



## **Advance unedited version**

### **2021 session**

23 July 2020–22 July 2021

Agenda item 7(a)

**Operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation: follow-up to policy recommendations of the General Assembly and the Council**

## **Development Coordination Office**

### **Report of the Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group**

#### *Summary*

In 2018, Member States agreed to a vision for a stronger development coordination function to respond to the paradigm shift ushered in by the 2030 Agenda. Three years later, the implementation of that vision for a reinvigorated Resident Coordinator (RC) system, alongside a new generation of UN Country Teams (UNCTs), is proving its value. Under stronger and more impartial leadership at all levels, the UN development system (UNDS) approached the COVID-19 crisis in emergency mode with a commitment to recovering better and delivering the SDGs during this Decade of Action. In fact, 91% of programme country Governments indicate that the UN is more relevant to their country's development needs when compared to three years ago, 88% indicate that RCs effectively lead UNCTs, up from 79% only a year before, and 92% report that RCs have ensured a coherent UN response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The reforms continue to mature, and so does the new RC system, which remains central to a more impactful UNDS. This report provides an overview of both achievements and challenges of the Development Coordination Office (DCO) and the RC system, in tandem with the 2021 report from the Secretary-General on the QCPR. The report also includes a response to the General Assembly request in resolution 72/279 for the UNDS to report on the system-wide contribution to the SDGs, focusing on 2020 results from the collective response to the COVID-19 crisis. While this reporting will be strengthened over time – as individual entities continue to harmonize and strengthen their data – this first-of-its-kind effort is a stepping stone in increasing transparency around what the system achieves, together, in support of the SDGs.

The current report will also inform the Secretary-General's report on the RC system review, mandated by A/RES/72/279, which will comprehensively assess the progress made over the past three years, providing an opportunity to refine and adjust the trajectory of the RC system where necessary.

## **I. Introduction:**

1. Three years ago, Member States adopted bold reforms to the UNDS. At the heart of those reforms was a commitment to transform the UN's development coordination function to unleash the system's full capacity to support countries on their path to achieving the transformational 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
2. The first stress test of these reforms came earlier than foreseen. In 2020, the world was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought disruption and loss of lives and livelihoods, and made evident that humankind was inextricably connected and yet divided between those who have access to care, services and opportunities and those who are left behind. Even as we were still consolidating the new RC system, the boost in coordination capacities and more collaborative ways of working that had already taken place proved crucial. UN RCs leadership facilitate a strong, integrated response by UNCTs to support over 160 countries and territories to tackle the health, humanitarian, and socioeconomic impacts, while setting the foundations for a better recovery grounded in the 2030 Agenda.
3. Guided by a robust UN Global Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response, a dedicated coordination function with increased capacities and enhanced leadership at the country level offered clear entry-points with Governments, more coherent positioning of the UN's work, and a stronger system response through effective UNCT working relationships. RCs drew upon the resources of the UNDS, with WHO, OCHA and UNDP as technical leads of the system's health, humanitarian, and socioeconomic response efforts, respectively, and on the wider UNDS. For the first time, the UNDS was able to deliver in 'emergency mode' – previously only witnessed on the humanitarian front. Results were facilitated by a swift system-wide effort to develop UN Socio-Economic Response and Recovery Plans (UN-SERPs), rapid repurposing and mobilization of resources and ensuring UNCT business continuity.
4. In hindsight, the COVID-19 response was not only a stress test for the reforms; it also served to accelerate the emergence of a new generation of UNCTs that are better equipped to address complex challenges through an integrated approach, making the most of the UN's assets at all levels. UN-SERPs, put together by UNCTs working with Governments and stakeholders, took the system to a new level in joint planning and results. This experience echoes and reinforces a marked shift towards joint programming and planning grounded in country contexts, as evidenced in the new Common Country Analyses (CCAs), UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (Cooperation Frameworks) and stronger collaboration across development, humanitarian and peacebuilding actors in complex country contexts. Similarly, we are seeing more integrated policy advice to help countries address intersecting vulnerabilities towards achieving the SDGs, drawing on UN capacities at all levels, regardless of physical presence in country, and, in some instances, on closer collaboration with international financial institutions (IFIs), and regional and sub-regional development institutions. In terms of increasing transparency and accountability, new tools such as improved data portals and annual UNCT results reports, are helping to strengthen engagement with national Governments, Member States and other stakeholders. Efforts continue to ensure more efficient operations and we are also seeing improvements in our ability to speak with one voice, demonstrating our joint and individual contributions.
5. Feedback from national Governments and Member States reinforced these findings. A survey of programme country Governments at the end of 2020 found a noteworthy increase in positive perceptions, with 88% of programme countries finding that RCs have effectively led UNCTs, up from 79% only a year before, and 77% reporting that the UNDS now works better together since the reform in 2018. In addition, 92% say that RCs have ensured a coherent UN response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
6. Data from surveys of UN entities also show a positive impression of the changes made, including increasing support for the empowered RC function and dual reporting lines: 12 entities recognize reporting obligations to the RC for planning, programme implementation and resource mobilization, 14 recognize their country representative's relationship vis-a-vis

the RC in their representatives' job descriptions, and 17 have reported to their governing body on actions taken to address institutional bottlenecks and promote greater programmatic collaboration and coherence within UNCTs. Almost half of the respondents of a UNICEF's survey of its country representatives reported an improvement in UNICEF's strategic engagement with the RC, and an increase in the RC ability to facilitate dialogue between the UNCT and the national Government and to pursue funding on behalf of the UNDS as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

7. As UNSDG Chair, I am encouraged by these initial results. At the same time, ultimately, the UNDS must be judged on the concrete results it delivers for people and planet. In response to OP28(a) of A/RES/72/279 and in benefitting from the tools developed for the COVID-19 response, this report seeks to capture for the first time the overall contribution of the UNDS to development results. Expectedly, in 2020 UNCT efforts across the globe were largely centered in the comprehensive response to the pandemic, with the health, humanitarian and socioeconomic responses coming together as a means of protecting SDG gains, minimizing roll-backs and laying the foundations for an inclusive, sustainable and resilient recovery. As such, this report focuses on collective results facilitated by the RC system and achieved by the UNDS through the UN-SERPs. Though this does not capture the full breadth of operational activities for development, it is a significant, first-of-its-kind effort to include aggregated data on results across UNCTs.
8. Overall, even though we have seen encouraging progress in delivering a reinvigorated RC system and in securing greater results through the UNDS, real transformation demands that we go further to deliver on the promise of the 2030 Agenda – thrown further off track by the COVID-19 crisis. Continued efforts are required for a fundamental realignment and culture-change in UN entities. In some instances, UNDS entities' business models are still to be fully aligned with the UN's value proposition for the needed step change in our ability to deliver an integrated response through the Cooperation Framework. Further refinements are also needed to maximize the effectiveness of DCO. And in some contexts, UNCT composition has not yet fully adjusted to changing country needs, and we must still see a more decisive shift from individual smaller scale projects to more horizontal and integrated policy solutions or programmes commensurate with the ambition of the 2030 Agenda. The funding of the RC system is also not yet sustainable, especially considering the critical role it plays today as an enabler of the UNDS. There is a need to invest in and champion a common data system and process for comprehensive SDG reporting, building on the experience of using a shared COVID-19 response monitoring framework in the UN Info platform.<sup>2</sup>
9. The UNDS reform is an investment in the system at large, but, in time, it will also be seen as an investment in the effectiveness of every UN entity. I am grateful for the commitment and leadership shown by the UNSDG Vice-Chair and UNDP Administrator, UNSDG Principals, RCs, and teams at regional and country levels, all of whom have worked tirelessly to respond to the impacts of this crisis on people's lives and livelihoods. This is a testament also to all of DCO staff and their stewardship under the Assistant Secretary-General for Development Coordination.
10. I also commend Member States who continue to work towards sustainable funding of the RC system and the broader shift in funding behavior called for by the Funding Compact. We can see the benefits of the reforms playing out in the work we are all undertaking and in the results to which we contribute. Understandably, for such a significant undertaking we must keep focused until the impact of the reforms is fully materialized. The RC system review that the Secretary-General is now undertaking provides an opportunity to reflect on any changes that are needed to course correct and reinforce the foundations of the reforms. Ultimately, the review will allow the membership to consider how to further consolidate the reforms to

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<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup> UN Info allows UNCTs to collect, analyze and report on their cooperation Framework workplans to advance the SDGs and the COVID-19 response, including programmes implemented at national and local level, available resources and partners engaged for the SDGs.

strengthen the UNDS ability to fully support countries in delivering improved outcomes for people and planet during what must become a truly transformative Decade of Action.

## II. Leadership for sustainable development results: building RC system capabilities for the 2030 Agenda and the COVID-19 response

11. A reinvigorated RC system is proving central to unlocking the full UNDS potential. During the COVID-19 global crisis of historic magnitude, response efforts continued to further solidify the new system – RCs, their Offices, and the regional and global support structures. Survey results provide encouraging evidence that these efforts are bearing fruit, while also pointing to areas where further improvements are needed.

