support and allotments have been made in the 2021 budget allocations of the RC system SPTF, in addition to the funding base allocation to enable stronger coordination across countries and territories. In line with my commitment, no resources were diverted from one region to another to make this possible. All multi-country offices received the same allocation base from the SPTF, with funding only varying according to the number of countries and territories covered.

### **3. Improved policy support for financing for development**

87. Eighteen SIDS are already receiving assistance to develop Integrated National Financing Frameworks to finance national development priorities and the SDGs, including through the multi-country offices in Barbados, Fiji, and Samoa. Furthermore, a design concept for an Innovative Finance Design Facility to respond to the financing needs of SIDS, under UNDP's technical leadership, is also taking shape.
88. The Joint SDG Fund has also approved a dedicated investment for small island developing states, as I had recommended. Through a 'call for proposals' for SIDS, valued at over \$30 million, dedicated interventions can be made to address SIDS vulnerabilities. These resources will complement nearly USD25 million already allocated through the 'leaving no-one behind' and 'SDG financing' portfolios of the Joint SDG Fund for countries covered by multi-country offices. Additional pooled funding has been made available in multi-country settings from the Spotlight initiative, the Peacebuilding Fund, the Global Fund for Coral Reefs and other mechanisms. I commend those who have already stepped forward, including to promote joint programming through other pooled funding channels, such as the first multi-country pooled fund in the Pacific. I count on the solidarity of the international community to further enhance financial support to these countries.

### **4. Strengthening national data systems, data collection and use**

89. The UNSDG task team on data and reporting has commenced a dedicated workstream to move from a supply-driven to needs-driven approach to data and statistics in countries and territories covered by multi-country offices. Individual entities are also taking dedicated actions. ECLAC is already addressing legislative and capacity constraint challenges that constitute main obstacles to the collection, dissemination, and use of disaggregated data in the Caribbean, and has committed to promote a coordinated approach to the production of official statistics. ESCAP is scaling up support for data collection and use to Pacific countries for SDG progress monitoring, as well as integrating statistical work into national planning and policy making. UNICEF has enhanced support for the Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (MICS) in the Caribbean, including Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos, St Lucia, and Montserrat. In the Pacific, these surveys have been completed in Kiribati, Samoa and Tonga, are underway for Tuvalu and Fiji, and commencing in 2021 for Nauru, Vanuatu and Federated States of Micronesia. IOM is also working to enhance the availability and facilitate use of data and analysis on migration and mobility in countries and territories serviced by MCOs, including through targeted capacity development support.

## **5. Facilitating participation in intergovernmental fora and processes**

90. Various UN entities such as OHRLLS, UNDESA, OHCHR, UNEP and UNESCO continue to provide funding, policy and technical support towards integration and participation of States serviced by multi-country offices in a number of intergovernmental fora and processes.
91. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, and the move to virtual meetings globally, this has opened up new possibilities for enhanced and more regular engagement by national governments of SIDS and other countries and partners in regional and global processes via information and communications technology. This is also the case for the engagement between MCOs and the countries and territories they support. I urge Member States to work with UN entities to explore ways to expand such opportunities in the future.

## **6. Fostering South-South Cooperation**

92. Through efforts spearheaded by the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation, the UNDS has identified a package of concrete deliverables to collectively operationalize the Strategy and Action Plan for South-South Cooperation in countries and territories supported by multi-country offices. South-South Cooperation and triangular cooperation (SSTC) will be mainstreamed in entities strategic frameworks at global and regional levels and institutional, human and technical capacities for SSTC, as well as support for multi-stakeholder partnerships, in MCOs will be strengthened. This will build on individual entity and multi-entity commitments and initiatives, such as the Partnership on Action for Green Economy (UNEP, ILO, UNITAR, UNIDO, and UNDP).

### **The way forward**

93. Overall, I am encouraged by the commitment shown and actions taken to enhance the substantive and coordination offer to multi-country offices over the last year. In a particularly challenging period, country teams and a number of entities at regional and headquarter levels have stepped up in multi-country settings. We have laid solid foundations, but to ensure strong and tailored advice and support towards national priorities and needs, especially in a context of deeper financial and debt challenges, we will work with all UN entities to maximise the impact of our work on the ground. In particular, greater attention will be placed on mobilizing the tailored UN response that is needed, strengthening coordination within MCOs, finding ways to expand fiscal space, and responding to the unique situation of small island developing states.

## **C. Leveraging the regional value of the United Nations for country, subregional and regional support**

94. The ability to connect regional assets to support country level actions and tackle cross-border issues to respond to the pandemic and accelerate implementation remains at the core of a repositioned UN development system. Over the past year, pursuant to ECOSOC resolution 2020/23 and General Assembly 74/297, we have made significant progress in the five key areas that I identified for the regional review – transitioning the previous UNDS regional coordination mechanisms into the new Regional Collaborative Platforms (RCP), establishing Issue Based Coalitions (IBCs), rolling out Knowledge Hubs, in improving results reports, strengthening data systems and advancing efficiency efforts. We have also seen the UNDS in all regions swiftly mobilize its collective expertise to assist countries in responding to the pandemic.
95. These key first steps provide us with new momentum. It is essential that we build on this to address the ongoing difficulties that many governments still report in effectively accessing regional capacities and to deliver on the longer-term reprofiling and repositioning of the UNDS at the regional level.

1. **Progress in operationalizing a strengthened regional architecture of the UN development system**

96. All regions transitioned previous coordination mechanisms into the new RCPs, effective 1 December 2020. Each RCP has developed its workplan for 2021, devised the set-up of the regional collaboration architecture and put in place its Joint Secretariat, within the parameters of common working arrangements that ensure consistency across regions. The first annual RCP meetings chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General were held over the course of March 2021,<sup>18</sup> identifying areas in which regional assets can best be utilized in support of the country-level action.
97. **Issue-based coalitions**, as one of the main vehicles of the substantive work of the RCPs, rally UN system-wide expertise in an agile manner to respond to changing regional and country needs. They are demand-driven and results-oriented, avoiding both siloed approaches and overlaps. While IBCs are of course region-specific, climate action, resilience and human mobility have emerged as priority issues in all regions (see figure XXI). The substantive focus of other coalitions is unique to their regions. In Africa, an IBC on sub-regional initiatives is under consideration. In Latin America and the Caribbean, an additional IBC on financing for development has been proposed. In 2021, IBCs will play a critical role in supporting the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, while enabling accelerated action on the 2030 Agenda as countries strive to recover better. RCPs will continue to engage with Resident Coordinators and UNCTs to seek feedback on the support provided, and engage Member States to ensure that IBCs respond to national needs and priorities.

Figure XXI  
Current Issue-based Coalitions (IBC)



98. Effectively pooling policy expertise is **vital** for enhanced support to the country-level. All regions have made good progress in establishing **Knowledge Management Hubs**. Knowledge Hubs for Latin America and the Caribbean and for Asia-Pacific have been launched. In Arab States, all functions of the ‘Manara’ knowledge

<sup>18</sup> Africa (2 March), Europe and Central Asia (12 March), Latin America and the Caribbean (15 March), Asia-Pacific (23 March) and Arab States (26 March), back-to-back with the Regional Forums on Sustainable Development.

platform are expected to become gradually available throughout the year. The launch of the Africa Knowledge Management Hub is planned towards the end of 2021. The RCP Europe and Central Asia is collaborating with ESCWA to adapt its platform for use in the Europe and Central Asia region.

99. A wealth of knowledge products is available through these platforms to foster evidence-based SDG solutions. However, further action is needed to ensure policy expertise is effectively leveraged through communities of practice, and that integrated policy support is readily available. The harmonization of common elements and greater efforts relating to interoperability across regional platforms will support this shift. Such additional steps are clearly needed. While almost 70% of countries in 2020 found it easy or very easy to access expertise from UNDS regional offices (see figure XXII) and 72% consider regional offices' support to be effective or very effective, nearly 20% of countries that find regional support difficult to access, and the 14% of countries that responded that they have received no support or that support was ineffective.

Figure XXII  
Access to and support from regional offices of the UN development system

	Response distribution			Trend in target response	
	% , 2020			%	
	Easy or very easy	Difficult or very difficult	Don't know	2019	2020
In general, how easy is it to access expertise from the regional offices of UN development system entities?	68	19	13	54	68
How effective has been the support by regional offices of the United Nations in providing support on the highest priority regional/sub-regional issues of relevance to the country:	72	14	15	n.d	72

100. In line with the commitment to **enhance transparency and results-based management**, the UNDS in all regions prepared a transitional report on the results achieved at the regional level in 2020, capturing the activities under previous coordination mechanisms. In 2022, the RCPs will present their first reports on collective achievements and joint system-wide impacts at the regional level that contributed to the advancement of the 2030 Agenda.
101. Work is also ongoing, under the leadership of the Regional Commissions working with other UNDS entities in the region and UN DESA at the global level, to **consolidate existing capacities with regards to data and statistics**. In 2021, all RCPs will continue to connect various data platforms hosted by UN development system entities in the region to create a one-stop shop for accessing the regional data ecosystem for the SDGs.
102. To increase **regional efficiencies in business operations**, Regional Operations Management Teams (R-OMTs) have been established in all regions and have developed their 2021 workplans. R-OMTs are focusing on developing and implementing Regional Business Operations Strategies, together with the Development Coordination Office. The mapping of regional operational supply and demand and matching such demands to the existing operational infrastructure is expected to yield both cost and quality improvements in the provision of regional operational services. R-OMTs also support the rollout and implementation of efficiency efforts at the regional level and the operationalization of efficiency enablers in the region, including mutual recognition.

## 2. The specificity of each region: an overview of the region-by-region progress

103. In **Africa**, the regional UNDS worked collaboratively to mount a joint response to COVID-19 in the Emergency Regional Action Plan on COVID-19, under which regional UN entities delivered in areas such as procurement to improve coordination amidst limited global stocks and weak supply chains. Regional UNDS mounted a regional COVID-19 Knowledge Management Hub, offering system-wide resources in support of combatting the pandemic. An Africa Knowledge Management Hub will be launched by the end of 2021; and the IBC on *Strengthened Integrated Data and Statistical Systems* will focus on developing the 'Africa UN Development

Data Gateway’ during the course of 2021 to effectively monitor progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. Work on an Africa UN Data and Statistics Strategy is also ongoing to guide and harmonize UN support on Data in Africa.

104. The seven IBCs identified in the region are closely aligned with priorities of the African Union, and in addition to data and statistical systems mentioned, focus on macroeconomic management and economic transformation; harnessing demographic dividends through investments in youth and women’s empowerment; leveraging new technologies and enabling digital transitions; climate action; peace, security, and the respect of human rights; as well as forced displacement and migration. The creation of an additional IBC on subregional initiatives is being considered. A Task Team has been formed to further review the legacy structures in the region to determine their relevance and potential accommodation within the new RCP structure. Institutionalizing these efforts for coordinated support will be critical for the Africa RCP to effectively support countries to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and chart the way towards sustainable development.
105. In the **Arab States** region, the RCP and its eight IBCs will provide support to regional priorities, including adolescents and youth empowerment and inclusion; the nexus between humanitarian and development activities; migration; macro-economic management and social protection; gender justice and equality; food security, climate action and the environment; quality social services; and urbanization. Feedback received from Resident Coordinators and Member States is currently being incorporated into the IBC workplans to ensure coalitions are demand-driven and task-bound. The Arab States IBCs contributed to the COVID-19 health response providing, among others, capacity building for Governments and UNCTs on digital health and innovation and supporting assessments of the impacts on reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health-care services.
106. Work is advancing on the ‘Manara’ platform, intended to be a one-stop shop for all knowledge and data from UN sources, Member States and other development actors to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Manara will be accessible to UNCTs and Member States, and includes several tools in Arabic and English, such as the Arab SDG Gateway and a comprehensive platform for data and statistics for the Arab region, based on nationally-sourced data and data from UN custodian agencies, complemented by estimates for the most recent time periods and ‘big data’. Manara will also include a set of knowledge products, a regional UN development system e-learning platform, a common UNDS online Arab Geospatial Data Hub and a set of policy simulation tools, based on various economic models.
107. The RCP **Asia-Pacific**, in its first months of existence, helped bring together entities of the regional UNDS in support of gender-responsive and human-rights centred COVID-19 assessments and response plans, new regional dialogues around climate action and data for the SDGs, and coherent policy messages on strengthening social protection, people mobility and disaster risk reduction. The five IBCs focussed on a more coordinated and targeted response by the UNDS at the regional level on key priority areas. Through the Human Rights, Gender Equality and Women Empowerment IBC, for example, WHO, UNFPA and UNICEF developed strategic and operational guidance for governments and other partners in South East Asia to address service gaps and ensure the continuity of sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health services during the pandemic. Dedicated dialogues with groups of RCs in Asia and the Pacific have been organized to better match the regional expertise and offer of support with country-level demands. Targeted support to Member States, Resident Coordinators and UNCTs in these areas are helping to lay a strong foundation for recovering better from the pandemic and accelerating action on the 2030 Agenda.
108. The RCP is also supported by groups addressing means of implementation, including on SDG Data and Statistics, Knowledge Management and System-wide Reporting, as well as the Regional Operations Management Team. As in other regions, the Peer Support Group, chaired by the regional presence of DCO provides country support. Drawing on the existing SDG Helpdesk developed by ESCAP, the Asia-Pacific Knowledge Management Hub was officially launched in March 2021 and facilitates access of Member States and UNCTs to knowledge resources, communities of practice and expertise across the UN development system. Work is ongoing to create a network of expertise and to further develop the Hub into a self-sustaining and dynamic space. The Asia-Pacific SDG Gateway is also fully operational, providing consolidated data on SDG progress at the regional level and feeding into the UN DESA global SDG indicator database. The SDG Data

and Statistics Group also provides technical and data support to Resident Coordinators and UNCTs, including in the COVID-19 context.