(i) *RC leadership to lift UNCT support for the SDGs*

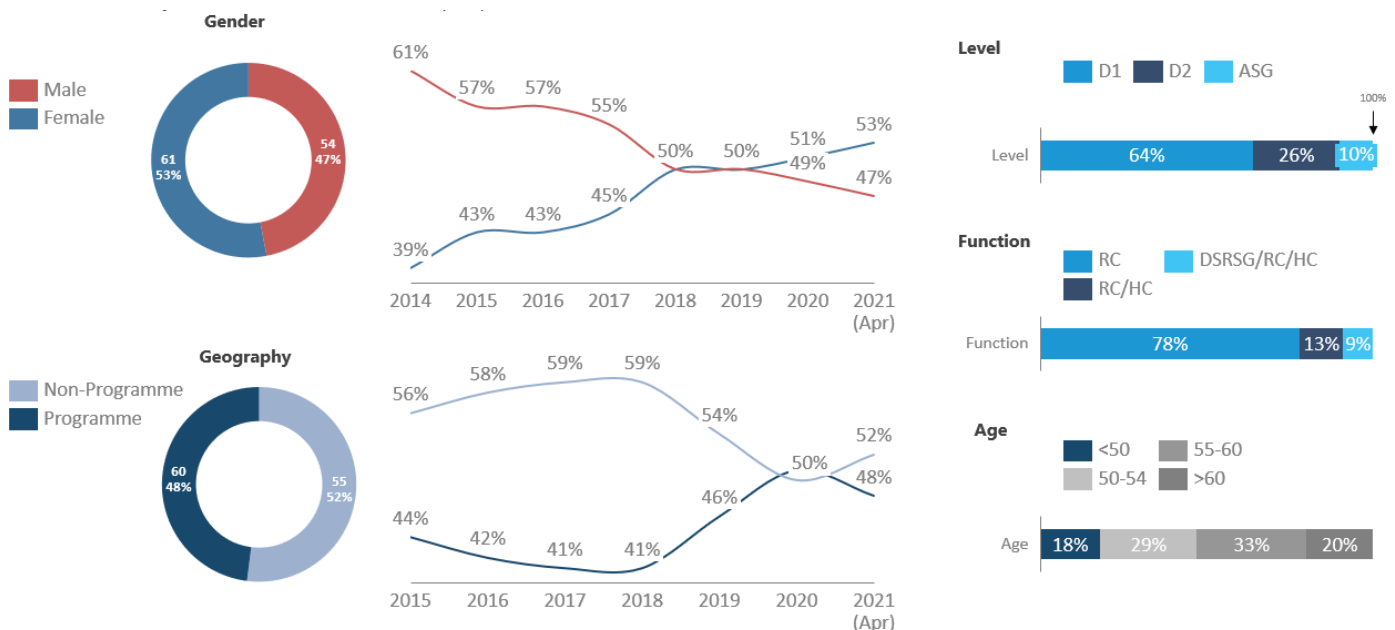
*Resident Coordinators*

12. In deciding to reinvigorate the RC system, Member States requested the Secretary-General to put in place a dedicated, independent, impartial, empowered and sustainable development-focused coordination function for the UNDS and to strengthen the authority and leadership of RCs over UNCTs.

13. As of 1 April 2021, more than one-third of RC posts had turned over since the shift of the RC system to the Secretariat in 2019, providing a first opportunity to diversify and bring new talent to the RC ranks. In 2020, DCO supported the Secretary-General in filling 41 RC posts, twice as many as in 2018, including five DSRSG/RC/HC positions in integrated mission settings. In this process, 23 new RCs were deployed. As figure 1 shows, diversity has notably improved, particularly in terms of gender and geographic balance – oscillating in view of constant movements of RCs, but continuously close to a 50/50 benchmark. As of April 2021, 52% of RCs were female (compared to 50% in 2019) and 48% from programme countries (46% in 2019), and they represented 58 nationalities (54 in 2019).

RC recruitment status as of April 2021

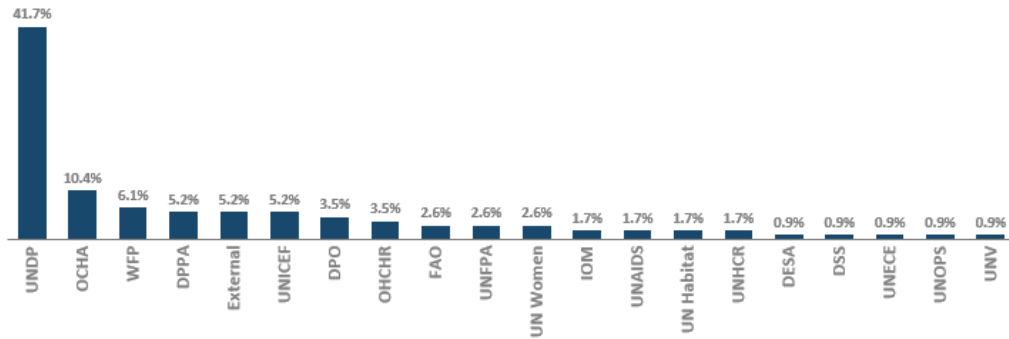
Figure 1



Source: Development Coordination Office, 2021

14. As figure 2 shows, today RCs come from 19 UN entities (16 in 2019), with 6 from outside the UN (compared to 2 in 2019). RCs increasingly bring experience and expertise from a variety of backgrounds in UN entities, Governments, and civil society.

Figure 2  
RC agency of origin

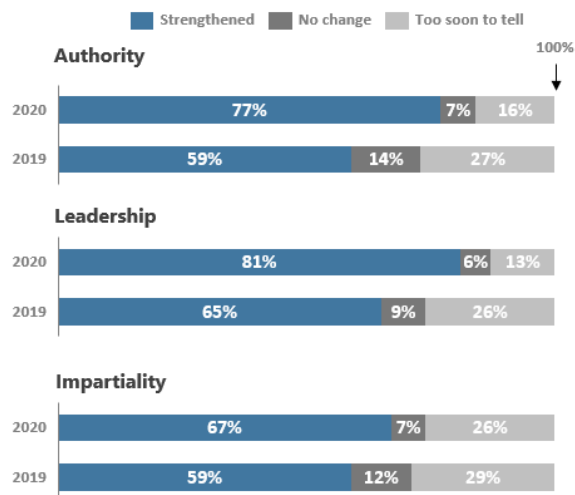


Source: Development Coordination Office, 2021

15. Significant measures were taken in 2020, including with contributions from UNDS entities, to ensure that RCs possess the attributes, values and competencies required to respond to country specificities and live up to the expectations of national Governments on sustainable development. The RC Assessment Centre was fully redesigned and aligned with the RC leadership profile, with a stronger emphasis on development credentials; a first edition was held virtually in November 2020, and a total of 42 new members were added to the RC Pool. DCO supported first-time RCs and those rotating to new postings with in-briefing programmes, individual executive coaching and six months of mentoring for first time RCs. A certification on the SDGs (the “SDG Primer”) is now mandatory for RCs, and it soon will be for RC candidates. A third annual global meeting of the Secretary-General with RCs was held virtually, providing an opportunity to discuss, reflect and exchange across regions and to reinforce the Secretary-General’s expectations.

16. Programme country Governments provided positive feedback on RCs’ and UNCTs’ role, capacities and skillsets (see figure 3 on RC’s role). 88% and 85 % reported that RCs and UNCTs, respectively, have the right profile, capacities and skillsets to support their countries’ development. 79% also noted that RCs have sufficient prerogative to fulfil their mandate, compared to 71% in 2019. I welcome this feedback, especially considering our primary accountability for results to host countries and the people we serve on the ground.

Figure 3  
Compared to before 1 January 2019 that marks the start of the reform, in relation to UN entities, to what extent has the RC displayed strengthened / increased:



Source: DESA survey of programme country Governments, 2020

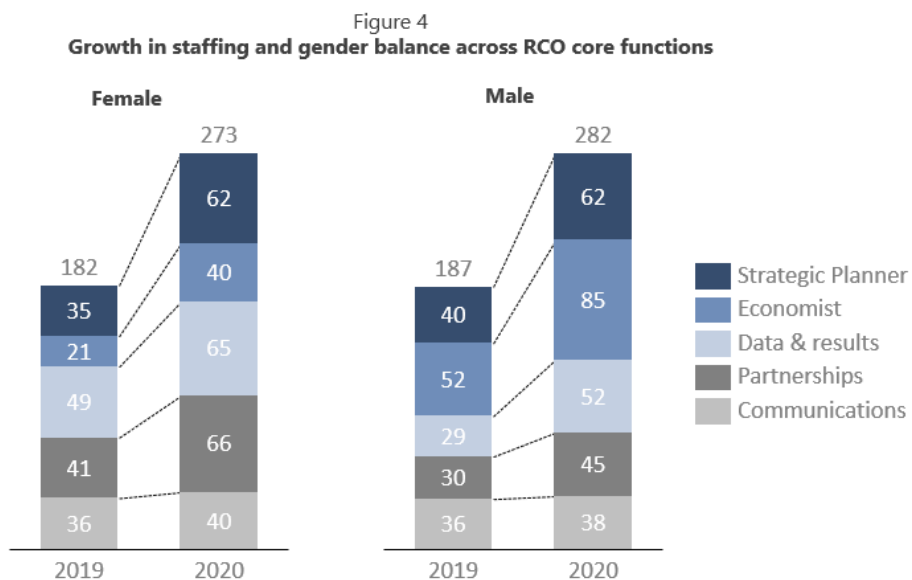
17. Improvements were made to the appraisal of RCs’ and UNCTs’ performance, to strengthen RC system accountability. In 2020, the Secretary-General appraised RCs for the first time, in a robust assessment process that included feedback from stakeholders, including UNSDG Regional Directors. Moving forward, an integrated system is being devised to appraise the performance of RCs who also carry out the functions of Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) in field operations. In line

with the system of dual reporting lines established by the General Assembly, RCs have already been included as additional supervisors in the performance appraisals of 18 UNCT entities.<sup>3</sup> This number is expected to reach 100% of UNCT entities by the end of 2021. As an example of the engagement of UN entities in these processes, a new RC Peer Feedback Tool was rolled out to gather feedback from UNCT members on RC leadership. Such feedback will inform the 2020 RC performance appraisals.