109. As most of the collaborative work in **Europe and Central Asia** was ongoing before it was codified in IBCs following ECOSOC resolution 2020/23, Regional Directors conducted a review of the functionality of pre-existing IBCs in 2020. The review revealed a strong consensus on IBC priority areas, based on past results and emerging regional and country needs. A management response plan was developed for the implementation of the review recommendations, which is expected to result in a clearer support offer and exit strategies to strengthen the focus of IBCs on concrete tasks. A Member State consultation on the IBCs was organized with the UNECE Executive Committee on 12 February 2021.
110. A regional knowledge management hub is being developed with focus on knowledge products such as publications, reports or guidelines and expertise of UN staff in the regions, including a Russian language version. The IBCs are expected to identify staff members or relevant experts available for support as part of their menu of services, which will be offered to Resident Coordinators and UNCTs. Other regional interagency coordination groups created under the RCP umbrella include the Digital Transformation Group and a Data and Statistics group. The latter includes statistics focal points of the UNCTs in the region and UN ESCAP, connects with the global statistical community, so that policy makers in the region have better access to data and statistics.
111. In 2020, the UN development system in **Latin America and the Caribbean** mobilized its assets and expertise to support Member States on the immediate health and socio-economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including assistance in the scaling up of health systems to provide coverage and quality services, increasing measures to address gender-based violence, expanding socio-economic emergency measures to reach the most vulnerable, and working with authorities to facilitate distance learning and the safe reopening of schools. To better match the regional expertise and IBC support offer with country-level demands, the RCP Latin America and the Caribbean organized consultations with Resident Coordinators and Member States in the region. As a result, a sixth IBC on financing for development is proposed to be established in 2021. Youth and gender equality and empowerment of women and girls are included as cross-cutting priorities in the regional policy work. IBC roles will be fostered to generate tangible country-level results by bringing technical support to Resident Coordinators and UNCTs in the specific thematic areas. Moreover, the RCP will facilitate joint actions to address gaps in SDG implementation.
112. The RCP is also supported by the Knowledge Management Hub Steering Committee, the SDG Data and Statistics Group, the Peer Support Group, the R-OMT and a regional Partnerships and Communications Group. The SDG Gateway is a reference entry point for all information on the 2030 Agenda in the region and facilitates the monitoring and statistical follow-up of progress towards the SDGs at the regional and country levels. The regional group on SDG Data and Statistics conducted a mapping of UN expertise and technical assistance accessible to Member States through the SDG Gateway. The mapping also served to update the regional self-assessment tool to diagnose capacity to produce SDG indicators, which will be shared with national statistical offices and systems of countries of the region in 2021.

### 3. Leveraging the strengthened regional architecture in the Decade of Action

113. 2020 was a period of transition into a new regional architecture, while facing an historic pandemic that exposed structural challenges to sustainable development across all regions. There is a need to accelerate the implementation of the five transformative areas outlined above. The new Regional Collaborative Platforms and their Issue-based coalitions, effective pooling of expertise at the service of Resident Coordinators and UNCTs and through them to Member States, reporting on results achieved, the consolidation of data and statistics and efficient business operations, are key components of a better support offer of the UNDS at the regional level.
114. I count on UN entities to further strengthen collaboration and support modalities under the RCP umbrella, and to do so in a transparent manner. As we consolidate the new regional architecture, I expect the RCPs to move their focus from process to substance, measuring impact and reporting on results in line with regional priorities and specificities. In doing so, it is crucial that we place greater attention on tackling cross border challenges, on strengthening collaboration across peace, development and humanitarian operations, and that we identify

ways to strengthen the availability of surge capacities when circumstances require. I remain committed to continue to ensure a consultative implementation process for Member States.

#### **D. Enhancing cooperation, collaboration and coordination across humanitarian, development and peace actions**

115. Today, some 77 per cent of the world's extreme poor live in fragile contexts. If we are to achieve the 2030 Agenda, we need to end conflicts and violence and address the underlying development deficits and climate vulnerabilities that contribute to fragility. Enhanced cooperation, collaboration and coordination across humanitarian, development and peace actions, as called for in the 2020 QCPR, are essential for the UNDS to fulfil its role in this regard.
116. Over the past year, we have seen strong efforts to enhance cross-pillar collaboration in joint analysis, identification of strategic priorities, and joint planning and programming. We have made progress in translating mandates into field-level guidance across the UN pillars. This includes the Cooperation Framework companion piece in the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Light Guidance on Collective Outcomes, and the UNSDG Guidance on Conflict Sensitivity, Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace. System-wide, UN entities are supporting RC offices to better link humanitarian, development and peace action. UNEP, for instance, is working closely with RC offices and UN missions to ensure they have access to environmental analysis to better identify opportunities for environmental action in peacebuilding. In Haiti and other countries, UN entities are working together to provide shared technical support to RC offices to support a joined-up approach across humanitarian-development-peace actions. This work will continue throughout 2021 and inform the upcoming round of Cooperation Frameworks with lessons and analyzes on humanitarian issues, preparedness, risk reduction, and addressing the root causes of crises.
117. The Joint Steering Committee to advance Humanitarian and Development Collaboration (JSC) is proving an increasingly effective platform to connect key humanitarian, development and peace actors and to more effectively tackle vulnerabilities and risks in eight priority countries – Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan. The JSC advocated effectively for linkages between the socioeconomic and humanitarian responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. As per the 2020 QCPR mandate, information on JSC work will now be regularly disseminated to Member States. We have also seen several joint initiatives to promote work across the humanitarian-development-peace continuum. For instance, WFP and UNHCR launched the Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub to help their country and regional offices operationalize global commitments, target data sharing and accountability to affected people, and strengthen joint programming. I commend the leadership of the Co-Chairs of the JSC and count on the continued commitment to maximizing the committee's impact.
118. On the ground, indications suggest that these efforts are beginning to pay off. According to the DESA survey, 76 per cent of programme country Governments agreed that in 2020 resident coordinators contributed to building stronger synergies across development, humanitarian, and/or peacebuilding interventions. Furthermore, 77 per cent of Governments responded that the UN system currently works together more collaboratively than before the repositioning exercise began, compared to 70 per cent the previous year. UN entities indicate some similarly positive trends, with 81 per cent of UN entities reported to have been involved in identifying collective outcomes across development, humanitarian and peacebuilding interventions in 2020 as opposed to 75 per cent in 2019.
119. Nonetheless, challenges remain. Several UNDS entities reported some form of difficulty in cross-pillar collaboration in emergency and crisis settings (see table 2).



Table 2

**Regarding ongoing work to bridge humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities, please assess the level of difficulties with each of the following aspects:**

Answer choices	Very Difficult/ Difficult		Minor problem		Not at all a problem		Don't know	
	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count
<i>Jointly developed &amp; risk-informed analysis</i>	38.8%	7	33.3%	6	22.2%	4	5.5%	1
<i>Joined-up planning and programming</i>	50%	9	27.7%	5	16.6%	3	5.5%	1
<i>Assessing impact</i>	55.5%	10	22.2%	4	11.1%	2	11.1%	2
<i>Ensuring appropriate financing</i>	72.2%	13	11.1%	2	5.5%	1	11.1%	2
<i>Monitoring and implementation</i>	55.5%	10	5.5%	1	22.2%	4	16.6%	3

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020 survey of United Nations development system headquarters.

120. In terms of joint planning, a major handicap reported by UNDS entities is the lack of a clear definition of what ‘collective outcomes’ are and how they should be featured in current planning tools, such as the Cooperation Framework, the Humanitarian Response Plan, and the Integrated Strategic Framework. They also noted that joint programme design remains aspirational, as organizations try to retrofit current work to reach collective outcomes rather than first identifying collective outcomes that then result in co-created programmes. The lack of data sharing between UN entities, resulting from complex legal and privacy concerns, and lack of data interoperability are additional obstacles to cooperation across the humanitarian-development-peace interface.
121. UNDS entities noted that a more systematic approach is required to ensure a whole-of-system response. At present, coordination efforts vary largely from one context to another, often depending on the goodwill, capacity of personnel and other circumstances in-country. They recommended that joint capacity development initiatives focus on building better understanding of the different principles, tools, and approaches applied to humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts.
122. The challenge most frequently reported (13 out of 18) continues to be ensuring appropriate financing, and addressing donors’ siloed approach to funding channels for humanitarian, development and peace actions that stands in the way of an effective whole-of-system response. To address this issue, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee has developed a catalogue of quality funding practices for humanitarian response as a reference tool for policymakers and practitioners. Furthermore, according to UN-Women, only 1.7 per cent of humanitarian programming targets gender equality and women’s empowerment and 2 per cent of all aid to peace and security in fragile states and economies target gender equality as a principal objective. A Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action Compact is being developed as an output of the Beijing+25 Gender Equality Forum to provide a clear picture of where gaps exist and what actions are needed to adequately address them.
123. Moving forward, I will continue to encourage UN entities to strengthen the practical impact of our work aimed at enhancing cooperation, collaboration and coordination between humanitarian, development and peace actions, in particular by addressing issues around collective outcomes and joint programming and by building greater understanding of the different principles, tools, and approaches.
124. In addition, I call on Member States to continue to support a whole-of-system response by adjusting funding practices and by leveraging the High-level meeting of the General Assembly on peacebuilding financing scheduled at its seventy-sixth session in 2022, to build momentum for adequate, predictable, sustained financing for activities that promote peacebuilding through coherent development, humanitarian and peace approaches. I also encourage the continued practise of the including coordination of humanitarian-development-peace efforts on the agenda of the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council to enable further progress on strengthening efforts in this area.

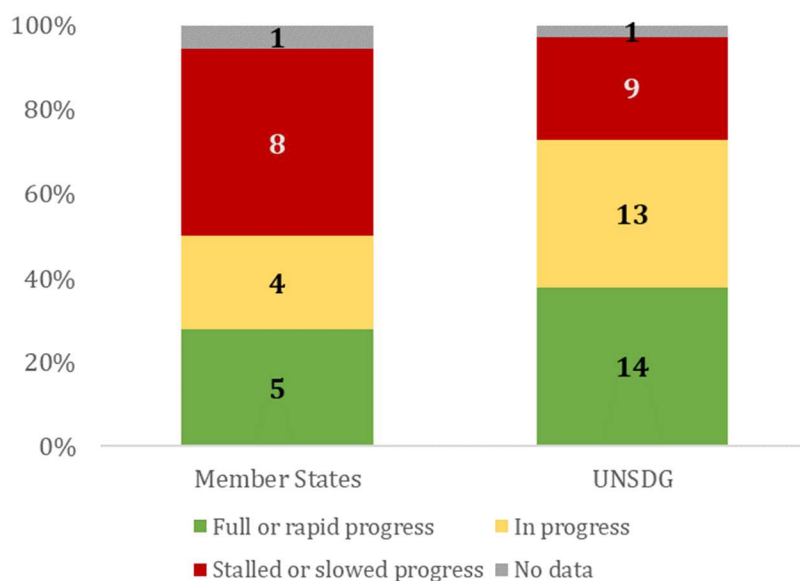
#### **IV. Funding, transparency, accountability and oversight of the UNDS**

125. The UNDS repositioning exercise recognized that securing a transformative shift in the way that the UNDS system is funded is fundamental to facilitating coherent, coordinated, efficient and integrated functioning. In this regard, the 2020 QCPR welcomes the Funding Compact<sup>19</sup> and encourages its full and effective implementation. It stresses that core resources remain the bedrock of operational activities for development, while it recognizes also the need for adequate quantity and quality of voluntary funding. Two years into Funding Compact implementation, progress is being made, but not as rapidly as is required.
126. While progress is being made on meeting targets on overall core resources for development and on inter-agency pooled funds (up from 5% to 9%), concerns remain regarding the slow rate of increase in the share of voluntary funding for development-related activities (from 19.4% in 2017 to 19.6% in 2019); the undercapitalization of the Joint SDG Fund (currently at 15% of the 2020 target), the overreliance on a small number of contributors and the shortfall in funding for the RC system.
127. On the part of the UNDS, maximizing support to countries implementing the 2030 Agenda and advancing the Funding Compact demands a strong results culture, grounded in robust evaluation and reporting and proper alignment of individual and collective planning. In 2020, the UNDS continued to invest in more consistent reporting at all levels, building a resilient information architecture, designing system-wide management and accountability frameworks, and accelerating the pace at which we are realizing efficiency gains (see chapter II C.). Further progress is needed, however, to strengthen transparency through better results-based management, stronger system-wide data capabilities, system-wide evaluations, and enhanced coherence among governing bodies and UNDS entities. 2021 also provides opportunities to further bolster ECOSOC as an accountability platform.

### A. Strengthening implementation of the Funding Compact

128. The Funding Compact is a key driver of accountability. A mixed picture, however, emerges from the data on implementing commitments. Based on the latest data (2020 funding data is not yet available), there has been some progress on 50 per cent of Member States commitments and 73 per cent of UNSDG commitments (see figure XXIII).

Figure XXIII  
Progress on Funding Compact commitments



<sup>19</sup> The table with all Funding Compact indicators is included in annex II.

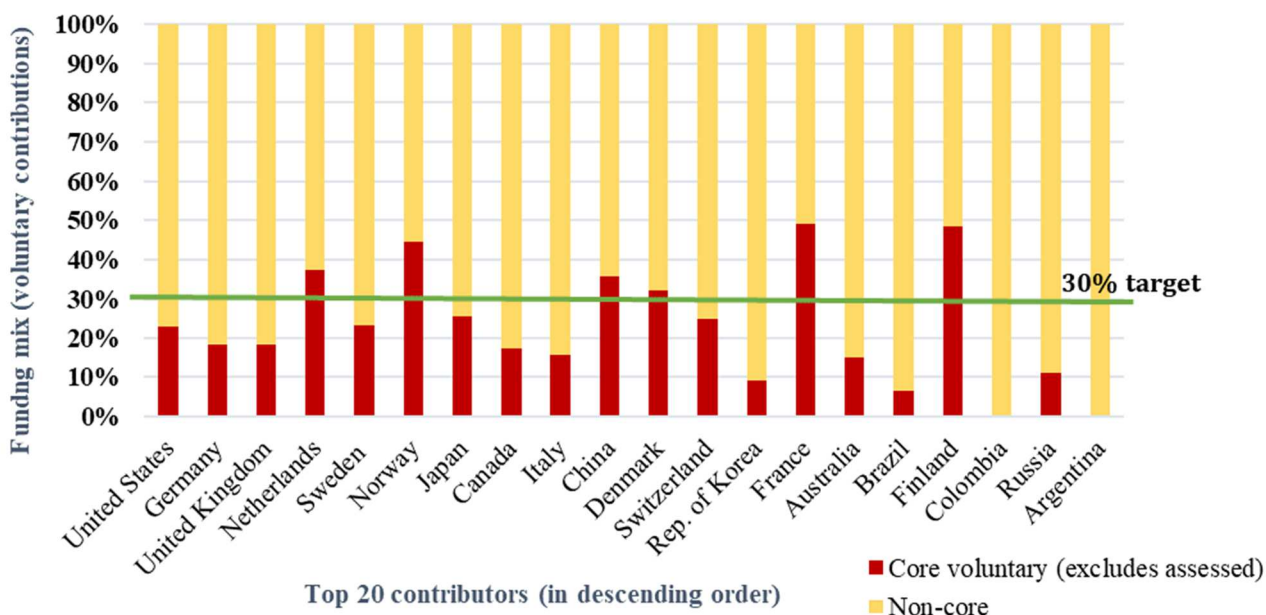
129. In 2019, Member States' financial contributions to UN operational activities for development totalled \$38.1 billion. A little over half or \$19.6 billion in contributions were spent on humanitarian assistance while \$18.5 billion funded development assistance activities. Of these \$18.5 billion, \$5.5 billion were in core (unearmarked) funding for development activities, or 29.6 per cent of total funding for development-related activities, just below the 30 per cent Funding Compact target (see table 3). However, when considering only voluntary (versus assessed) funding, the share drops to 19.6 per cent.

Table 3  
**Funding Compact: Member States commitment 1**

<b>To increase core resources for the UN development system</b>				
<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Target</i>	<i>Latest value</i>	<i>Trend</i>
MS. 1.1. Core share of voluntary funding for development-related activities	19.4% (2017)	30% (2023)	19.6% (2019)	
MS 1.2. Core share of funding for development-related activities (including assessed contributions)	27.0% (2017)	30% (2023)	29.6% (2019)	

130. Sixty-seven Member States provided at least 30 per cent of their voluntary funding to development activities in the form of core resources, including six of the top 20 contributors (see figure XXIV).

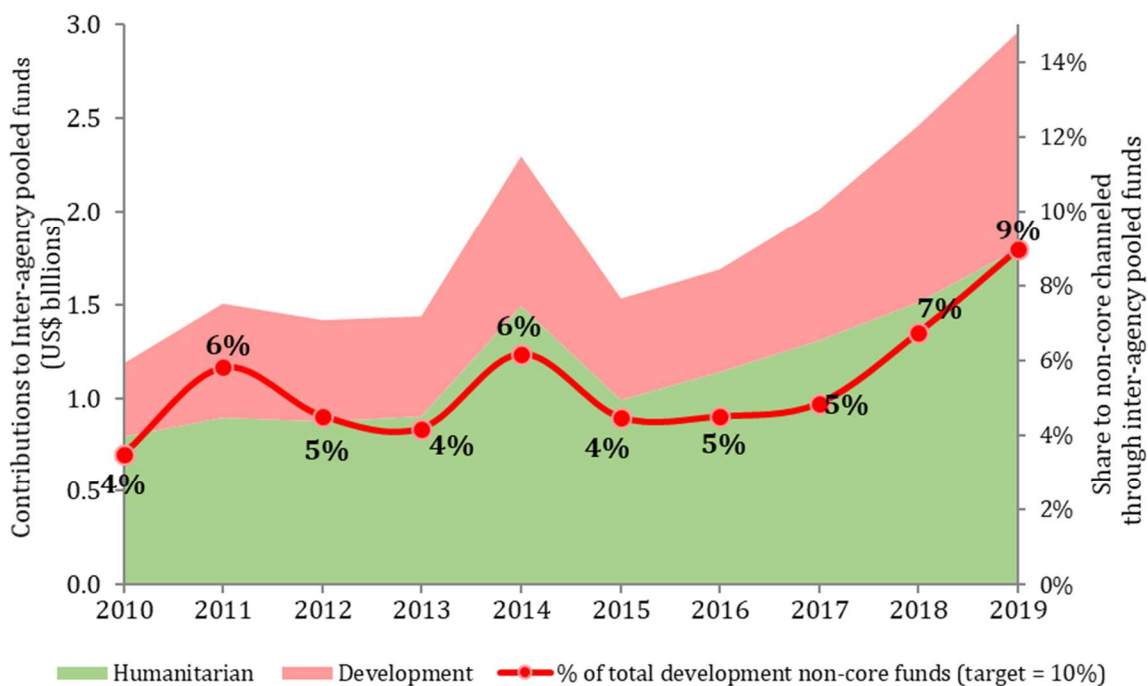
Figure XXIV  
**Funding mix for the top 20 contributors to UN development assistance activities (2019)**



131. The flexible nature of core funding proved indispensable as the COVID-19 crisis unfolded. Some of these core funds could be rapidly re-purposed in response to the pandemic. Reprogramming other (non-core) resources, however, was more complex and sometimes not feasible owing to agreements with the individual contributors. I encourage all contributing Member States to consider allocating a larger proportion of their contributions to core resources, rather than in the form of tightly earmarked non-core contributions, toward meeting the targets of the Funding Compact.

132. I am encouraged by the efforts of many Member States to meet their commitment to double the share of their non-core contributions provided through pooled funding mechanisms. Total funding to inter-agency pooled funds in 2019 totalled \$2.96 billion, an increase of 20 per cent compared to 2018 (see figure XXV). While 61 per cent of contributions to inter-agency pooled funds went to funds with a humanitarian focus, funding to development-related inter-agency pooled funds has more than doubled since 2015 and now represents 9.0 per cent of all non-core funding to UN development-related activities. This represents good progress towards the Funding Compact commitment to channel 10 per cent of non-core funding for development activities through inter-agency pooled funds by 2023.

Figure XXV  
**Funding to inter-agency pooled funds, 2010 to 2019**



133. Contributions to agency-specific thematic funds doubled over the past three years, reaching just over \$900 million in 2019, of which \$720 million were dedicated to a development-related theme. This translates to a 5.5 per cent share of all non-core funding to development activities, compared with the Funding Compact commitment to a 6 per cent share by 2023 (see table 4).

134. At the same time, funding to the flagship Joint SDG Fund – a critical enabler of the UNDS reforms – remains well below the level to which Member States committed in the Funding Compact. In 2020, contributions to the Joint SDG Fund were only \$48 million compared to the Funding Compact commitment for annual contributions of \$290 million. While new funds such as the complementary COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, established to finance the emergency response to the socioeconomic impacts of the crisis, and the impact of COVID-19 on resource availability may account for some of the lower-than-expected levels of funding, it is essential that these trends be reversed. In this regard, as we bridge the emergency response phase to the recovery and long term sustainable development with the wind up and off ramping of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund into the Joint SDG Fund, it will be essential that Member States reassert their commitment and channel resources to the Joint SDG Fund as the preeminent funding mechanism for driving joint action by the UNDS on interventions that are fully aligned to the transformation required by the 2030 Agenda.

Table 4

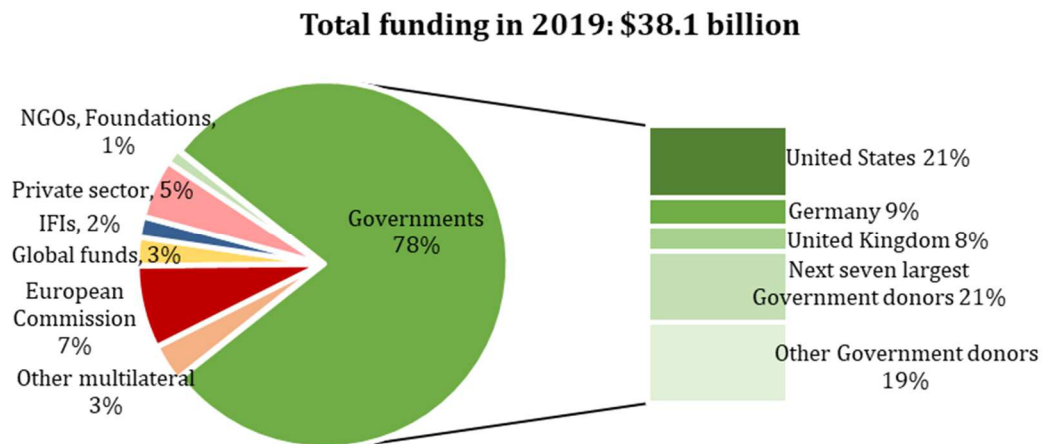
**Funding Compact – Member States’ commitment 2**

<b>To double the share of non-core contributions that are provided through development-related pooled funds and single-agency thematic funds</b>				
<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Target</i>	<i>Latest value</i>	<i>Trend</i>
MS 2.1. Percentage of non-core resources for development-related activities channelled through inter-agency pooled funds	5.0% (2017)	10.0% (2023)	9.0% (2019)	
MS 2.2. Percentage of non-core resources for development-related activities channelled through single-agency thematic funds	2.6% (2017)	6.0% (2023)	5.5% (2019)	
MS 2.3. Annual capitalization of the Joint Fund for the 2030 Agenda	\$43 million (2018)	\$290 million (2020)	\$43 million (2020)	
MS 2.4. Annual contributions to the Peacebuilding Fund	\$129 million (2018)	\$500 million (2020)	\$180 million (2020)	

135. Despite some positive trends in the total volume of high-quality funding, the high dependence on a few Member States for a large part of UNDS funding remains a concern. The top three Government contributors<sup>20</sup> accounted for nearly half of all contributions from Member States, and the top 10 contributors accounted for three-quarters of funding received from the full membership (see figure XXVI).

Figure XXVI

**Main groups of funding sources, 2019**



136. For contributions to voluntary core contributions of UNSDG entities and to inter-agency pooled and entity-specific thematic funds, trends on broadening the funding base are moving in the wrong direction. While progress has been made in increasing the number of contributors to the RC system budget, the current number will need to be doubled if the 2021 Funding Compact commitment is to be met (see table 5). The system’s current heavy reliance on a small number of donors for its funding is particularly worrying when combined with the continuing imbalance that exists between core and non-core funding. Heavy reliance on a few donors makes the UNDS funding base more exposed to risks. Strengthened and proactive UNDS engagement is required to continue building trust with Member States and other potential contributors and to broaden the donor base.

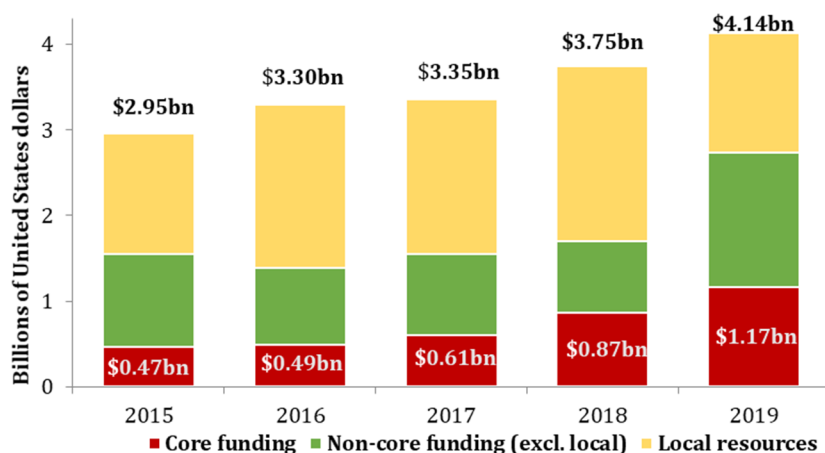
<sup>20</sup> United States, Germany and the United Kingdom.