18. Ensuring that the RC pool continues to attract and retain the best talent remains a priority. Expanding career opportunities for those choosing the RC path is an important step in this regard. At present, however, RCs wishing to return to their agency of origin find themselves with limited career options and RC movements to other UN entities, including in the Secretariat, remain rare. In 2020, DCO offered career guidance to RCs and the Secretary-General is looking at possibilities that could help broaden career paths. An RC/HC Talent Pipeline was launched to identify and prepare candidates for the RC track, both external and internal to the UN system. This effort will also help to ensure a more proactive approach to talent management and will cover existing gaps in profiles required in specific country contexts.

### *Resident Coordinator Offices (RCOs)*

19. Significant progress has been made in ensuring a core coordination capacity in all RCOs, moving away from the ad hoc practices that marked the coordination system before the reforms. As of January 2021, most RCOs had recruited their five core positions covering strategic planning; economics; data management and results reporting; partnership and development finance; communications and advocacy; as well as additional coordination specialists in multi-country offices (MCOs). This has ensured a strong core of expertise needed for the RCs to lead UNCTs and engage credibly with Governments. Across 132 RCOs, 565 recruitments were completed, up from 369 in March 2020; this includes 199 international officers (46% from programme countries) and 366 national officers. Gender parity was reached among the 565 RCO professional staff, and gender representation increased across RCO core functions (see figure 4). Efforts to recruit candidates with disabilities are ongoing. UNDP continued to support national officers recruitment, while also continuing to provide procurement services to RCOs.



Source: UNSDG Information Management System (IMS), 2020

<sup>3</sup> UNDP, UNICEF, FAO, UNFPA, UNESCO, ILO, IOM, WFP, UNAIDS, UN Women, UNIDO, UNHCR, UNOPS, IFAD, OHCHR, UNODC, UN-HABITAT, UNEP, OCHA, WHO.

20. The reform investment in essential capacities standardized across all RCOs, as well as numerous training and peer-to-peer initiatives launched over the past year, have been a critical foundation for effective coordination at the country level. RCOs were able to contribute to more coherent UNCT analysis, programming, and partnerships, and to monitor and communicate progress towards achieved results. For example, several RCs reported that economists have been game-changers in increasing the focus by UNCTs on issues of economic transformation and SDG financing, working closely not only with UNCT counterparts but also with entities like DESA, ITC and UNCTAD not present in country, as well as IFIs. This was the case, for example, in Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, the Maldives, Mozambique and Sudan. However, RCO capacities are still maturing and vary considerably. We will continue to strengthen RCO capabilities, networking them within and outside RCOs, linking to existing UNDS assets and expertise throughout the UNDS at all levels.
21. RCOs also benefited from additional capacities deployed by the UN system in response to specific country contexts. Peace and Development Advisors – part of a joint programme with UNDP and DPPA – were deployed in more than 80 countries in support of RCs and UNCTs efforts to sustain peace. Human Rights Advisors provided by OHCHR supported RCs and UNCTs in 43 countries, including by integrating a human rights perspective in CCAs and Cooperation Frameworks. Gender advisors were present in 13 RCOs to strengthen UNCT efforts for gender equality and women’s empowerment. Sixty-two countries have UN entity capacity embedded in RCOs and/or a UNCT entity (36 RCOs alone), to maximize the reach of entities with no physical presence.

(ii) *Coordination capacities at regional level to support the RC system*

22. Closely located with major clusters of partners, regional DCO teams are now fully operational, having reached full capacity (64% female). Over the last year, we have seen good progress in the ability of these teams to deliver more effective support to RCs and UNCTs through strengthened regional coordination and engagement of regional partners.
23. Several steps have been taken to deliver on the primary focus of regional DCO teams, namely, to back RCs and UNCTs. Regional DCO directors now chair meetings in the regions dedicated to support and provide quality-assurance for UNCTs preparing new CCAs and Cooperation Frameworks. In 2020, they also provided support to the preparation of UN-SERPs, including by connecting expertise within and outside the UN. This contributed to better quality analysis and programming, stronger RC positioning of an integrated UN response, and increased engagement of stakeholders. Regional DCO teams support in Asia Pacific, Arab States and Europe, for example, helped to articulate and mainstream climate change in CCAs and Cooperation Frameworks. In the Asia-Pacific region, DCO and ESCAP jointly mobilized financial contributions from over 30 Bangkok-based entities to offer resources and expertise to UNCTs through a newly created knowledge management hub. In Latin America and the Caribbean, DCO convened a strategic dialogue between the private sector and the RCs to increase engagement of businesses in the national responses to the COVID-19 crisis. Regional DCO teams also engaged in supporting system-wide staff wellbeing efforts, providing timely advice and support to RCs and RCOs on COVID-related Duty of Care and medical evacuations.
24. Regional teams of DCO have also collaborated with the wider UN teams in regions to step up analysis, assessments, programming, and partnership efforts at the regional and sub-regional levels. In Africa, for example, the DCO regional team provided coordination and implementation support for and facilitated RC participation in the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, the Comprehensive Regional Prevention Strategy for the Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes Strategy. In Latin America and the Caribbean, DCO supported RCs and UNCTs in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico for the Comprehensive Development Plan for Central America, coordinated by ECLAC. In Europe and Central Asia, DCO provided support to the RCs on the implementation of the Western Balkans Action Plan, in consultation with DPPA-DPO and UNDP and also coordinated a Regional Risk and

Resilience Assessment on the Fergana Valley and Central Asia's border areas with Afghanistan.

25. In addition, regional DCO teams are directly engaged in supporting the roll-out of the regional UNDS reform, under my direct oversight and the overall leadership of the respective Executive Secretary of regional economic and social commissions and UNDP regional director. Jointly with the regional economic and social commissions and UNDP, DCO provided secretariat support to the new Regional Collaborative Platforms (RCP), supporting the RCP Vice-chairs in the new architecture, including for the set-up of Issue-Based Coalitions to tackle priority regional concerns. Regional teams also contributed to implementing reform mandates, connecting global and country levels. For example, DCO regional teams supported the roll-out of measures to support more efficient operations, with DCO teams in Latin America and the Caribbean as well as Europe and Central Asia – where 15 and 17 UNCTs, respectively, adopted new Business Operations Strategies.
26. Overall, 94% of RCOs rated DCO regional support in 2020 as appropriate or very appropriate, particularly in facilitating knowledge sharing, building capacity, providing quality assurance and guiding the implementation of the reforms. Yet, there remains scope for improvement. Regional DCOs are characterized by varying maturity levels, capacities, and partnerships. RCs and RCOs feedback vary across regions on the management and support they receive from regional DCO teams. In addition, regional DCO teams are still finding their place and roles vis-à-vis regional economic and social commissions, UNDP, and UN agencies in regions in the new regional architecture. The implementation experience of new regional capacities will undergo continuous review and will inform the RC system review.

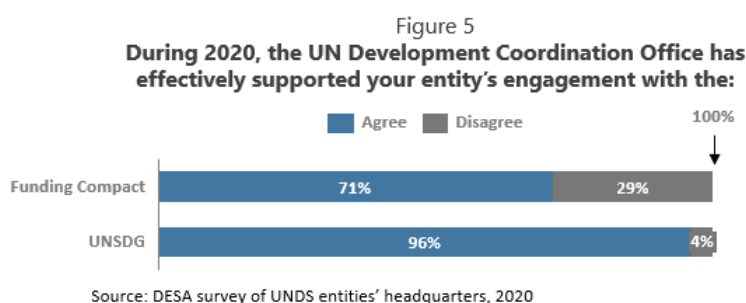
(iii) *Global support of the UNDS*

27. As the COVID-19 crisis took hold, UNSDG Principals came together to ensure DCO could leverage its full capacities to support and enable the response of the RC system and the UNDS at large, to ensure business continuity and use the COVID response to recover better, accelerating SDG progress on the ground and further rooting the reforms.
28. In March 2020, the Secretary-General put forward a comprehensive approach to respond to the health and socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19. This was promptly followed by the UN Global Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response, corresponding guidance for the development of UN-SERPs and an indicator framework to monitor UNCT results under the co-convening of UNDP and DCO. Information to support RCs and UNCTs in their response activities was shared through daily digests and weekly webinars. At the same time, strengthened medical and isolation capacity to UNCTs was put in place, enabling UN staff to stay on the ground and deliver, with business continuity plans activated across 130 RCOs by May 2020.
29. In parallel, efforts continued to improve coordination around country-level planning, programming, and reporting. The UNSDG supplemental guidance (“Companion Package”) on the Cooperation Framework was finalized and launched. DCO engaged regularly through formal and informal channels with key agencies, funds and programmes to streamline the preparation of quality Cooperation Frameworks, working closely with regional DCO teams. It also continued to support the UNSDG and myself, as its Chair, in the rollout of the remaining UNDS reform mandates on the regional and the MCO reviews.
30. In addition, DCO continued to support the UNSDG's ambitious efforts to deliver more efficient operations. The shift from UNDP services to providers in the Secretariat continued apace, completing the transition of the RC system. In December 2020, DCO and DOS signed a regional-service-level agreement with five regional service providers (ECLAC, ESCAP, ESCWA, UNOG and UNON) to provide international travel, high-value procurement and consultant and international contractor support; they also signed a global-service-level agreement with the Global Services Center in Brindisi to support asset management and another with UNON to support human resources administration and financial transactions. Sixteen RCOs took part in an in-situ pilot project to receive location-dependent services from Secretariat providers with a physical presence in their country. The remaining 115 RCOs will



begin to receive international travel services by the five regional service providers as of July 2021. Furthermore, building on the strong foundations laid by the UNSDG’s Business Innovations Group (BIG). DCO will facilitate interagency implementation of efficiency commitments on Business Operations Strategies, Common Back Offices and Common Premises. An inter-agency task team is working to establish clearer parameters and methodologies for advancing efficiencies that can be attributed to inter-agency, bilateral, and agency initiatives in the context of the reforms. The progress made, as well as the challenges that we continue to address, are outlined in greater detail in the Secretary-General’s QCPR report.