Table 5  
**Funding Compact – Member States’ commitment 3**

To broaden the sources of funding support to the United Nations development system				
Indicators	Baseline	Target	Latest value	Trend
UN 3.1. Percentage of UNSDG entities reporting an annual increase in the number of contributors of voluntary core resources	67% (2017)	100% (2023)	50% (2019)	
UN 3.2. Number of Member State contributors to development-related inter-agency pooled funds and to single-agency thematic funds	59 & 27 (2017)	100 & 50 (2021)	39 & 24 (2019)	
UN 3.3. Number of Member State contributors to the resident coordinator system budget	28 (2019)	100 (2021)	43 (2020)	

137. Funding from programme countries helps to alleviate some of the high dependency that the UNDS has on its top donors and I am very pleased to see that funding from programme countries reached \$4.1 billion, a very significant increase of 40 per cent since 2015 (figure XXVII).

Figure XXVII  
**Funding from programme countries, 2015-2019**



138. This includes \$1.4 billion in local resources for programming in contributors’ own countries. Encouragingly, core funding from programme countries has increased by 150 per cent over the same period, from just under \$0.5 billion in 2015 to nearly \$1.2 billion in 2019.

139. In relation to the funding the RC system, there is a significant scope for improving its sustainability. I am pleased by the progress made to deliver on the three funding sources – voluntary contributions, cost-sharing and the levy. I commend those contributors that have made a strong effort to front load contributions and to ensure their contributions are at the appropriate level. However, voluntary funding to the Special Purpose Trust Fund for the RC system remains below ambition, with a \$72 million funding gap in 2020, despite full payment of the UNSDG cost-sharing and levy contributions exceeding initial projections. As the RC system is now at full capacity and the early results demonstrate that the RC system is living up to expectations, the budget shortfall will need to be addressed in 2021 to avoid cash constraints. The first review of the functioning of the new RC system will also include concrete recommendations relating to its funding arrangements.

## B. Delivering improved system-wide results, strengthening evaluation and improving transparency on funding flows

### 1. System-wide results

140. Both the Funding Compact and the 2020 QCPR call for strengthening transparency and commitment to system-wide results.

141. At country level, UNCT annual results reports on their Cooperation Frameworks constitute the cornerstone of our transparency and accountability to countries. Internal data from the UN Development Coordination Office, shows that UNCTs produced 86 annual reports by the end of 2020, and we expect to see this figure significantly surpassed in 2021. I am concerned however that 25% of programme country governments report that they did not receive an annual UNCT results report in the previous annual cycle, and a further 30% of respondents were unaware if they had. New guidelines have now been issued for UNCTs requesting that reports be produced within the first quarter of the year that follows the annual reporting cycle. It is my expectation that we will see 100 per cent compliance in the course of the current QCPR cycle.

142. Encouragingly, the DESA survey also shows that the quality of reporting has improved in almost all country categories (see figure XXVIII). Between 61 and 64 per cent of countries state that UNCT results reports are structured around Cooperation Frameworks, linked to national results, and include up-to-date information, for example, on UN resource mobilization and delivery. Agreement is lowest on whether the results of the whole UN system are included (57% agree), and if reporting includes information on resources leveraged for SDG financing (52% agree).

Figure XXVIII

#### Improvements in reporting quality

	Response distribution			Trend in target response	
	% , 2020			%	
	Yes	No	Don't know	2019	2020
Did your Government receive a report from the UN Resident Coordinator on the results achieved by the UN system in your country in the last annual cycle?	47	24	30	50	47
To what extent do you agree with the following statements about reports on your UN:	Agree	Disagree	Don't know	2019	2020
We receive reports on UN results regularly enough to meet our needs	57	31	12	51	57
The information in the reports is up-to- date	61	16	23	62	61
The results of the whole UN system are included	57	15	28	50	57
The reporting includes resources leveraged for financing the SDGs in the country	52	21	27	48	52
The reporting includes information on resources mobilized and delivered by the UNDS	63	14	23	54	63
Reporting is structured around the outcomes of the Cooperation Framework/UNDAF	64	11	25	61	64
Reporting is linked to national development results	63	13	24	56	63

143. The work of various UN entities at the country level is to be captured through UN-Info, the system-wide monitoring and reporting platform for tracking results on how UNCTs direct resources to national priorities to support the SDGs. All new Cooperation Frameworks and joint workplans are to be included in UN-Info, thereby ensuring a common result reporting baseline and improving data visualization through public websites (country and global). Country-level reporting for 2020 is due in April 2021 based on the new guidance, and will be made available on the UNCT pages, and on the UNSDG website as well, especially those using UN Info,

144. This past year country teams have used UN-Info as the key system for COVID-19 socioeconomic response plans, with data conveyed automatically on the new public COVID-19 Data Portal to track the roll-out of socioeconomic response plans. UN-Info is complemented by the DCO Information Management System (IMS) that collects quantitative and qualitative data on country team work for country and global results reporting, including information published on public websites. However, the success of UN-Info very much depends on the number of country teams that regularly contribute their joint workplans and results to the platform and on the number of UN entities that invest in updating their systems in line with open-data principles. The aim will be to ensure data interoperability within entities' systems by end 2023, in keeping with the vision of the UN Data Strategy for Action by Everyone, Everywhere. Individual governing bodies' support to these objectives is critical.
145. At regional level, we have reframed system-wide results reporting as an integral part of the regional review and restructuring of coordination. As mentioned in chapter III, I am pleased to see the first annual regional UNDS results reports of UNDS entities made available to Member States by the Regional Collaborative Platforms (RCPs) in each of the five regions.<sup>21</sup> The reports will enable Member States in the region to consider annually regional UNDS achievements.
146. At the global level, the UNDS continues to develop and expand common methodologies to ensure robust results-based management. In 2020, all but two responding entities reported support to the development of common approaches to measure system-wide results and harmonize indicators. Entities are increasingly using SDG targets and indicators in their results-based frameworks. WFP and WHO already have their strategic plans fully aligned to SDG targets and indicators. In 2020, four entities (UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and UN-Women) developed a tracking framework to monitor results towards a core set of SDG indicators for the common chapter of their Strategic Plans. In 2021, the UN Strategic Planners Network and DCO will work together to revise the 2011 UNDG results-based management handbook.
147. All of these actions will help to strengthen the ability of the Chair of UNSDG to report on the contribution of the UNDS to the SDGs. This year's report of the UNSDG Chair provides a first snapshot of the results that the UNDS helped to achieve in 2020, against a set of indicators developed as part of the COVID-19 socioeconomic response. This will be expanded to improve system-wide reporting on their contribution to advancing the SDGs throughout 2021.

## 2. Evaluation

148. The UNDS has made progress fulfilling its Funding Compact commitments and responding to the 2020 QCPR by increasing joint and system-wide evaluation and improving the quality of evaluations of the Cooperation Frameworks at country level. There is progress in strengthening a culture of evaluation, with increasing engagement by entities in joint and system-wide evaluations, and a significantly increased percentage of corporate evaluations being made centrally available on the United Nations Evaluation Group website.
149. More than 70 joint evaluations were carried out by UNDS entities in 2020. Most (50) were conducted at country-level and there was an increase of 20 global-level evaluations up from 16 in 2019. Smaller entities, and those engaged in fewer joint activities, noted constraints in increasing joint evaluations. Over 95 per cent (24/25) of entities track evaluation status and management responses and over 80 per cent (21/26) of entities' evaluation units meet independence standards set out by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). In 2020, 80 per cent (20/25) of entities reported that over three-quarters of evaluations have a management response. Similarly, 80 per cent of entities reported in 2020 that in most cases the management response was publicly available, up from 68 per cent in 2019 (see figure XXIX). A major focus in 2021 is on the roll-out of strengthened evaluation reports of Cooperation Frameworks, based on new guidance, and the establishment of the system-wide evaluation office.

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<sup>21</sup> See [ESCAP/RFS/2020/INF/3](#) for the report from the Asia-Pacific. Other 2021 regional reports are pending publishing online.



Figure XXIX

**Evaluations and management responses**

	<i>Response distribution</i>			
	<b>% , 2020</b>			
	0-25%	26-50%	51-75%	over 75%
What proportion of your entity’s evaluations have a management response?	8	0	12	80
What proportion of these management responses are publicly available?	12.0	8.0	0.0	80.0

150. UNEG has also updated its database of evaluation reports to track evaluations specific to pooled funds or joint programmes. Recommendations and lessons extracted from these evaluations are being incorporated in the design of new pooled funds, new strategic frameworks of existing funds, and knowledge products of the Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office. A good example is the Peacebuilding Fund’s new Strategic Plan, 2021-2024, that was informed to a great extent by portfolio evaluations.

151. Independent system-wide evaluation is an essential component to strengthen oversight, transparency, and accountability and to incentivize joint work and collective learning among the United Nations development system entities. I detailed in my report last year my decision to establish the UN Sustainable Development Group system-wide evaluation office as a dedicated capacity to help coordinate system-wide evaluations.

152. The COVID-19 pandemic offered a first opportunity to test the methodology for system-wide evaluation. As the UNDS came together in responding to COVID-19, there was an immediate need for a system-wide assessment of the response to ensure alignment with our objective to save lives, protect societies and recover better, and course correct as needed. As a first initiative of the system-wide evaluation office, under the interim direction of a Senior Coordinator, I launched a lessons learned and evaluability exercise of the relevance of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund. The report, to be published this month, is the first to assess the UNDS response from a system-wide approach. It demonstrates the potential of UNDS collaboration to achieve collective results when all members of the UNCT bring their expertise to inform policy engagement. Its findings and recommendations will be considered as part of the review of the Resident Coordinator System.

153. This first exercise has reaffirmed the need, and the value of an independent system-wide evaluation office that is fully equipped to assess the system’s collective support to the Sustainable Development Goals. I am requesting the concurrence by the ACABQ for the creation of a Director position to head the System-Wide Evaluation Office, supported by a small team, with a view for the office to be fully operational by the end of the year. To ensure the independence and credibility of function, this will be a stand-alone office with the Director will report directly to me, with the authority and discretion to submit reports at the appropriate level of decision-making, and with the prerogative to share reports directly with the Economic and Social Council. Through these reports, the Director will keep Member States apprised of the priorities and activities of the System-Wide Evaluation Office.

**C. Enhancing alignment of individual and collective planning, reporting and funding**

154. The structured funding dialogues organized by UNDS entities provide a platform for interactive discussions between Member States and UN entities on a spectrum of issues covered in the QCPR. Thirteen entities, including all funds and programmes, held a structured dialogue in 2020 with the Funding Compact at the heart of these discussions. Several entities now produce a results matrix that tracks their progress in meeting their Funding Compact commitments.

155. In addition, in the last two years, there have been concerted efforts to improve the working methods of the governing bodies of UNDS entities vis-à-vis the repositioned UNDS. The most tangible progress has taken place within the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP, both in the individual Boards and the joint meeting of the Executive Boards. The Core Group on working methods, formed by the Presidents of the Executive Boards in 2019, prompted several changes. The Boards' decision to hold joint informal briefings and Presidents' meetings fosters transparent consultations that address coordination and harmonization issues. Individual Board sessions are now more interactive, feature a lessons-learned component, and invite diverse stakeholders and experts from the private sector and civil society.
156. I welcome and commend the UN entity boards that are also taking action to ensure coherence between individual entities' Country Programme Documents (CPDs) and system-wide activities and results laid out in the Cooperation Frameworks. To this end, DCO has created a new Cooperation Framework status dashboard for UN partners to see the links between the documents and their stage of development. In line with the 2020 QCPR, UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF now have standard operating procedures to ensure draft CPDs submitted to the Executive Boards are accompanied by at least an advanced draft of the Cooperation Framework or agreed results framework. Such practices need to become more systematic and more commonplace across all UN entity boards.
157. Efforts to address agenda items such as UNDS reform in the first of their triannual sessions in 2021 shows Member States' strong commitment to aligning the funds and programmes' strategic planning to the QCPR. Addressing UNDS reform issues and entities' annual results reporting at annual sessions also allows holistic oversight.
158. Almost all UNDS entities have at least partially aligned their planning and budget cycles with the QCPR cycle. Some entities, including the Secretariat, noted partial alignment due to different planning cycle frequencies, while WHO noted that its governing body is discussing the alignment of its planning with the QCPR cycle (see figure XXX). Specialized agencies' governing bodies have made various efforts to align with the rest of the UNDS, including significant steps to increase efficiency gains through UNDS common business operations (see chapter II) and harmonization in thematic areas related to SDG support and acceleration.

Figure XXX  
Alignment of UNDS strategic planning cycles

	<i>Response distribution</i>		
	<b>% , 2020</b>		
	Fully	Partially	Not at all
To what extent is your entity's planning and budgetary cycle aligned with the QCPR cycle?	40.7	55.6	3.7
Does your entity's strategic plan include reporting on the implementation of the QCPR?	63.0	18.5	18.5

159. At their first regular session 2021, the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF and UN -Women stressed the importance of UNDS repositioning and integrating the 2020 QCPR in the entities' policies, planning, programming and monitoring as they develop their new strategic plans, 2022-2025. It would be helpful for governing bodies to further encourage joint programme activities, including by recommending that each country office ensure a minimum proportion of their portfolios to be comprised of joint programmes. UNDS entities and their governing boards can also deliver on their commitment to collective results by making every effort to fully align entity upcoming strategic plans to the 2020 QCPR mandates and guidance.
160. I was also pleased to learn that at the first regular sessions 2021, the Presidents of the Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP stated that the Boards would pursue cooperation and coordination with the executive boards of other funds, programmes and specialized agencies and continue to seek ways to improve Board effectiveness through pragmatic results-oriented, proactive approaches to

providing guidance. Member States may wish to continue to strengthen integration of the governance of the Executive Boards.

#### **D. Further bolstering the ECOSOC's operational activities segment as an accountability platform**

161. The 2020 QCPR resolution strengthens ECOSOC's responsibility and prerogative in line with the UN Charter. It reaffirms the role of ECOSOC and its operational activities segment as an accountability platform for the UNDS when carrying out operational activities for development.
162. Over the past QCPR cycle, Member States reinvigorated the functioning of the operational activities segment to ensure it remains a forum for interactive discussion and feedback on UN development activities supporting countries' achievement of the 2030 Agenda. To strengthen linkages with other governance mechanisms, in its resolution 72/305 the General Assembly changed the segment's timing to take place close to the annual sessions of the Executive Boards of the funds and programmes. It also built on the call made in resolution 72/279 to ensure the segment provides an opportunity for regular evidence-based reporting and dialogue on QCPR implementation and with the Chair of UNSDG. The segment is now much more interactive, and includes a dedicated session with RCs and UNCT members from all regions, broadened participation of UNDS executive heads beyond those of funds and programmes primarily headquartered in New York. I will work with the Vice-President of ECOSOC to build on this progress, which was facilitated by the virtual nature of the segment in 2020, and include participation of actors from civil society and the private sector.
163. The General Assembly is currently reviewing ECOSOC's role through deliberations that include follow-up to the 2030 Agenda and review of the High-level Political Forum. Following the outcome of this process, there will be opportunities to reinforce ECOSOC's accountability role through the segment by improving the format and contents; adjusting the segment's timing to enable it to feed into the reports of the Boards; strengthening linkages between ECOSOC's accountability functions and those of the General Assembly; and requesting consistent reporting and action-oriented recommendations from UNDS entities.
164. As part of overhauling the QCPR monitoring and reporting framework, I will encourage UNDS entities to more fully align their new strategic plan indicators with those of the QCPR and provide system-wide results reports to their governing bodies, which are then submitted to ECOSOC.

#### **E. Implementation of key strategies in UNDS operations**

165. The 2020 QCPR places an increased focus on a number of areas that speak to the ability of the UNDS to strengthen its own performance against critical corporate commitments, particularly as it relates to achieving gender parity, ensuring environmental sustainability and preventing sexual violence and abuse. I welcome this important step by the General Assembly and will continue to encourage the UNDS to deliver consistent improvements in these three crucial areas.

##### **1. Achieving gender parity across the UN development system**

166. Implementation of the 2017 System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity is showing steady progress. We have maintained gender parity across our senior-most ranks of full-time Under and Assistant-Secretaries-General, a result achieved in January 2020. We have also achieved and maintained parity in resident coordinator appointments and reached a record number of women heads and deputy heads of peace operations (24 out of 50 encumbered positions). The overall representation of women in the international professional and higher categories of the United Nations system reached 47.3 per cent in 2019 (up from 46.6% in 2018). UNCTs have also taken various actions to enhance gender parity in the recruitment, retention, progression and talent management of staff, including by producing, in one country, a Gender Parity Compact, designed to achieve full gender parity by 2026 and signed by all heads of agencies of the country team.

167. The global pandemic has brought additional challenges and opportunities. Over 71 per cent of UN gender focal points that participated in a survey conducted by UN-Women in September 2020 point out that the COVID-19 crisis has negatively affected progress towards gender parity and the creation of enabling working environments in their respective entities. At the same time, the pandemic made flexible working a reality across the UN system and offered a window of opportunity for organizational culture change. Country teams have undertaken specific actions to build an enabling environment for all, conducting communication campaigns, advocating, engaging in dialogue and organizing workshops. The UNCT in the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, has produced a Gender Parity Compact, signed by all heads of agencies of the country team to achieve full gender parity by 2026. More immediate and holistic support is needed to transform organizational culture to attract and retain more women, especially in the field. I expect the entire UN system to step up implementation of the Enabling Environment Guidelines and the Field-specific Enabling Environment Guidelines to help increase representation of women and accelerate efforts to reach gender parity throughout the UN system.

## 2. Ensuring environmental sustainability of UNDS operations

168. The 2020 QCPR requests the UNDS to address the environmental sustainability of operations, building on system-wide efforts that have already been put in place. Since 2009, the annual Greening the Blue report provides a snapshot of the UN system's environmental sustainability in the management of its facilities and operations. It has expanded over the years to include data on climate emissions, waste, pollution, water and biodiversity from nearly 60 entities. To make joint progress that goes beyond individualized entity efforts, the 10-year Strategy for Sustainability Management in the UN System was adopted in 2019. Phase I focuses on management and phase II, to be rolled out in 2021, addresses the full picture of internal environmental and social sustainability in policies, programming, facilities, and operations. The strategy is supported by the 10-year Climate Action Plan that aims to achieve an ambitious reduction in emissions from the UN Secretariat's operations in line with recommendations from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

169. Despite progress, at country level only 18 per cent of operation management teams reported having a premises environmental strategy in place in 2019, citing lack of financial resources and capacity and fragmented locations as the main challenges. The move to set up common country premises should spur efforts further on our path to ensure that every country team has a plan in place to reduce its environmental footprint, following the example of the environmental strategy for field missions launched in 2016.

## 3. Preventing sexual exploitation and abuse

170. In reforming the resident coordinator system, the responsibility of preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse was explicitly included in resident coordinators' terms of reference and in management and accountability frameworks in 2019. UNCT members are instructed to notify the resident coordinators of any allegations they receive.

171. As set out in my Annual Report on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in February of this year, 91 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse relating to personnel of United Nations entities (other than peace operations and special political missions) and their implementing partners were reported, compared with 107 in 2019. Of the 91 allegations, 19 related to 2020 and 72 related to previous years or unknown periods. The number of allegations of sexual abuse decreased from 38 in 2019 to 17 in 2020, and the number of child victims decreased from 38 in 2019 to 15 in 2020. Of them, seven allegations have been substantiated, nine were unsubstantiated, 35 are under investigation, 21 are at the preliminary assessment stage, one is to be determined and 18 are closed.<sup>22</sup>

172. My 2017 strategy to combat sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations personnel<sup>23</sup> is clear: a zero-tolerance policy applies to everyone in the organization. As of 2020, 119 out of 129 country teams reported

<sup>22</sup> Secretary General's Annual report on [special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse A/75/754](#) (15 February 2021), paragraph 68.

<sup>23</sup> [A/71/818](#) and [A/71/818/Corr.1](#)

having a prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse action plan in place and a dedicated inter-agency taskforce, coordination mechanism or focal point. We will continue to provide guidance and training to support them in their role.

173. I will also continue to work with UN entities to advance the UN System Workplace Mental Health and Well Being Strategy and the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy, addressed in greater detail in Chapter V.

#### **4. Delivering on our collective commitments**

174. As we advance into this new QCPR cycle, it is clear that more concerted action and efforts are needed by both Member States and the UNDS to implement the Funding Compact and to strengthen system-wide results, evaluation, transparency and accountability.

175. Over the past two years, we have made encouraging progress, but advances remain uneven, and some of the critical levers of change still need more determined commitment. Our monitoring efforts clearly show where more attention is required to close the gaps. I call on all entities to thoroughly review commitments and ensure the required steps are being taken to deliver on each of them. All entities need to customize their individual reporting on Funding Compact implementation to their governing bodies, in the context of the structured funding dialogues. I am asking DCO to continue to facilitate regular follow-up with entities and Member States to monitor implementation and encourage progress.

176. I also call on all Member States to continue implementing the Funding Compact, individually and collectively. During a time of global crisis, it is critical that we do not lower ambitions to improve the quality of funding to the United Nations and ensure it can be a driver of coherence and results. While some Member States have clearly reviewed policies and funding practices in light of the Funding Compact, I count on Member States and entities to sustain the momentum of the Funding Compact and ensure we stay the course on our mutual commitments.

177. Today more than ever we must deliver at scale. The Funding Compact marked a milestone in the drive to better results. UNDS entities have internalized the Funding Compact, and we have made progress on transparency and accountability. But there are realities we must recognize. We will not achieve some commitments by year's end. We need to accelerate our individual and collective efforts and strengthen the case for Member States to achieve theirs. Funding must increase considerably so the UNDS has the resources and capacity to support Member States in achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in this Decade of Action.

## **V. An integrated whole-of-system response in support of the Decade of Action**

178. In the 2020 QCPR, Member States recognized the progress we have made together in reforming the UNDS. The revitalized RC system and new generation of UN Country Teams demonstrated their increased agility and a more integrated, focussed approach through the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The necessary changes at the regional level are in place and significant progress has been made in strengthening our support through our Multi-Country Offices. I commend the Principals of the UNDS for their tremendous commitment and contribution. In this context and at the beginning of the Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs, it is appropriate that the 2020 QCPR marks a significant shift in focus, from the structural changes required to advance the reforms to the transformative policy and technical support expected of the UNDS to accelerate SDG progress during the Decade of Action.

179. The challenges the world is facing are daunting. The COVID-19 crisis, and the inequitable global response that has followed is causing immense hardship and disruption and has set back our efforts to advance the SDGs by many years. This is particularly the case in relation to eradicating poverty, which is estimated to have increased by 131 million people in 2020 alone<sup>24</sup>, and the advancement of women's rights, where progress may have been

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<sup>24</sup> UN DESA, World Economic Situation and Prospects, 2021.

set back by a generation.<sup>25</sup> The pandemic has highlighted the fragility of our current systems – economic, social and political – and made crystal clear the folly of pursuing development pathways that produce extreme inequality and fuel a war on nature. But the path forward is also clear. With the 2030 Agenda as our north star, COVID-19 recovery efforts provide a unique opportunity to make bold changes towards more inclusive, gender-equal and low-carbon economies, underpinned by accountability, respect for human rights and effective international cooperation.

180. Against this backdrop, the 2020 QCPR highlights critical areas where the UNDS is expected to step up during the current cycle. It calls for support to recovery efforts that can supercharge SDG implementation. And it requests the UNDS to focus in particular on crucial investments in education, health, social protection and decent work; in climate action, sustainable and inclusive economic growth, the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the energy transition; in advancing gender equality and tackling discrimination; and in leveraging the power of digital transformation.

181. To meet Member States' expectations as they seek to recover lost ground and secure a great leap towards sustainable development, the UNDS will need to leverage the full potential of the reforms, move its provision of integrated policy and programmatic support to the next level, strengthen its offer on capacity development; intensify support to governments to mobilize investment and technologies and facilitate strengthened partnerships with other international institutions, the private sector, academia, civil society, local authorities and the world's young people.

182. After three years of reforms, the foundations are now securely in place and I am confident that the UNDS is ready to rise to this challenge set out in the 2020 QCPR. Combined with the right level of ambition and political will from governments, partners and society at large, together we can make this a decade of transformation for people and planet.

### **A. Towards integrated transformative support for the SDGs**

183. The UNDS has shown its ability to adapt to the needs and priorities of programme countries as it supported them to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Programme country Governments have reported that the UN contribution to national efforts in the past two years has been most impactful in the areas of health and wellbeing (SDG3), food security (SDG2), and education (SDG4); followed by poverty eradication (SDG1), gender equality (SDG5) and climate change (SDG13) (see figure XXXI).

Figure XXXI

**Past and future UN assistance and contribution to the SDGs**

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<sup>25</sup> [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2021.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf)

Sustainable Development Goal	Top 5 areas where UN contribution has been most significant over PAST 2 YEARS	Top 5 areas requiring UN assistance over the NEXT 4 YEARS		
	2020	2020	2019	Change in percentage points
SDG 03 - Health and well-being	68%	59%	45%	▲ 15
SDG 08 - Productive employment and sustainable economic growth	24%	52%	42%	▲ 10
SDG 04 - Education	46%	48%	47%	■ 1
SDG 01 - Poverty eradication	42%	44%	49%	▼ -5
SDG 02 - Food security, nutrition and eradicating hunger	51%	42%	36%	▲ 7
SDG 13 - Combatting climate change and its impacts	42%	39%	52%	▼ -13
SDG 17 - Convening and leveraging partnership for the goals	18%	34%	31%	■ 3
SDG 09 - Industry, innovation and infrastructure	12%	33%	20%	▲ 13
SDG 06 - Water, sanitation and hygiene	27%	25%	23%	■ 2
SDG 16 - Peace, justice and strong institutions	32%	25%	34%	▼ -9
SDG 05 - Gender equality	42%	20%	29%	▼ -10
SDG 07 - Affordable and clean energy	11%	20%	17%	■ 3
SDG 10 - Reducing inequalities	15%	19%	29%	▼ -11
SDG 14 - Sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources	6%	17%	15%	■ 2
SDG 11 - Sustainable cities and communities	11%	12%	14%	■ -2
SDG 15 - Sustainable use of land, ecosystems and forests	6%	12%	15%	■ -3
SDG 12 - Responsible consumption and production	4%	10%	10%	■ 1

184. For the next four years, programme countries report that UNDS support will especially be needed in the areas of health and wellbeing (SDG3), decent work and economic growth (SDG8), education (SDG4), poverty eradication (SDG1) and food security (SDG2) – among the most critically impacted by the pandemic. With variance across regions and countries, these SDGs were also the most frequently cited in 2019 (see figure XXXII), although combating climate change and its impacts (SDG13) was given greater importance last year.