31. Another area that saw increased activity in 2020 was inter-agency collaboration on key priorities. In 2020, DCO supported a review of the UNSDG, resulting in improved support for whole-of-system priorities, in line with the QCPR and other intergovernmental frameworks. As part of the joint secretariat of the Joint Steering Committee on Humanitarian and Development Collaboration, DCO supported efforts to strengthen synergies across development, humanitarian and peacebuilding actions in eight priority countries, for example advancing concrete collaboration between the UNCT and the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan. Considerable effort was also undertaken to advance implementation by UNCTs of Secretary-General initiatives on disability, youth, gender parity, climate action, data, and SDG financing.
32. DCO also helped to facilitate UNDS engagement with Member States to communicate results, track implementation of Funding Compact commitments, and strengthen partnerships for voluntary contributions, to help mobilize resources for the RC system and strengthen the quality of funding for the UNDS (see figure 5).



33. By end March 2021, DCO in headquarters was almost fully staffed, with 67 of 68 staff on board (62% female and 53 % staff from programme countries). In line with the UN’s Disability Inclusion Strategy, DCO job listings seek to recruit persons living with disabilities, with a small DCO fund set up to enable reasonable accommodation for disabilities of applicants, new hires, or current staff.
34. Two years on from its establishment, it is encouraging to see that more than 90% of RCs/RCOs considered the support received from DCO New York in 2020 as “very appropriate” or “appropriate.”<sup>4</sup> The most positive ratings were for change management and information on UNDS repositioning, CCA and Cooperation Framework processes, as well as communications and advocacy. At the same time, areas for improvement include continued alignment across all UNDS entities to the new relationships and accountability set out in the Management and Accountability Framework, in line with resolution 72/279; securing greater clarity on issues of oversight and performance management; addressing career planning and support issues; ensuring more effective UNCT configuration processes; and increasing administrative support. RCs also report that requests from UN processes continue to outstrip their Office capacities. The RC system review will enable a deeper analysis of such challenges, identify ways to reduce process burdens, and consider the broader set-up and performance of DCO.

<sup>4</sup> UNSDG IMS, 2020

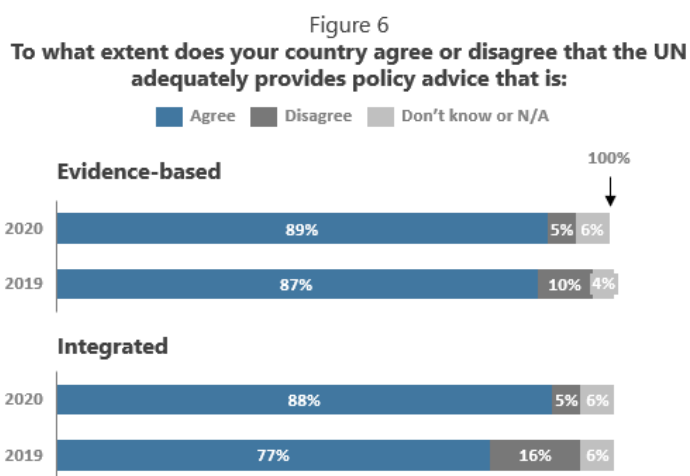
### III. Integrated and effective responses: the UNDS contribution to advancing the SDGs, including through the COVID-19 response and recovery efforts

- 35. In 2020, the benefits of efforts to strengthen the RC system at country, regional and global levels are becoming more visible in the integrated and effective responses by UNCTs to priorities and needs of programme countries.
- 36. Progress can be seen in the CCAs and the Cooperation Frameworks, particularly in terms of expanding the range of expertise available throughout UNCTs, in improving efforts to leave no one behind and in adopting more innovative approaches. With the onset of the pandemic, however, the UNDS moved quickly to advance an emergency response to the socioeconomic impacts of the crisis. A strong effort was made to ensure full alignment between UN-SERPs and the 2030 Agenda, and the results achieved under the UN-SERPs are captured below as a first step towards reporting on the full contribution of the UNDS to the implementation of the SDGs.

(i) *More integrated and effective UNCT responses that leave no one behind*

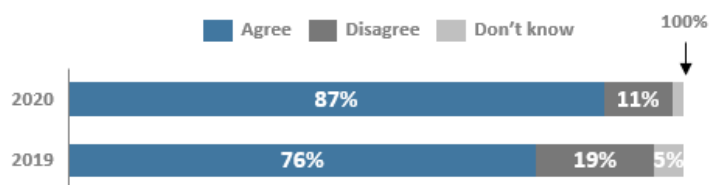
- 37. Over the past year, the reinvigorated RC system has enabled UNCTs to strengthen joint planning and programming and better draw on relevant expertise from across the system to tackle complex, interconnected problems – replacing sectoral approaches to better support countries to achieve the SDGs. 91% of programme country Governments report that the relevance of the UN in their country’s development needs has changed in the past three years, since the reform kicked in, with better and more integrated advice and adequate presence.
- 38. Implementation of new Cooperation Frameworks began in 11 countries in 2020. With an additional 32 for implementation this year, well over half of UNCTs (57%) will have replaced previous UNDAFs by the end of 2021. A dashboard on the implementation status of Cooperation Frameworks in every country is available on the UNSDG website, which now includes a new section in support of governing-board review of entity-specific country programmes.

39. New CCAs and Cooperation Frameworks increasingly demonstrate a stronger integrated response to national SDG challenges, particularly through more and better policy support (see figure 6), and wider engagement of development partners. In Uganda, for example, the UNCT configuration dialogue saw an increase in signatory agencies of the Cooperation Framework to 29 (from 18 in the previous UNDAF cycle) demonstrating a commitment by the system to work under the Cooperation Framework umbrella, regardless of physical presence in country. And 71% of UNCTs reported that capacities were drawn from across the UN system to develop and or update a new CCA. This is part of a wider, encouraging trend: regional economic and social commissions are now fully-fledged members of 49 UNCTs, up 9 from 40 in 2019; the World Bank and the IMF are a member of 53 and 28 UNCTs, and signed 12 and 4 Cooperation Frameworks/UNDAFs, respectively. More and better access to relevant technical capacities is vital for tailored support in countries and Governments have noted these improvements, as shown in figure 7.



Source: DESA survey of programme country Governments, 2020

Figure 7  
**UN presence is adequately tailored for meeting the specific challenges of the country**



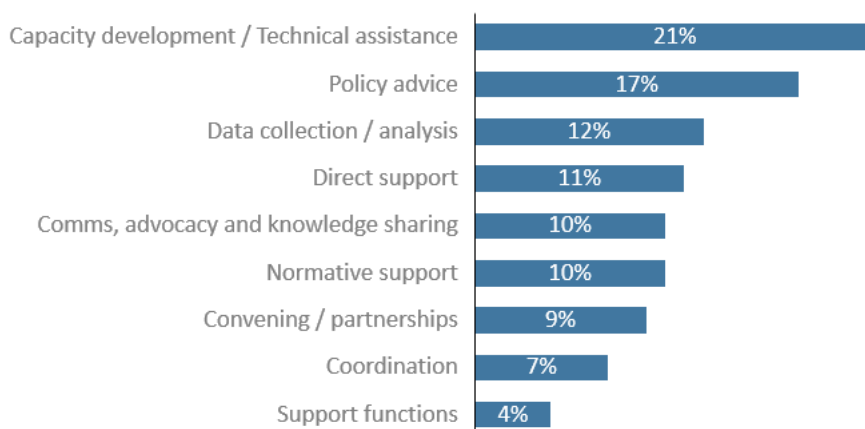
Source: DESA survey of programme country Governments, 2020

40. Synergies between development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding interventions, in countries or situations at risk or affected by crises, were also strengthened. For example, UNCT engagement with the Secretary-General’s Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), leveraged in 2020 alone investments of \$51.4million in 26 projects, with a focus on the Sahel. In Burkina Faso, nearly 2,000 civilians received free health care at military health centers. In Guinea, 160 youth and 800 women were provided training on leadership, electoral processes, and conflict resolution, while 500 vulnerable youth benefited from quick-impact livelihood opportunities to dissuade them from becoming involved in violence. In Nigeria, institutional capacity was built to promote peaceful relations through an approach that advances women’s rights, securing a national budget line to implement the women, peace, and security agenda.
41. Increased integrated policy support and thought leadership has served to respond to specific country needs, including by tackling cross-border and regional challenges. At the request of respective Governments, RCs in Colombia, Brazil and Peru brought national authorities and UNCTs together in a cross-border initiative to address the COVID-19 impact in the Amazon region, supporting local authorities to deliver health, legal and socioeconomic assistance to migrants, refugees and indigenous people, especially women. The RCs in Samoa and Barbados have been leading an initiative to develop a Multidimensional Vulnerability Index to move beyond GDP as a measure of development needs, and consider the unique challenges faced by SIDS, as called for by the SAMOA Pathway, working with partners in and outside the UN system.
42. UNCTs have also strengthened their focus on the most vulnerable groups and those left behind. All Cooperation Frameworks and UN-SERPs developed in 2020 identify such populations more clearly and increasingly involve them in the programme design process. In fact, most programme country Governments perceive the COVID-19 response as targeted towards at-risk groups (84%) and sufficiently coherent with the Cooperation Framework/UNDAF (81%) and the humanitarian response plans (84%). UNCTs have also begun reporting on their support to gender equality and women’s empowerment, youth, and disability inclusion through new corporate scorecards.
43. Progress has been made in advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment, while also addressing violence against women. Gender equality and women’s empowerment are better mainstreamed in Cooperation Frameworks, as for example of those in Cuba, Ethiopia, Paraguay and Uzbekistan. The Cooperation Framework preparation process in Bangladesh helped to inform gender priorities in the Government’s Five-Year Plan. UN support helped to increase services for victims of gender-based violence. For example, in Mauritius, the UN-supported a “panic button” phone app to connect women facing violence with the authorities, benefiting one in four women; and, in KENYA, the volume of calls to a UN-backed gender-based violence hotline increased four-fold compared to the previous year, providing vital support not only to women, but also to men and children. The UNDS also increased investment in women’s organizations to provide support services at the local level (as in Brazil, Kosovo, Moldova and India), for women’s participation in local governance (as in Central African Republic, Nepal, Syria and Ukraine), for access to justice for survivors of gender-based violence (as in Turkey, South Sudan and Zimbabwe), including amendment to the criminal code (as in Kosovo). The Spotlight Initiative redirected more than \$21million to

address the uptick in domestic violence during lockdown, shifted some programme activities and survivor support services online, and secured additional personal protective equipment for women's shelters.

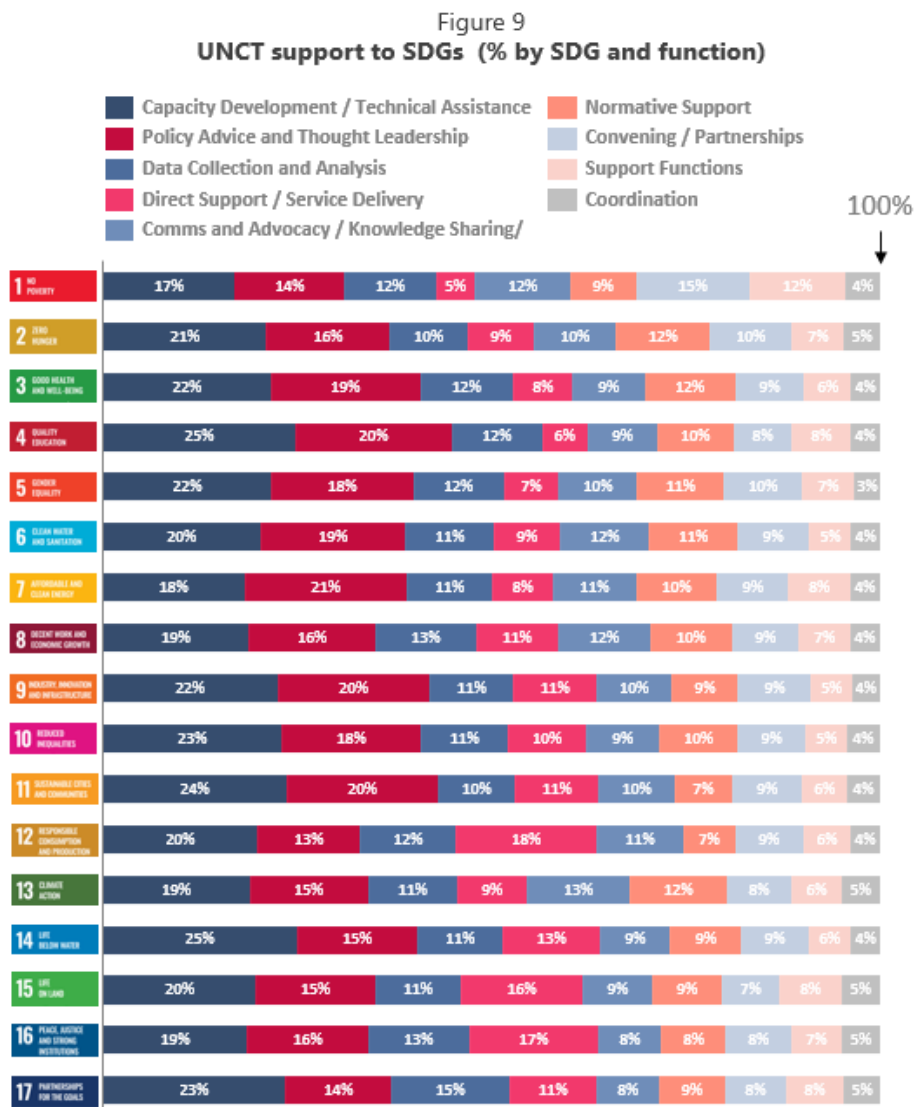
44. The results of the first youth scorecard reporting on the UN Youth Strategy found progress across a range of priority areas, with UNCTs working with Governments and advocating for and with youth. It demonstrated, however, the need for improvements, particularly in terms of UNCT's ability to work with young people. To accelerate progress, DCO is working closely with the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth on a UNCT information and policy support package to support the UN Youth Strategy implementation. The UNCTs in Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Ghana, Jordan, Morocco, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Uzbekistan are piloting the roll-out of the strategy and will also field-test and fine-tune implementation.
45. Similarly, the results of the first analysis on the implementation of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy are notable. For example, in Zimbabwe, the UNCT supported the Government on disability inclusion, resulting in improved offer of services by the justice system and on sexual and reproductive health rights for women and girls with disabilities. The Parliament of Georgia adopted a Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, backed by the UNCT working in close collaboration with persons with disabilities through a joint programme under the Joint SDG Fund. In Guatemala, the UNCT worked with authorities to ensure people with disabilities were included in the national plan to mitigate effects of COVID-19. These examples must be built on, over the course of the next year.
46. Indigenous peoples were also increasingly involved in finding solutions to the issues that affect them, including in response to the compounding risks of COVID-19 and climate change. These efforts include strengthening national data capacities to ensure greater visibility of and response to indigenous peoples and the challenges they face. For example, in Ecuador, the UNCT developed strategic lines of actions on issues like the empowerment of indigenous women in the Amazon region and strengthening indigenous food systems. In Costa Rica, the UNCT promoted new partnerships to face the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 and the structural barriers that indigenous people have faced for many years.
47. Another area of progress is the advancement of more innovative approaches. At least 48 UNCTs reported innovation in the deployment of data and digital technologies to help countries address and monitor the pandemic. In Latin American and the Caribbean, for example, eight RCOs are piloting real-time monitoring via social media and mobile platforms to assess how populations are coping.
48. In order for these improvements to translate into the type of support that countries will require to accelerate action towards 2030, we need to reinforce the shift towards more integrated and high-quality policy advice and support, leveraging the comparative advantages and capacities of different UN entities. The latest IMS data is encouraging in this regard (see figure 8). It shows SDG-related technical assistance and capacity development remains the most common UNDS function at the country level, followed by policy advice and thought leadership, along with

Figure 8  
UNCT support to SDGs (aggregate % by function)



Source: UNSDG Information Management System (IMS), 2020

data collection and analysis. A similar distribution can be seen right across the SDGs, as figure 9 shows.



Source: UNSDG Information Management System (IMS), 2020

(ii) *UNDS contribution to the COVID-19 response and recovery efforts – a foundation for SDG acceleration*

49. The pandemic sparked a global development crisis that undermined hard-won gains and progress towards the SDGs. The Secretary-General mobilized the entire UN system to advance a comprehensive response to the health, humanitarian and socio-economic aspects of the crisis, including through the a strong push on financing aspects of the crisis and a series of crucial Policy Briefs.<sup>5</sup> The UNDS response to COVID-19 showcased the value of strengthened coordination to enable an immediate comprehensive and complementary health, humanitarian, and socioeconomic response by UNCTs. This was only possible because the entire UNDS came together under the RC leadership as well as WHO, OCHA and UNDP lead and expertise, with UNICEF also playing a crucial role alongside other partners in the COVAX-backed global vaccine distribution efforts. Programme country Governments

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/un-secretary-general>

reported that the UNCT COVID-19 response has been comprehensive (74%), timely (76%), and effective (77%).

50. UNCTs moved swiftly to prepare UN-SERPs aligned with the UN global socioeconomic response framework, to support countries in minimizing the impacts of the crisis on the SDGs and laying the ground to recover better. 121 UN-SERPs were prepared covering 139 countries and territories to support the provision of essential services, strengthen social protection services, protect jobs and vulnerable workers, and maintain social cohesion. They align to SDG trajectories and include a focus on a green recovery, digitalization, and inclusion.
51. As highlighted above, the global socioeconomic response framework that guides the UN-SERPs is accompanied by a robust monitoring framework, with a set of 18 indicators -- disaggregated by type of programme, territory (rural/urban), sex, age group and at-risk populations, to measure system-wide results. Together with the health and humanitarian indicators, and 10 human rights indicators, they form the foundation to assess the UN system's COVID-19 response. The socioeconomic indicators have been integrated into the DCO-managed UN Info platform that feeds a new UN COVID-19 data portal.<sup>6</sup>
52. The analysis of the emerging dataset is presented below, according to the five pillars of the global socioeconomic response framework. Overall, it represents the collective results of UNCTs and demonstrates how joint efforts, thus far, have resulted in concrete benefits for the countries we support and the people we serve.