Figure XXXII  
**Future UN assistance and contribution related to the SDGs in country groupings**

(ranked from most frequently to least frequently selected)



Note: Based on responses of top five areas United Nations assistance will be required

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020 survey of programme country Governments



185. In responding to these priorities, it is essential that the UNDS account for the interconnections between sectors and goals; the centrality of gender equality and the interdependence of the three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental. This demands a new way of examining challenges and advancing national planning and policy. Central to this is a systems-approach to sustainable development, as called for by the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report. Over the coming period, the UNSDG will continue to strengthen the capacity, knowledge, and skills among UNDS staff in this area to ensure that the UNDS itself is fully attuned to the type of transformation demanded by the 2030 Agenda.
186. It is also key that the UNDS focus more on providing high-quality, integrated policy advice and support that leverages the comparative advantages and capacities of UN entities and accelerates the shift away from a traditional single agency direct support and service provision model. New instruments or the recasting of those already in place, such as Common Country Analysis and Cooperation Frameworks, already embody this shift and are having a knock-on effect on the approach of UN entities. Over 60 per cent of UNDS entities report having simplified and harmonized agency-specific programming and reporting instruments based on Cooperation Framework guidelines. Ninety-one per cent have taken steps to support the development of common approaches and definitions and harmonized indicators to measure system-wide results. Some entities, however, commented on the challenge of harmonizing programming and reporting in the context of four different results frameworks: national development plans, UNDS entity strategic plans (including CPDs where they exist), Cooperation Frameworks, and donor plans when and if they are applicable. We will continue to identify opportunities to simplify and harmonize these frameworks.

## **B. Raising ambition to tackle poverty and inequality, leaving no one behind**

187. The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to the first upsurge in global poverty in more than two decades. Underlying and intersecting inequalities, including gender inequality, have meant that many of those people and segments of the population who were facing discrimination or were marginalized in society before the pandemic suffered the most. The 2020 QCPR places renewed emphasis on each of these issues and underscores that collective efforts are essential to support countries with transformative policy-making that can build inclusive societies and economies, leaving no one behind.

### **1. Turning the corner on poverty eradication and investing in human well-being**

188. Addressing the weaknesses in current systems of health care, education and social protection, as well as systemic discrimination and unequal power relations that were laid bare by the COVID-19 pandemic, is central to eradicating poverty, one of the greatest global challenges. As governments leverage new resources to support investment-led recoveries, fresh attention must be placed on protecting the dignity of all persons and their rights to an adequate standard of living, increasing the investment in these services and examining new ways to support their effective and inclusive provision, including by making use of new technologies, such as big data and digital connectivity, and investing in areas with a multiplier impact, such as the care economy.
189. With more than half the world's population still without access to **social protection**, we can no longer ignore the urgency of looking at poverty reduction and building resilience from a multidimensional perspective. The UNDS is working to step up its offer in this area. In 2021, the UNSDG will elaborate a coherent, system-wide strategy to help countries implement nationally-appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including social protection floors, as requested in the 2020 QCPR. Furthermore, in the context of the Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond Initiative, the ILO is leading efforts to identify concrete steps for strengthening social protection systems, boosting decent work and reducing poverty. This work will culminate in a high-level meeting convened with UNDP and UNCTAD on the margins of the High-level Political Forum in July 2021. It demonstrates a broader commitment to strengthen UNDS capacities in the area of macro-economic analysis and support for productive employment.
190. The global COVID-19 pandemic has clearly exposed under-investment in **health and health systems**. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic at least half of the world's population were still without full coverage of

essential health services, and over 800 million people were spending at least 10 per cent of household budgets to pay for health. The world must draw the hard lessons of this crisis and immediately invest in equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics, in Universal Health Coverage (UHC) that includes mental health, and in health emergency preparedness. WHO has been leading the global health response to COVID-19 through its knowledge and expertise and UNCTs, under the leadership of the resident coordinator and with WHO and UNICEF support, will continue to play an important role in enabling vaccine equity and the rollout of national vaccination programmes in 145 countries through the COVAX facility. Through other joint efforts to advance SDG3, including Mental Health, such as the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All, the UNDS's convening power, knowledge and expertise can be better leveraged to support countries to achieve UHC by 2030.

191. Exacerbating a pre-pandemic learning crisis, **education** has been disrupted at an unprecedented scale and threatens to reverse progress on reducing the number of out-of-school children, especially girls. The crisis put a spotlight on unacceptable limits on the right to education, gaps in education provision and financing globally and demonstrated the urgent need for transformative change to education systems and curricula. At the October 2020 UNESCO Global Education Meeting, Member States highlighted concrete areas for immediate action, while UNESCO's 'Futures of Education' initiative will release a flagship report later this year on how knowledge, education and learning must be reimagined in a world of increasing complexity, uncertainty and precarity. In addition, UNICEF has launched new efforts to bridge digital learning divides, leveraging the UNICEF-ITU 'Giga' initiative, as well as the Generation Unlimited partnership. Together with the UNESCO and UNICEF, I am also working to advance an initiative aimed at placing access to digital learning and skills at the heart of recovery efforts as in nine of the world's most populous developing countries.<sup>26</sup> More broadly, a review of the global education collaboration and monitoring mechanism is underway, aimed at enhancing efficiency, fostering stronger synergies, and scaling up cooperation among global education partners to support to Member State priorities and efforts.<sup>27</sup> Together, these measures provide a unique opportunity to strengthen the capacity of the UNDS and its partners to bring support to quality education for all to a new level.
192. Conscious that we are in danger of a digital divide that will reinforce social and economic divides between and within countries, the QCPR places emphasis for the first time on UNDS support to **digital technology** for sustainable development. About half of the world's population remains offline, the majority in Africa and the Asia and the Pacific regions, and there are further rural-urban, gender and youth-older-persons digital gulfs. As technology transforms our world, the UNDS must support Governments in prioritizing investment in digital literacy and infrastructure. To that end, I launched my Roadmap for Digital Cooperation in June 2020, which promotes a vision of an inclusive, sustainable digital future for all; and several UN entities are already working to strengthen the UNDS offer on digital transformation. Accelerating digital connectivity of schools through the GIGA initiative is one key element of the roadmap. Furthermore, UNDP has served as the UN institutional lead of the Digital Finance Task Force that I launched as a part of my strategy for financing the 2030 Agenda in 2019, and which has produced actionable recommendations to leverage digitalisation and fintech for sustainable development. The UN Legal Identity Agenda Task Force has developed the ONE UN Model towards legal identity consisting on a holistic model of birth-to-date registration, which can be further accelerated by widespread and appropriate development of new digital technologies and digitized systems. Additionally, UNDP launched last year its first Digital Strategy, that will serve as key part of its integrator offer.<sup>28</sup> Digital technologies also open the door for the wider public to increasingly participate in the design and implementation of their country's development programme. Resident coordinators are requested to facilitate the active, meaningful participation of local communities, particularly those being left behind. Innovative tools and information technologies can expand participation, including in the development of Cooperation Frameworks, closing the access gap for those who are still left out of the digital revolution.

## 2. Leaving no one behind

193. Given the increasing complexity, uncertainty and precarity of our world as previously referenced, dedicated measures and action are needed to achieve inclusive societies and economies.

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<sup>26</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/news/scaling-digital-learning-and-skills-worlds-most-populous-countries-drive-education-recovery>

<sup>27</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/news/education-post-covid-19-extraordinary-session-global-education-meeting-2020-gem>

<sup>28</sup> <https://digitalstrategy.undp.org/how.html>

194. Accordingly, 25 out of 26 UN entities' strategic plans define concrete approaches for reaching the furthest behind, and 21 out of 24 entities report annually to their governing bodies on progress in this area. At country level, 91 per cent of programme country Governments report that the UNDS has assisted them in identifying those furthest behind, and 92 per cent in actually reaching those furthest behind. Eighty-four per cent of programme country Governments agree that the UNDS COVID-19 socioeconomic response has targeted at-risk groups. At the same time, UNSDG analysis shows that these actions were often incomplete, addressing primarily women and children with insufficient attention to other marginalised groups or intersecting vulnerabilities. Forty-three per cent of socioeconomic response plans developed by October 2020 had yet to translate into targeted interventions across the five response pillars.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, while 70 per cent of SERPs included human rights analysis, only 32 per cent mainstreamed a rights-based approach into concrete measures throughout the plan.<sup>30</sup> These results indicate that specific attention and focus and additional support and training are essential to fully translate the leave-no-one-behind principle and the rights-based approach into our policy and programmatic support, in keeping with my Call to Action on Human Rights
195. Recognizing that 80 per cent of the world's **persons with disabilities** live in developing countries, the 2020 QCPR guides the UNDS to mainstream the inclusion of persons with disabilities into our work, in particular at country level. Following the launch of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS), we developed and rolled out an accountability scorecard on disability inclusion to all country teams. Reporting by 57 entities and 7 early roll-out UNCTs for the 2019 programme year shows that the Strategy has triggered positive action, across programmes and operations. At the end of 2020, all UN Country Teams reported for the first time on implementation of UNDIS through the scorecard, which will create a global UN baseline on disability inclusion, as well as planned actions for advancing progress in 2021 and beyond. We are already seeing progress in the area of joint programming, leveraging financing from the fund of the UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and from the Joint SDG Fund. Active consultation with organizations of persons with disabilities, disability-inclusive procurement and communications have been identified as key areas where significant progress is needed, and specific policy and technical guidance is being provided to meet these gaps.
196. The UN is also seeking to strengthen its ability to **work for and with young people**, given that today the world hosts the largest generation of youth ever, close to 90 per cent of whom live in developing countries. With poverty, food shortages, unemployment, interrupted education and lost opportunities resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, and an unfolding climate and biodiversity crisis, the future of an entire generation is at risk. Many young people who are advocating for justice and action to advance the SDGs are also facing challenges to their right to peaceful assembly and to freedom of expression, as part of a broader trend of narrowing civic space. The first stocktaking report on the implementation of the United Nations Youth Strategy demonstrated that there is strong momentum across the UN system on the "Youth and SDGs" agenda at all levels, but it also highlighted the need for more concerted efforts to strengthen how the UN works with youth, particularly disadvantaged/marginalized groups. Over the course of the QCPR cycle, I expect all UN entities and country teams to accelerate implementation of Youth 2030 across all foundational and programmatic priority areas.
197. **Quality, timely, relevant, open and disaggregated data** on countries' progress toward sustainable development and other targets is central to implementing the SDGs and reaching the furthest behind first. The operations of national statistics offices in many countries were already facing serious resource constraints and gaps in data collection before being severely disrupted by the pandemic in 2020, resulting in the postponement or even cancellation of key data collection efforts. From Governments' perspective, in 2020, 83 per cent of respondents deemed UNDS support in this area to be adequate. This is consistent with the fact that 96 per cent of UNCTs were helping to strengthen national statistical capacities, including to a lesser extent on direct data collection (see figure XXXIII). However, agreed workplans to coordinate and strengthen national statistical capacity exist in only 18.5 per cent of UNCTs.

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<sup>29</sup> Healthhealth, protecting people, economic response and recovery, macroeconomic response and multilateral collaboration, social cohesion and community resilience.

<sup>30</sup> UNSDG. Human Rights Review of UNCT COVID-19 SERPs, 10 November 2020.

Figure XXXIII

**Support to national statistical capacity**

	<i>Response distribution</i>	
	<i>%, 2020</i>	
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
Does the UNCT provide support to national statistical capacity?	96.2	3.8
Does the UNCT have an agreed workplan to coordinate and strengthen national statistical capacity?	18.5	81.5
<b>Type of support provided:</b>		
Capacity development	96.8	3.2
Direct data collection/survey administration	56	44.0
Financial support	66.4	33.6
Other	27.2	72.8

Source: DCO, based on official data from the Information Management System

198. In response to the current crisis, the UNDS will work closely with national statistical offices in a collective effort to help create resilient and sustainable information architectures based on statistics, geospatial information and, where appropriate, big data. This includes supporting the modernization of data collection, processing, and dissemination, the upgrade of skillsets at national level, and strengthening data governance and stewardship and the sharing of best practices. Resident coordinators, country teams and national statistical offices are getting a technical support boost thanks to a major effort by the Regional Commissions, other entities and offices, and the Global Network of Data Officers and Statisticians launched in October 2020, led by the DESA Statistics Division. Through the Data For Now initiative, the UN will also increase the use of robust methods and tools that improve the timeliness, coverage, inclusiveness and quality of SDG data at the country-level, working closely with key partners such as the World Bank, Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD) and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN). The World Data Forum, to be hosted by Switzerland in October 2021, provides further opportunities to reinvigorate the push for strengthened SDG data systems.

#### 4. Accelerating efforts on gender equality and the rights of all women and girls

199. The pandemic has disproportionately affected women and girls, illustrating just how deeply gender inequality remains embedded in the world's political, social and economic systems. Women's labour force participation has regressed, feminization of poverty deepened, and the burden of unpaid care work escalated, as have horrifying levels of male violence against women and girls, that I highlighted in my call for Peace in Homes across the world. The past year has also however highlighted the positive outcomes of gender balanced leadership for all, leveraging the capacities of societies as a whole to address critical challenges. The recovery and reset from this crisis must accelerate implementation of SDG 5 – through the building blocks of realizing women's full and equal rights; ensuring equal participation; advancing inclusive economies; urgently addressing the emergency that is violence against women; and supporting the intergenerational transition to those advocating for a more just and equal world. The UNDS has a crucial role to play in this regard, in terms of advocacy, strengthening of norms and policy, and programming. However, analysis of current UNDS performance levels on gender equality shows a mixed picture.