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### 121 UN Socio-Economic Response Plans

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#### UNCTs geared >\$5bn to the COVID-19 socioeconomic response

**\$3.0bn**

Repurposed funds

**\$2.18bn**

Additionally mobilized



**139 countries and territories covered**



Developed in consultation with **host governments**



**18 global-level programme indicators** showing the UN's collective efforts in country



Programming folds into Cooperation Framework in **2022 onwards**

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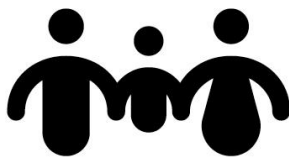
<sup>6</sup> <https://data.uninfo.org/>

# PILLAR 1



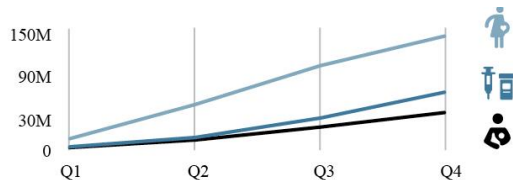
## HEALTH FIRST: Protecting Health Services and Systems During the Crisis<sup>7</sup>

- 53. Learning from the UN-wide Ebola crisis response, targeted UN support for the COVID-19 response enabled countries to maintain essential health services despite the spike in demand for acute COVID-related care.
- 54. The UNCT in Kuwait, for example, boosted the participation of people with disabilities through a national campaign, which provided nearly 24,000 food baskets to vulnerable groups and workers, 50,000 face masks, 20,000 surgical masks, 40,000 gloves, and 3,100 advocacy publications for families of people with disabilities. In Brazil, RC engagement with governors in the Amazon region paved the way for UN support to vulnerable communities: cash transfers to 40,000 migrants, documentation to 20,000 refugees, 2,000 medical consultations to at-risk communities, and medical kits to 7,000 indigenous health agents.



**240 million** people supported with essential non-COVID related services

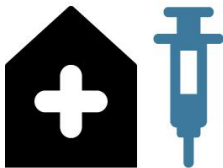
This includes:  
**114M** in LDCs  
**101M** in LLDCs  
**2M** in SIDS



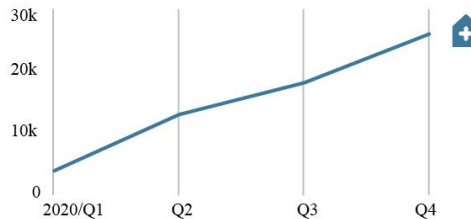
**142M** Women (Maternal health services)  
**73M** Children vaccinated (non-COVID)  
**48M** Children (Nutrition programmes)



UNCTs supported around **3 million health workers**, including with personal protective equipment and risk communication and communication engagement items.



UNCTs supported nearly **30,000 health facilities** to maintain essential immunization services.



**30K** Health facilities supported

<sup>7</sup> Lead entities: UNFPA, WHO, UNICEF

## PILLAR 2



### PROTECTING PEOPLE: Social Protection and Basic Services<sup>8</sup>

55. The efforts by Governments across the world to protect basic services during the pandemic have been critical to minimizing the rise in poverty levels and will help people to bounce back as the crisis subsides. UNCTs supported governments to adapt, extend and scale-up social protection services, including cash transfers, food assistance programmes, social-insurance programmes and child benefits to support families. UNCTs leveraged the social protection programmes developed through earlier allocations of the Joint SDG Fund with up to 20% of budgets reallocated to address COVID-19 impacts, such as better healthcare and lower-cost informal social-protection interventions.



**1 in 10** (263 million)  
**children globally supported**  
by UN-backed distance/  
home-based learning

**This includes:**

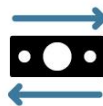


56. In Chile, for example, the UNCT redirected \$1.5million from the Joint SDG Fund to boost social protection and inclusion for the elderly. In Thailand, the Government adopted the UN-SERP proposal to boost existing social transfers to children, elderly and the disabled, with a top-up of an approximate \$10 additionally per month for three months, benefiting over 6.7million people. In India, UNCT efforts helped the country deliver a five-fold increase in investments to address gender-based violence; in addition, nearly 5million children and women received essential care for reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health. The UNCT in Serbia adopted a data-based approach to address the impacts of COVID-19 on older persons.

**Over 17 million**  
**primary school children**  
received food assistance  
through UN support



**8.7M**  
Meals



**271K**  
Cash transfer



**6.3M**  
Take-home rations

<sup>8 8</sup> Lead entities: UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, FAO, WHO, UNICEF, WFP, UN Women.





Over 36 million people were reached with critical water and sanitation supplies

Of the gender disaggregated figures available this includes:



**4.7M Women**  
**6.6M Girls**



**5.6M Men**  
**6.4M Boys**



**1.0M**  
Migrants, refugees,  
stateless persons or IDPs



**250K**  
Persons with disabilities



UNCTs supported the integration of measures to address gender-based violence in **86 countries** as part of the **COVID-19 response plan**.

Nearly **120 million** people benefited from social protection schemes, with **44 million** having received financial aid packages and another **8 million** employed through cash-for-productivity programmes



**Nearly 60M Women**



**Over 60M Men**



**Over 44M**  
People benefitted from cash transfers



**32M**  
People benefited from water & sanitation services



**Over 26M**  
People received food and nutrition



**Over 17M**  
People received psychosocial support



**Nearly 8M**  
People received human rights protection



**Over 7M**  
People received legal aid

## PILLAR 3



### ECONOMIC RESPONSE AND RECOVERY: Protecting Jobs, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, and Vulnerable Workers in the Informal Economy<sup>9</sup>

57. The economic fall-out from the COVID-19 pandemic has hit certain sectors the hardest: small and medium-sized enterprises, farm workers, the self-employed, daily wage earners, informal-sector workers, refugees, and migrant workers. In this context, several UNCTs have focused on protecting workers and sectors most, including by helping businesses to contain massive layoffs and protecting households and individuals through expanded social-protection, teleworking, and work-sharing policies.
32. Examples include support for universal unemployment insurance (as in Mexico); green recovery and digitalization (in Cameroon, Chile, Jamaica, Kenya Montenegro and Thailand); agroindustry and resilience and skills training (in Guatemala); labor governance to enable decent work for vulnerable groups (in the Maldives ); leveraging digital technologies for stronger social safety nets and universal health coverage (in Iran and many other countries). Given the vulnerabilities of SIDS and the importance of the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, livelihoods, and jobs, UN-SERPs of countries such as the Seychelles, Dominican Republic, Cabo Verde, and the Maldives seek to capitalize on the opportunities of a blue economy for a better recovery.

Countries that reinforced UN-backed employment policies and a regulatory environment to protect key groups



**52** Countries reinforced women protection



**52** Countries reinforced youth protection



**47** Countries reinforced informal workers' protection



**47** Countries reinforced migrant workers' protection



**35** Countries reinforced workers with disabilities' protection

<sup>9</sup> Lead entities: UNDP, UN Women, IFAD, WFP, ILO, UNICEF

In 2020, UNCTs supported over **1.3 million formal sector workers** and over **580,000 informal sector workers**. Also, the UN provided support to around **375,000 companies**, mostly micro, small or medium enterprises



**349K**  
Medium & Small Enterprises



**24.8K**  
Other companies



**581K**  
Informal workers



**1.3M**  
Formal workers

Number of countries adopting fiscal, monetary and legislative stimulus packages



**41**  
Countries that are **Climate / Environment sensitive** for greener recovery



**51**  
Countries that are **gender sensitive**, including to address needs of women heads of household

Number of people supported by food supply protection regimes



**4.7M**  
People working in food supply

# PILLAR 4



## MACROECONOMIC RESPONSE AND MULTILATERAL COLLABORATION<sup>10</sup>

58. With the global economy experiencing the worst recession in 90 years<sup>11</sup>, countries are experiencing a massive need for counter-cyclical fiscal and financial support. Several UNCTs across all regions integrated their ongoing support to SDG financing into UN-SERPs to form the basis of a COVID-19 financing response – from Cabo Verde to Lesotho, Mongolia and Costa Rica drawing on the financing portfolio of the Joint SDG Fund, the UNDS supported the Government of Cambodia with analysis on the economic and social impacts of COVID-19, and Colombia with an analysis of COVID-19’s impact on SDG financing gaps.

Number of countries that undertook socioeconomic impact assessments backed by UNCT support with a focus on at-risk populations



**62**  
Economic needs



**33**  
Fiscal and public debt



**74**  
Labour market



**78**  
Human impact needs



**79**  
Multi-sectoral needs



**77**  
Gender-sensitive needs

Number of countries implementing policies informed by UNCT-backed socioeconomic impact assessment focused on at-risk populations



**53**  
Socioeconomic policy including employment



**50**  
Social protection policy



**47**  
Women's empowerment policy



**47**  
Labour market policies, including food security



**44**  
Fiscal policy

<sup>10</sup> Lead entities: UNDP, UN Women, FAO, ILO, UNICEF

<sup>11</sup> [https://developmentfinance.un.org/sites/developmentfinance.un.org/files/FSDR\\_2021.pdf](https://developmentfinance.un.org/sites/developmentfinance.un.org/files/FSDR_2021.pdf)

# PILLAR 5



## SOCIAL COHESION AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE<sup>12</sup>

59. The pandemic placed considerable strains on social cohesion, magnifying existing fault lines and creating new ones. In response, UNCTs, under the technical lead of ILO, helped facilitate over 1,000 national and over 500 sub-national dialogues for employers and business organizations as well as trade unions on how to respond to the pandemic and the increased domestic violence, racism, xenophobia, stigma, and other forms of discrimination, and how to prevent and remedy human rights abuses.