200. In terms of UN policy and programming support, we can see that while gender equality remained the most common focus of joint programmes, the proportion of Cooperation Frameworks featuring gender-specific results at the outcome level decreased to 65.9 per cent in 2020, down from 72.3 per cent in 2019. For UN-SERPS, analysis shows that all plans identified women as a vulnerable group and 79 per cent recognized gender

equality as a crosscutting priority, yet only one-fourth mainstreamed gender equality across all response plan pillars, and 9.3 per cent included a gender analysis of groups furthest behind.<sup>31</sup> In terms of joint programming, the Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls, a flagship UNDS initiative in partnership with the EU, has delivered concrete results even in the face of challenges of mobility restrictions and increased violence in recent months. A mid-point review of the first country programmes in Latin America and Africa found that the Initiative has been successful as a model of integrated delivery, placing gender as the responsibility of the country team as a whole. Moving forward, we will continue to refine the Spotlight Initiative and ensure that lessons learned inform other joint SDG initiatives.

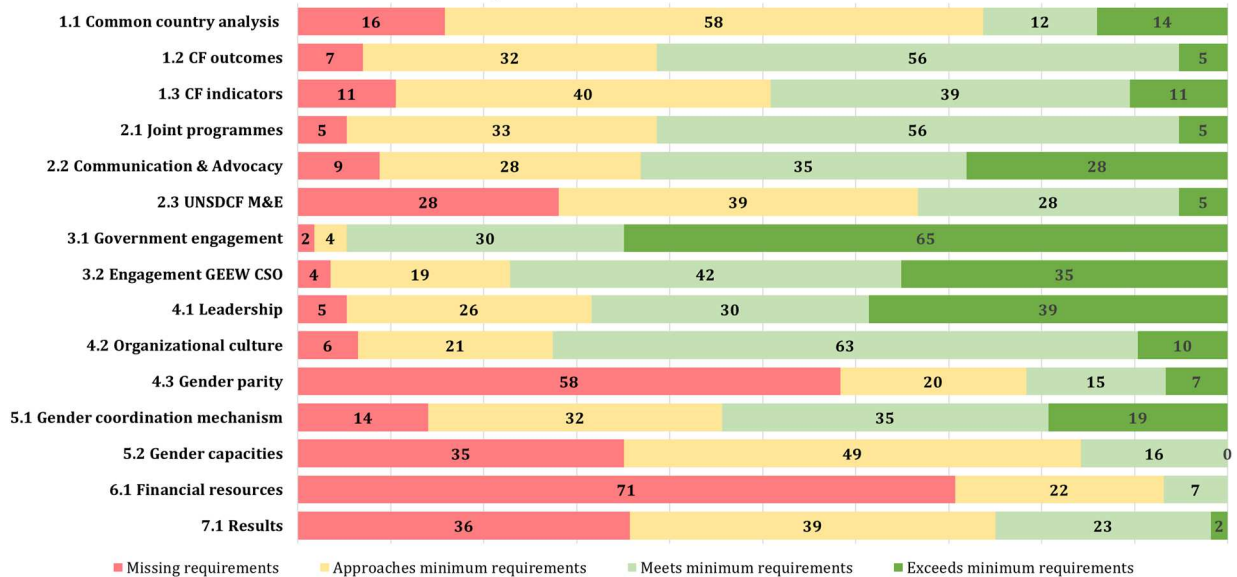
201. We are also seeing progress in boosting expenditures on gender equality in inter-agency funding mechanisms. The explicit emphasis on the gender equality marker combined with the establishment of a 30 per cent funding target led to 65 per cent of allocated funding to go to proposals with gender equality as their principal objective in the second call of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund. In line with my Call to Action on Human Rights, the system is coordinating around two strategic interventions on gender equality: the repeal of all discriminatory laws, and the consistent use of temporary special measures, including quotas, to achieve women's full and equal participation in all levels of decision-making in public life. UNDS and secretariat entities in coordination with DCO are developing and piloting the tools needed to support UNCTs. Women's full, equal and meaningful participation in achieving and sustaining peace remain another key priority for the UN, essential for successful peacekeeping, for peacebuilding and for the laying the foundations for sustainable development.
202. The United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (UN-SWAP 2.0) and its country-level equivalent provide a further insights into UN performance on gender equality. In 2020, as in 2019, 39 UNDS entities reported on the UN-SWAP 2.0 accountability framework. Over 80 per cent of them exceeded or met requirement ratings for performance indicators in the areas of audit, gender-responsive performance management, policy and strategic planning, and gender-related SDG results. There was a noteworthy improvement in evaluation. Of concern, however, is that ratings remained significantly lower for indicators measuring resource tracking, resource allocation and gender parity, underscoring the need for targeted action and to further integrate gender perspectives across all areas of work.
203. In terms of the UNCT-SWAP, 38 UNCTs reported in 2020. The number of country teams undertaking UNCT-SWAP comprehensive assessments conducted at the planning stage of Cooperation Frameworks is steadily increasing and now stands at 60 country teams in the past four years<sup>32</sup> (2017-2020). Of these, only 56.7 per cent either met or exceeded requirements in at least half of the 15 performance indicators (see figure XXXIV). While this shows a slight improvement on 2019, it is still well below the target of 75 per cent for 2020 established in the Funding Compact. A major effort will be needed to ensure gender mainstreaming at the country level.

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<sup>31</sup> UNSDG, 2021. Technical Note on Gender Mainstreaming into the UNCT Response to COVID-19 (forthcoming).

<sup>32</sup> UNCTs are expected to complete the UNCT-SWAP comprehensive assessments once per Cooperation Framework cycle, usually at its start.

Figure XXXIV  
**UNCT-SWAP Performance 2017-2020 (in per cent)**



Source: UN-Women.

204. Overall, as we pursue QCPR implementation, we must step up our performance on gender equality, ensuring that women’s rights and a gender-perspective are integrated across our work on all SDGs, including the building blocks outline. In 2021, the UNSDG is committed to ensuring a common UN voice on the centrality of gender equality and human rights, their systematic integration in interagency analysis, planning, implementation and evaluation, and integrated delivery that places gender equality as a shared priority and common goal in all programmes. Most importantly, I expect to see improved performance translate into a measurable difference in the lives of women and girls.

### C. Accelerating the just transition to sustainable economies and strengthening preparedness for future crises

205. The 2020 QCPR directed the UNDS to make confronting the climate emergency a central aspect of our work, not only at the global level but also regionally and in every country.

206. My Climate Action Team, together with DCO, have been stepping up outreach and engagement with resident coordinators and UNCTs to advance climate change priorities at the country level. Increasingly, country teams are supporting the preparation of enhanced nationally-determined contributions, long-term low emission development strategies and national adaptation plans. Still, only 75 out of 130 CCAs include a specific examination of environment and climate change factors. Going forward, the Cooperation Frameworks will serve as a primary vehicle for UN climate change support to Governments at country level. At the regional level, several issue-based coalitions focused on climate change, environment and resilience provide a regional platform for UN entities to promote coordinated support to Member States and country teams. In addition, to expand the depth and breadth of our reach, the 2021 UNSDG workplan envisages a detailed review of the UN climate response at country level and the development of a strategy to deliver climate support to programme countries. This includes a commitment to mainstreaming a more climate and environment-responsive approach in operations, programmes and Cooperation Frameworks.

207. As part of stepped up climate action, the UNDS is also supporting countries to accelerate the just transition to low-emission resilient pathways, with a particular focus on energy access and the energy transition, sustainable

food systems and sustainable infrastructure, and leveraging investments in COVID-19 recovery stimulus packages to implement ambitious climate actions. Recent analysis by IMF showed that every dollar spent on key carbon-neutral or carbon-sink activities – from zero-emissions power to the protection of wildlife and ecosystems – has estimated multipliers 2 to 7 times larger than those associated with non-eco-friendly expenditure, depending on sectors, technologies and horizons<sup>33</sup>. Food systems directly support the livelihoods of over 1 billion people and represent at least a tenth of the global economy, yet new data from the European Commission and FAO shows that they are also responsible for over one-third of all man-made greenhouse gases<sup>34</sup>. At the same time, a recent UNEP report found that only 18 percent of COVID-19 recovery spending so far is expected to enhance sustainability. Major processes, such as the Food System Summit and the High-level Dialogue on Energy, the second UN Global Conference on Sustainable Transport, and the Conference of Parties meetings on Climate Change, Biodiversity and Desertification provide key opportunities to mobilize a global movement for transformation in these areas. It is essential that the momentum generated by these processes be leveraged by UNCTs to advance improved policy advice and support over the course of the QCPR cycle.

208. These issues are also inextricably linked to the promotion of biodiversity and ecosystem-based approaches for sustainable development, highlighted by the 2020 QCPR. Implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, expected to be agreed in 2021, will provide an opportunity to advance commitments in this direction, supported by the upcoming report of the Environment Management Group on ‘Supporting the Global Biodiversity Agenda’, which lays out a UN System commitment for action to assist Member States delivering on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. The High-Level Committee on Programmes endorsed in March 2021 a common approach to integrating biodiversity and nature-based solutions for sustainable development into the UN’s policy and programme planning and delivery, which will help UN entities engage more actively with UNCTs and resident coordinators to deliver on the environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Overall, we must do better to adopt a system-wide approach to the environment, with the Environment Management Group, currently comprising 51 UN entities, serving as the central coordination body.
209. The pandemic showed how unprepared and ill-equipped the world is to face these parallel and intertwined crises. With the significant and increasing risks of climate change and environmental degradation, we must strengthen preparedness and deepen our resilience to future shocks starting today. Member States directed the UNDS through the 2020 QCPR to strengthen its offer on disaster risk reduction in general and as part of sustainable, inclusive and resilient recoveries. Support to national disaster risk reduction efforts is currently provided by 115 out of 130 UNCTs. As the pandemic unfolded, in August 2020 UNSDG issued additional guidance on integrating disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in Cooperation Frameworks, accompanied by training modules and briefing packages for country-level staff. Efforts are underway to incorporate the guidance into Cooperation Frameworks, enabling country teams to offer even stronger support in the future.

## **D. Strengthening cooperation and partnerships for the 2030 Agenda**

210. With SDG progress set back by the pandemic, achieving the 2030 Agenda will require unprecedented collaboration and partnerships across sectors and borders. Joining forces with development partners from the public and private sectors is simply no longer an option but a *sine qua non* for success. A desk review of 86 UN socioeconomic response plans shows that, while they were developed with diverse cross-entity engagement, about 35 per cent fully involved external partners, with 36 per cent involving partners sporadically. On the other hand, over the past year, country-level satisfaction with the ability of the UNDS to leverage partnerships remained high. In 2020, nine in 10 programme country Governments agreed that the United Nations adequately provides support to leverage partnerships in support of national development priorities. These results are consistent with the results achieved in 2019. Similarly, 85 per cent of respondents agreed that the resident coordinator has contributed to leveraging partnerships in support of national efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda.

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<sup>33</sup> [www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2021/03/19/Building-Back-Better-How-Big-Are-Green-Spending-Multipliers-50264](http://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2021/03/19/Building-Back-Better-How-Big-Are-Green-Spending-Multipliers-50264)

<sup>34</sup> [www.nature.com/articles/s43016-021-00225-9](http://www.nature.com/articles/s43016-021-00225-9)

211. The 2020 QCPR is clear on its expectations of the UNDS in this area and there are a number of steps that need to be taken to meet those expectations.

### **1. Deepening UN action on financing in the response and recovery post-COVID-19**

212. The 2020 QCPR makes an explicit request to the UNDS to further explore financing strategies for the Sustainable Development Goals, including through innovative financing and blended finance, to respond to the unique situation of countries, especially those with special needs. This takes on added importance at a time when many developing countries are facing immense financing pressures due to the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, including in terms of debt vulnerability and liquidity constraints<sup>35</sup>. The crisis has proven a major set-back for SDG efforts but it also provides opportunities, including through stimulus and recovery packages, to scale investment in areas that will drive inclusive and sustainable economies.

213. A key area of collaboration is the system's support to integrated national financing frameworks (INFFs), a country-owned strategic tool derived from the Addis Ababa Action Agenda to close the link between national development plans and the financial resources needed to achieve them. Around 70 countries are developing and implementing INFFs with support from the UN system at local, regional and global level, as well as bilateral and other partners. Most are also receiving financial assistance from the Joint SDG Fund. The experience of 16 countries that have been pioneering the design and implementation of INFFs is informing these efforts. To further strengthen this work, the Inter-Agency Task Force on Financing for Development coordinated by DESA, including UNDS entities and the Bretton Woods institutions, is developing methodology and guidance material that will be available on a global INFF knowledge platform in the first half of 2021. The guidance also touches on the important alignment of financing strategies with national long-term priorities and the SDGs, for example, on issues such as leaving no one behind and climate action.

214. At global and regional levels, UN entities have been advancing numerous actions aimed at increasing financing access and advocating the relief of debt burdens for developing countries to ensure they can not only respond to the immediate challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, but recover better. The Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond Initiative (FfDI), highlighted in Section III, has resulted in a comprehensive menu of options and supported progress in some areas. To maintain momentum for action, UN entities are working to support countries with implementation of relevant policy options has now been re-configured into six clusters.<sup>36</sup> Leadership of each cluster is open and collaborative, drawing on the knowledge and expertise of other UN entities, while cross-cluster work is undertaken as necessary. I will continue to call for more ambitious measures on financing for development, including the extension of the DSSI until at least the end of 2022, the expansion of the DSSI and the Common Framework to include vulnerable middle-income countries that request support, and a large issuance paired with a reallocation of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs). I will also continue to advocate for action to redress the long-standing weaknesses in the international debt architecture, in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders.

215. The UNDS and international financial institutions have rallied together as part of the COVID-19 response. But this is only a first step. At present, 44 out of 130 UNCTs report having joint initiatives with international financial institutions to promote sustainable financial systems at country level, mostly with the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank. Unchanged from 2019, a little over half of programme country Governments agree that the collaboration between the Bretton Woods institutions and the UN in their countries has improved over the past four years. When disaggregated by region, responses show sharp differences (see table 6).

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<sup>35</sup> [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg\\_policy\\_brief\\_on\\_liquidity\\_and\\_debt\\_solutions\\_march\\_2021.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_on_liquidity_and_debt_solutions_march_2021.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> The six clusters and respective UN leads are (i) sustainability and climate action, led by UNDP; (ii) socio-economic response: social protection, gender, youth, health, education, and human rights, led by ILO; (iii) finance and technology, led by UNCTAD; (iv) liquidity and debt vulnerability, led by DESA; (v) illicit financial flows, led by the Regional Economic Commissions; and (vi) addressing special country needs, led by DESA



Table 6

**Collaboration between the Bretton Woods institutions and the UN in their country has improved over the past four years**

Region	Agree	Disagree	Unaware of any	No BWI in Country	Total
Africa	76%	3%	18%	3%	100%
Arab States	36%	45%	18%	0%	100%
Asia and the Pacific	55%	14%	27%	5%	100%
Europe and Central Asia	71%	7%	21%	0%	100%
Latin America and the Caribbean	36%	8%	48%	8%	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020 survey of programme country Governments.

216. Cooperation with the international financial institutions is the new frontier to reposition the UNDS as part of an integrated effort to address the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. To increase cooperation not only with the Bretton Woods institutions but the entire range of international financial institutions, UNSDG will develop a joint framework of collaboration with the international financial institutions and multilateral development banks to improve synergies at the regional and country levels, as requested by the 2020 QCPR as part of my Financing for Sustainable Development strategy. I look forward to seeing a step-change in our collaboration over the course of the QCPR cycle.

## 2. Continuing to improve engagement with the private sector

217. UNDS entities continued growing their private sector partnership portfolios, with new partnerships increasing by 26 per cent between 2019 and 2020. UNSDG is planning a common online platform to centralize and streamline information on private sector partnerships. A number of UN entities, including the UN Office for Project Services, are advancing innovative approaches to private sector engagement. Additionally, the Global Compact local networks, in collaboration with the Partnership and Finance officers of RC offices, are playing a central role in promoting local action to build private sector partnerships. In January 2021, the Global Compact launched its new three-year strategy that strengthens active engagement across the system and growth of local and regional networks. The new strategy aims for measurable impact in five areas: gender equality; decent work and economic growth; climate action; peace, justice and strong institutions; and partnerships.

218. Oversight of partnerships has been reinforced through the UNSDG common methodology on due diligence adopted in 2019, and practical guidance is currently being developed for resident coordinators and UNCTs to complement it. In most cases, UNDS entities provide additional guidance and support for partnership development. Three-quarters of UN entities have platforms or mechanisms to track the annual status and results of each partnership at global and regional levels, and nearly two-thirds monitor at country level (see table 7). While good progress has been made, we must make an additional effort to ensure we have oversight policies and mechanisms in place everywhere.

Table 7

Does your entity have a functioning monitoring and reporting platform or mechanism/s that tracks the annual status and results of each partnership?

Levels	Yes		No		Total
Global	77%	20	23%	6	26
Regional	73%	19	27%	7	26
Country	63%	15	37%	9	24

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020 survey of United Nations development system headquarters.

### **3. Invigorating support for South-South and triangular cooperation**

219. There was a surge in activities on South-South cooperation organized by UNDS entities in 2020 that included hundreds of pandemic-related capacity-building events, knowledge exchanges, and cooperation for the rapid deployment of vital medical supplies. South-South trust funds fast-tracked close to \$12 million to 31 countries to support the purchase of ventilators and personal protective equipment, as well as resources to mitigate the socioeconomic impact among vulnerable populations. Furthermore, eighty-five per cent of UNDS entities have included South-South cooperation in their strategic plans. At the same time, the number of entities with a unit dedicated to South-South cooperation has decreased from 12 out of 28 in 2019 to seven out of 25 in 2020. Challenges remain unchanged, namely in mobilizing additional resources, effective monitoring and evaluation, and lack of engagement when impact is difficult to measure and national institutions for managing South-South cooperation initiatives at national level are limited. The South-South Galaxy platform established in 2019 is increasingly serving as a one-stop shop for a broad array of partners, including some 300 institutions, 50 Member States and 45 UN entities, to share solutions and broker deals between solution seekers and providers. The platform includes a curated digital repository of over 550 good practices so far, including a specific repository of efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic.
220. In 2020, most programme country Governments reported receiving adequate UN support for South-South and triangular cooperation. Still, one in five countries (21%) considered this support inadequate and requested more engagement in this area. The adoption in August 2020 of the System-wide Strategy on South-South and Triangular Cooperation for Sustainable Development, 2020-2024, and the ongoing development by the UN Office for South-South Cooperation of an action plan and monitoring framework for this strategy are expected to improve integrated support from the system and enable us to better initiate, facilitate and crowd-in South-South and triangular cooperation.

### **4. Collaboration with other partners**

221. Collaboration for partnerships continues to be strengthened across the UNDS, with strong engagement of the United Nations Office for Partnerships (UNOP) as the global gateway for partnerships to deliver the SDGs. Examples include the tailored support provided through the 2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator, with direct partnership training and advisory services to country teams and regions, and the SDG Strategy Hub, which raises engagement around the SDGs by helping enhance, connect and align the efforts of various stakeholders. UNOP has also worked in close collaboration with the United Nations Foundation on the COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund, which allows individuals, organizations and companies to support the WHO response to COVID-19. More than 663 million contributors already committed over \$242 million in flexible funding through the fund.<sup>37</sup>
222. Engagement with RCO Partnership and Finance Officers and those of UNDS entities will be key to strengthening partnerships going forward, including actors such as civil society and academia. There is also a need to strengthen our engagement with local authorities, including through the work of Local 2030 – a platform that supports local leaders in collaboratively incubating and sharing solutions, unlocking bottlenecks and implementing strategies that advance the SDGs at the local level. This initiative will be taken to the next level by UN-Habitat as we look ahead to the High-level Meeting on the New Urban Agenda in the 76<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly.
223. The 2020 QCPR includes a dedicated focus on volunteerism which is increasingly recognized as a powerful, crosscutting instrument to implement the 2030 Agenda. Between 2016 and 2020, 51 per cent of Voluntary National Reviews submitted by Member States to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development referenced the positive contributions of volunteers. A review of 77 Cooperation Frameworks or similar instruments active between 2019 and 2021 showed that 58.4 per cent included volunteerism. UNSDG entities have embedded volunteerism in their organizational strategies, including through specific mentions in strategic

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<sup>37</sup> As of 19 March 2021.

plans, interdivisional working groups, volunteer offices and individual initiatives. In 2020, 9,458 UN-Volunteers served in 60 UN entities across the globe, the highest number of volunteers deployed in the history of United Nations Volunteers (UNV). Looking ahead, UNCTs should deepen their engagement with local volunteers, volunteer groups and volunteer-involving organizations and reflect the distinctive value-added and contributions of volunteering in Cooperation Frameworks and country programme documents.

## E. Supporting countries in voluntary national reviews

224. Voluntary National Reviews provide an opportunity for countries to engage a wide range of stakeholders to reflect on progress being made to implement the 2030 Agenda and to focus on key areas in need of accelerated action over the course of the coming Decade. In 2020, the vast majority (82%) of countries that participated in the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) at the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) considered the process effective in advancing national implementation of the 2030 Agenda, a strong increase from around two-thirds of countries in 2019 (see figure XXXV).

225. As highlighted by the 2020 QCPR, UNCTs can play an important role in supporting governments in this critical exercise. Over half of programme country Governments report receiving UN support in preparing VNR national reports and in following up after their presentation at the High-level Political Forum. UN support in preparing national reports focused most often on stakeholder engagement, report writing, data and statistics, and awareness-raising. Over 90 per cent of countries indicate that the UN has, in the VNR context, to some extent assisted in identifying and reaching those furthest behind first.

Figure XXXV

### United Nations country support to the voluntary national review processes

	Response distribution			Trend in target	
	2020			%	
	Yes	No	Don't know	2019	2020
All things considered, was the Voluntary National Review (VNR) effective in strengthening implementation efforts towards the 2030 Agenda in your country?	82	1	17	67	82
	2020	2020	2018 & 2019		
If your country presented a Voluntary National Review at the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in 2020, Please select those areas where the UN provided support to the Voluntary National Review process:	VNR report support	VNR follow-up support	VNR follow-up support		
Consultations within the government	44	n.d.	n.d.		
Report writing	59	n.d.	n.d.		
Data and statistics	59	45	64		
Stakeholder engagement	63	52	54		
Resource mobilization	34	44	56		
Awareness raising for the SDGs	59	56	58		
Capacity building for the SDGs	53	52	62		
Institutional arrangements	19	30	32		
Other (specify)	13	11	6		

226. However, support to VNR follow-up appears to have dropped from 2019 in all areas – possibly due to countries' and UNCT focus on responding to the pandemic. The development and updating of Cooperation Frameworks present an opportunity to strengthen the interface between VNR reporting and follow-up on the one hand and

country-level programming and implementation on the other, as called for in the 2020 QCPR. To maximize results and impact, it is essential that these two exercises be considered as part of a single loop. The emergence of Voluntary Local Reviews provides an opportunity to further advance the localization of the 2030 Agenda and it is important that UNCTs support such efforts in the spirit of inclusive development.

### **The way ahead**

227. The areas highlighted in the 2020 QCPR provide clear direction for the UNDS as it seeks to step up its support for countries during this Decade of Action. It will require a considerable effort from all UN entities, departing from old ways of doing business, embracing new partners, identifying synergies across various mandates, and approaching the significant challenges that countries face with both humility and ambition. The COVID-19 response from the UNDS shows that the system is primed for this shift. With support from Member States, in executive boards, in funding allocations and in programme countries, and commitment by all involved, the current QCPR cycle can demonstrate that the UNDS now embodies what is needed to deliver the SDGs, as evidenced by the transformative results to which it now must contribute.

## **VII. Conclusion: Delivering a sustainable and better future for all**

228. The COVID-19 crisis has also shown how interconnected our world is and how mutually dependent we are. A microscopic virus has categorically demonstrated no one is safe until all are safe, that overcoming this crisis will require a whole-of-society, whole-of-government, unified approach driven by compassion, humility and solidarity.

229. I am pleased that programme country Governments positively view the UNDS response to this unprecedented emergency, demonstrating that our collective effort to reform the UNDS is bearing fruit. Building on these achievements and noting the challenges that this report has highlighted, we have started planning the way forward to deliver upon the expectations conveyed in the 2020 QCPR.

230. First, we must continue to strengthen our ability to deliver a truly whole-of-system and society support at country, regional and global levels. This will require investments to shift and incentivize UNDS business model, culture and workforce, including country configuration, towards integrated policy advice. It also requires better alignment of UNDS, individual and collective planning, reporting and funding, enabling improved results-based tracking, reporting and evaluation, and further advancing more efficient operations. And it demands close attention to tailoring our offer to countries in different situations, overcoming challenges that this poses for many agencies, funds and programmes, and making further progress on the synergies across our development, humanitarian and peace operations.

231. Second, with a view to accelerating implementation of the SDGs during the Decade of Action, we must now see a step-change in our delivery of transformative policy-making, advancing a systems-approach that promotes resilience, facilitates the transition to more inclusive and sustainable economies, leveraging opportunities that emerge to recover better together. In particular, the provision of concrete policy advice and investments on climate adaptation and mitigation will be crucial if we are to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement on Climate change, leveraging the appropriate capacities and skills for RCs and UNCTs to co-create solutions with governments and partners

232. Third, we need to enhance our support to countries to mobilize the means of implementation. This requires working through key instruments such as the integrated national financing frameworks, better engagement with international financial institutions and multilateral development banks and other financial partners. It also requires greater capacity within the UNDS on these issues and a more concrete offer on issues of digital transformation.

233. Demand for UNDS support continues to be strong. Successfully meeting this demand and delivering at scale require predictable, sustainable, flexible, long-term funding that addresses the continuing unbalance between core and non-core resources and the system's over-dependence on a small number of donors. As we continue our efforts to enhance transparency and accountability and fulfil our commitments under the Funding Compact, I count on the strengthened and proactive engagement of the Principals of individual UN entities to continue building trust. Governing boards must play their part in establishing and implementing accountability mechanisms against which the UNDS will report.
234. These issues and more will inform the review of the functioning of the RC system that I am currently undertaking, as requested by the General Assembly. We will engage actively with Member States to reflect progress to date and to identify areas where course correction may be needed. This requires an honest and thorough reflection. While it is already clear that the RC system is proving its added value, we must not be shy in recognizing any shortcomings and seizing opportunities to improve our value proposition.
235. In moving forward, Our Common Agenda, set out by Member States in the political declaration marking the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations, provides a clear framework for strengthening the United Nations within the context of inclusive and networked multilateralism. The 2020 QCPR brings similar intent to the work of the UNDS and will guide our work over the coming four years. I look forward to continuing partnership with Member States and all stakeholders to meet expectations and deliver on the promise of the 2030 Agenda, so as to secure a sustainable and better future for all.