Number of trade unions/  
business organizations  
benefiting from  
UNCT-backed  
capacity-building to  
address COVID-19  
impacts



**2.8K**  
Employers & Business  
Organizations



**300+**  
Trade Unions



**Over 25,000**  
Community/civil society  
organizations benefitted  
from UNCT support

Including community organizations/institutions for:

**>7,200**  
Youth

**>1,000**  
Informal  
settlements

**>49**  
Human rights  
(NHRI)

**>300**  
Religious  
groups

**>2,800**  
Indigenous  
people

**>2,700**  
Fragile  
settings

**>2,600**  
At risk  
populations

**>4,600**  
Livelihood  
support

<sup>12</sup> Lead entities: UNDP, UN Women, UN-Habitat, UNHCR, ILO, UNICEF

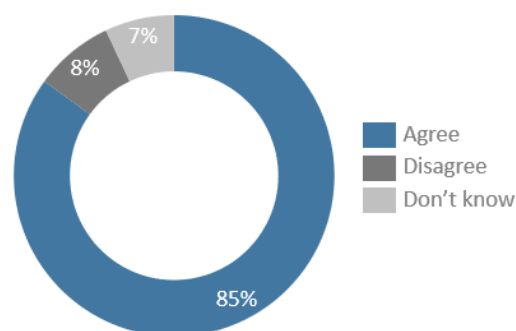
(iii) *Capturing the full contribution of the UNDS to the advancement of the SDGs.*

60. The results of the UN socioeconomic response to COVID-19 capture a proportion of the UNDS contribution at the country level to protect and advance sustainable development. They showcase the strong performance of entities on the ground, the ability of the system to deliver together under RC leadership and the kind of system-wide results reporting that the UN aims to produce to capture its contribution to the advancement of the SDGs. The results confirm that the UN system's support is stronger when the system works together, enabling individual entities to deliver better on their mandates.
61. This first reporting effort also provides a clear indication of where UNDS reporting can and must improve as the reforms mature, and will inform our efforts to strengthen a common UNDS approach to measuring system-wide contribution to the SDGs. It is critical that this effort ensures due recognition for both individual and collective contribution by UN entities. A broad corporate effort is needed in this regard and I will be relying on the leadership of the UNSDG to bring our collective reporting to the next level. Support from entity-specific governing bodies will also be essential to boost progress in this area.

#### **IV. Partnerships: joining forces to recover and advance national needs and priorities towards 2030**

62. With an impartial coordination function and stronger capacities, RCs showed the unique value of the UN's convening power for the 2030 Agenda. Data indicates that the vast majority of programme country Governments agree that these efforts have been bearing fruit (see figure 10). More effective links are being formed across all parts and levels of Government with development partners, including civil society and the private sector.

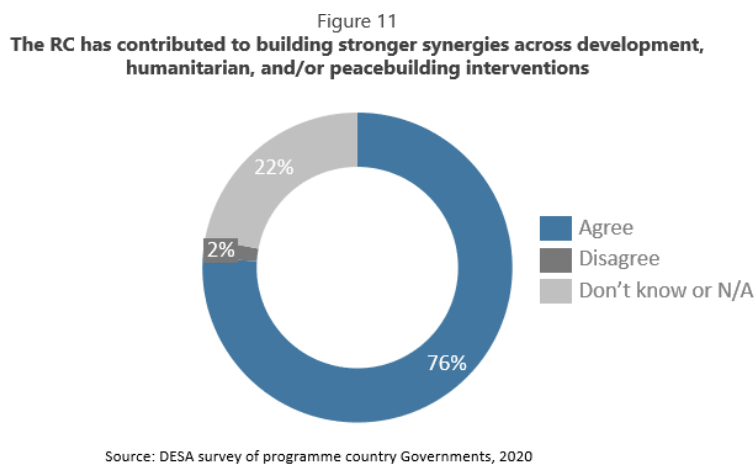
Figure 10  
The RC has contributed to leveraging partnerships in support of national efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda and achieve the SDGs



Source: DESA survey of programme country Governments, 2020

63. RCs are enabling more coordinated development cooperation, including as co-chairs of donors' and national Governments' aid platforms – a role many perform, at the request of national counterparts. In Kenya, the SDG Partnership Platform, involving the Government and development partners, has mobilized approximately \$7million in funding and in-kind support and facilitated a \$165million investment for affordable primary healthcare for 25million people. In Moldova, the RC brought together, for the first time, senior government officials from line ministries with development partners in country for a collective effort on leadership, coordination, and advocacy, raising \$19million for COVID-19 response and recovery.
64. RCs and UNCTs amplified their reach through strengthened partnerships with IFIs. In Uzbekistan, IFI engagement resulted in a rapid joint socio-economic assessment on the impact of the pandemic, with a strong macroeconomic focus included in the UN-SERP, and the establishment of a financial tracking mechanism for the Government on grants and loans from partners. In Cabo Verde, the UN and the World Bank supported the development of the national vaccination plan, facilitating the country's inclusion in the COVAX facility. As a result, Cabo Verde was among the first countries in Africa to receive vaccines in March 2021 for nearly 200,000 people, or about 35% of its population.

65. A number of new partnerships were realized with the private sector. In Albania, for example, the UN and a major telecommunication company partnered for the UN's 75th anniversary and launched a one-minute survey for citizens to share priorities for the future they want. In Brazil, the RCO, in collaboration with the UN Global Compact local network, partnered with a beverage company to produce alcohol-based sanitizer bottles donated to public hospitals. In Trinidad and Tobago, the RCO supported the UNCT to bring together lawmakers, private sector telecommunication companies, global tech companies, data scientists and academia at the country's first Big Data Forum, with 1,100 participants exchanging ideas and success stories.
66. The RC system is also beginning to better harness the knowledge and capacities of universities and the research community at large. The UNCT in Uruguay partnered with universities to introduce a basic course on SDGs in all private and public universities. A partnership with Canadian universities also served to launch, a UN Research Roadmap for the COVID-19 Recovery, with universities and think-tanks from five regions.
67. With RC coordination and UNDP technical lead, Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs) were initiated in 69 developing countries to support SDG financing. 15 UN entities are currently involved in INFF programmes, with resources from the Joint SDG Fund. In 2020, Cuba achieved significant progress in formulating an SDG Financing Framework through extensive stakeholder engagement and customized training on SDG prioritization, and by expanding a digital platform for SDG monitoring. In Ghana, the INFF supported COVID-19 recovery plans and integrated financing frameworks for local economies.
68. Partnerships among the development, humanitarian and peacebuilding actors also continued to grow under the leadership of double- or triple-hatted RCs. As figure 11 shows, this country-specific RC role has been acknowledged by many Governments. In Somalia, the system-wide contributions across the pillars of the Cooperation Framework (that also serves as the UN Assistance Mission's Integrated Strategic Framework), the forthcoming Humanitarian Response Plan and the National Development Plan have helped galvanize cross-pillar collaboration for access to basic social services, resilience to climate change, food security and durable solutions. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the UNCT is implementing four joint programmes to address development challenges and ensure humanitarian assistance under a peace consolidation framework. In Haiti, the One UN Plan guides the UN's support across pillars and the preparations for the transition and integration with the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH).
69. Despite many achievements, challenges remain and will receive special attention moving forward. Of critical importance is the need to accelerate progress in strengthening our capacities in the area of financing and our partnerships with the IFIs, as they carry truly significant potential in a context where economic transformation constitutes a make or break for the COVID-19 recovery and the achievement of the SDGs. Only 58% of host Governments agree that collaboration between IFIs and the UN in their country has improved over the past four years.<sup>13</sup> DCO will continue to support the strengthening of partnership capacities in RCOs, working closely with DESA, regional economic and social commissions



<sup>13</sup> DESA survey of programme country Governments, 2020PCG

and other entities with strong track-record on macro-economic support and partnerships with IFIs.

## **V. Quality funding: Driving the COVID-19 response and sustainable development through the spirit and commitments of the Funding Compact**

70. The UNSDG and the RC system, supported by DCO, have strived to enhance the quality of funding to the UNDS in the spirit of the Funding Compact, both at global at country level.
71. The Joint SDG Fund remains the muscle of the RC system and a new generation of UNCTs. Hosted by DCO, it raised \$50million in 2020 and capitalized \$290million in total. To date, it has funded 101 joint programmes focused on integrated social protection or SDG finance, stimulated over 800 partnerships to support the SDGs, and tested over 200 innovative solutions to accelerate the 2030 Agenda. The Fund's catalytic investment in Vietnam, for example, leveraged \$2.5billion of government financing for inclusive solutions that provided social protection benefits for all children. In Ecuador, it introduced innovative policy to close the social protection gap for youth, enabling decent work for 70% of 1.4million young people, with at least 40% of those gaining access to the social protection system. In March 2021, the Joint SDG Fund announced a \$41million portfolio to catalyze strategic financing to accelerate the SDGs: Fiji, Indonesia, Malawi and Uruguay were selected from 155 proposals from over 100 countries across the globe. The Fund has already invested \$31.5million to address SIDS vulnerabilities. In addition, in the first quarter of 2021, the Fund's Steering Committee approved a dedicated call for proposals from SIDS of over \$30million, to further help in addressing SIDS challenges, now exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19.
72. The UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Trust Fund provided a dedicated avenue to support UNCTs in implementing UN-SERPs. Since its launch in April 2020, the Fund programmed nearly \$75million to 24 UN entities to deliver on joint programmes across 80 countries. The Fund mainstreamed a gender-sensitive approach and supported millions of people most at risk of being left behind. It helped widen the reach of social safety nets, procure critical supplies, provide essential healthcare, extend digital learning, and restore water, sanitation and other basic service infrastructure. It also supported innovations like tele- and mobile-healthcare, and digital payments systems, and helped formal and informal businesses enter the digital economy. A report on early lessons and evaluability of the Fund will be released this month and will inform the RC system review.
73. RCs have also been leveraging opportunities offered by the Peacebuilding Fund and the Spotlight initiative to deliver integrated responses on crucial country challenges. The PBF invested over \$170million in joint programmes through UNCTs, under the leadership of RCs, contributing to the peacebuilding components of the Cooperation and UN-SERPs in 36 countries and 11 cross border settings. Benefitting from enhanced coordination, the Spotlight Initiative reached 42million people with campaigns challenging harmful social norms and gender stereotypes, including 350,000 adolescents.
74. 2020 witnessed the consolidation of deposits to SDG country-level pooled funds, after a substantial growth of these in 2019 following the reforms. The net funded amount transferred to participating agencies increased from \$200million to \$230million. Over 30 countries now have such funds active, with 21 of them established following UNDS reform. The UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Sustaining Peace in Colombia, with a cumulative capitalization of \$172million from various international partners, brought together the Government, 13 UN entities and 113 civil-society and private-sector organizations, and directly benefitted over 1.8million people, with 34.5% of all investments targeted directly to gender equality . The Malawi SDG Acceleration Fund, set up in 2019 by the Government, the UNCT and development partners, was able to quickly respond to the pandemic to improve health systems, keep girls in school, and build community resilience for a budget of \$130million in the coming years. New funds were established or redesigned in 2020 in Cabo Verde, Lebanon and Uganda; the first multi-country pooled fund was established in the Pacific (the UN



Pacific Strategy Fund). The quality that pooled funds bring to in-country interventions is attested by the level of national ownership in many of them: in 2020, the Papua New Guinea government for example contributed almost 15% of the total capitalization of the PNG UN Country Fund.

75. As set out in more detail in the Secretary-General's report on the QCPR, flexible and predictable contributions, including through funding to interagency pooled funds is instrumental, yet remain significantly lower than the Funding Compact commitments. Overall, funding tools such as pooled and thematic funds have shown that they can play a catalytic role in the uptake in integrated UN policy support and facilitating SDG financing, however much more ambitious capitalization, particularly of the Joint SDG Fund, is required to reach their potential.
76. In addition, notwithstanding the repurposing of \$3billion, the mobilization of an additional \$2billion and the \$75 million programmed through the COVID-19 Response and Recovery, UN-SERPs remain just less than half funded; and the immediate response to COVID-19 remains significantly easier to fund than addressing longer-term recovery, hampering the ability of UNCTs to ensure the COVID-19 response also helps propel countries forward on the SDG front. The RC's role in resource mobilization for the Cooperation Frameworks and pooled funds also requires further clarification, as highlighted by a survey of RCs and UNCTs, and we are taking steps in that regard. It is critical that Member States invest at the appropriate levels to enable UNCTs to provide a robust contribution to the efforts of Governments to design and rollout a better recovery, without which a unique opportunity to get the SDGs back on track would have been missed.

## **VI. Communications for development results: fostering accountability and transparency for results**

77. With increased RC system capacities and growing momentum across all UNSDG entities, new tools are enhancing monitoring and reporting at country, regional and global levels, strengthening UNDS accountability for results at country level.
78. A new generation of reports informing national Governments of system-wide results at country and regional levels started to take shape in early 2021. UNCT results reports focus on achievements in advancing the priorities of the Cooperation Framework and other national development plans, with the majority of 2020 reports integrating results achieved in the COVID-19 socioeconomic response, pegged to SDG targets. As part of the Joint RCP Secretariat, DCO regional offices were involved in the first generation of regional results reports produced under the aegis of the RCP.
79. In line with the Secretary-General's Data Strategy, strengthened digital platforms have enabled improved monitoring and reporting of results. UN Info is being fully revamped, and a COVID-19 data portal was built within it to increase transparency and accountability. With UNSDG members' leadership and UNCT compliance with UN Info, reporting comprehensively on the system-wide contribution to the SDGs through Cooperation Frameworks will be possible. The UNSDG Information Management System was overhauled into a one-stop coordination portal within UN Info.
80. Cooperation Framework evaluations are another key tool for understanding the UNDS contribution at country level. In 2020, 20 countries conducted an evaluation of their Cooperation Framework/UNDAF to inform the development of the new Framework. Twelve (or 60%) of those countries developed a management response and action plan for implementation, marking a significant improvement from 2019, when only 22% of countries complied. Guidance on Cooperation Framework evaluations was issued in 2020 for strengthened evaluations from 2021 onwards.
81. Strengthened communications capacities in RCOs are helping to show results in support of the SDGs. There was a 9% increase in UNCT support provided to national Governments for

their SDG reports<sup>14</sup> and a 40% increase of UNCTs with joint advocacy initiatives to promote the implementation of the SDGs or other key UN priorities. The number of stories on the global UNSDG websites showcasing UNCT results from the five regions jumped 960% from 2019 to 2020, aligned to the new Global Communications Strategy.<sup>15</sup> An increase in UNCT use of digital communication was also recorded, particularly the use of social media, along with UNCT websites.

82. The RC system continued to actively enhance support to communicate results effectively. In a recent internal review of the RCO communications function in five regions, the dedicated communications function for RCOs post-reform in country settings without UN Information Centres (UNICs) was reported as a game-changer to bring country-level UN Communications Groups together around communications for the SDGs and other priorities. In China, messages on COVID-19 preparedness were translated into more than 40 languages and dialects tailored to the elderly or those in ethnic minority communities. In Peru and Brazil, COVID-19 prevention campaigns were translated into Spanish, French and indigenous languages to address needs of Venezuelan and Haitian migrants and refugees. RCO communication officers and UNICs also helped mobilize more than 1.5million people in 195 countries, who shared their priorities for the UN in its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Furthermore, from an efficiency perspective, in 2020, the number of UNICs and RCO co-located in the same premises increased from 27 in 2019 (61%) to 28 (64%).
83. In 2020, DCO launched the UNSDG global website in English, French and Spanish, with all other official languages expected in 2021. This was pivotal to showcase stories and results of UNCTs and provide a repository of key documents, from global guidelines to UNCT results reports. One hundred and eight DCO-backed UNCT websites in over 21 languages were also launched, boosting efficiency gains and cybersecurity. For example, the UNCT in Brazil was pooling \$20,000 per year to keep its privately-run website. After joining the DCO-backed UNCT website, they no longer incur any such costs. The UNCT in Uruguay, led by the RCO, spearheaded an effort to increase accessibility in its own national digital communications, inspiring a redesign of all other UNCT and global UNSDG websites to surpass the UN Secretariat accessibility standards by May 2021.
84. Despite important advancements, the success and impact of enhanced UNCT websites and strengthened communication capacities in RCOs, including through the integration of UNICs in 44 locations, is being further assessed and will inform the RC system review. The recent announcement that 9, of 15 vacant communications posts that were affected by the liquidity-related hiring freeze in the UN Secretariat, can be filled in 2021-2022 provides a welcome boost to the capacities and effectiveness of UNICs and RCs to deliver in this area.

## **VII. Funding the RC system**

85. Predictable and sustainable funding of the RC system is fundamental for a fully reinvigorated RC system and has been recognized as such in the Funding Compact. In 2020, funding levels for the RC system remained stable, with a total of \$203.9million received in the Special Purpose Trust Fund (SPTF). Even against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic, no dip in funding levels was recorded. Inflow from the three funding streams amounted to \$86.1million from voluntary contributions, \$77.4million from the UNSDG cost-sharing arrangement and approximately \$40.4million from the coordination levy. The commitment of Member States to the RC system is reflected additionally in the fact that some increased their funding contributions while other made contributions early in the year, importantly providing a longer-term planning horizon and greater predictability.
86. Significant progress was made in broadening and diversifying the donor base. Within the past year, the donor base grew from a total of 32 Member States at the beginning of 2020 to a total

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<sup>14</sup> UNSDG IMS, 2020

<sup>15</sup> UNSDG IMS, 2020

of 43 at the beginning of 2021. This includes an increase in the number of countries from the G-77 and China, from 8 in 2019 (one-quarter of the donor base) to 14 countries now (representing one-third of the donor base).

87. All contributing UNSDG entities paid their share of the cost-sharing arrangement in 2020. WMO and ITC provided their contributions for the first time, and UNIDO fulfilled its promise to contribute its full share in 2020. As of March 2021, almost every UNSDG entity had also already provided its 2021 contribution — the remaining contributions are expected by June. From 2022 onwards the cost-sharing allocations will be updated based on the most recent agency data.
88. Revenue from the coordination levy in 2020, per agreements signed with UNSDG entities, increased by \$10million since 2019. Most of the levy collection is administered by UNSDG entities on behalf of donors. However, two Member States (Sweden and Iceland) and the European Union administer the levy directly. Analysis is being undertaken of the administration and impact of the levy as an input to the RC system review later this year.
89. Transparency and accountability have continuously been strengthened with upgrades to the online SPTF portal, displaying both income and expenditure information on all three funding streams in a new format. A user-survey was also launched to continuously keep the website at the level of expectations of the users.
90. The total annual budget of \$281million, however, was not reached in 2020. Implementation of coordination activities continued with the resources available, owing to the efficiencies brought by the online and hybrid format of work and meetings, as well as staggered recruitment in accordance with the implementation plan. At this point in time, a significant funding gap is currently foreseen for 2021 underlining the importance of agreeing on a sustainable, predictable method of funding the RC system going forward. Shortfalls of this nature could lead to reduced operational budgets or, in the worst case, not being able to fill all posts, hampering the ability of the RC system to fully deliver on its mandate. The budget of \$281million was carefully crafted based on needs for an effective coordination system, approved by the ACABQ and the Fifth Committee, with full funding required to run at full speed.
91. This financial foundation is critical to driving the RC system successfully – a system that we have now witnessed through the pandemic offers substantial value for money, is effective at country-level, financially efficient and politically expedient to harness talent to get the results needed. Closing this funding gap is an absolute priority for 2021 for the system to function optimally. The RC system review in 2021 will also include a closer examination of the funding model to ensure a sustainable and predictable funding base for the RC system in 2022 and for the years to come.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

92. 2020 was a watershed year. The reform of the RC system passed the stress-test of the COVID-19 pandemic on top of a myriad of other development challenges, making the value of coordination far more evident than in any other year. It provided proof of concept for Member States' increased investments and showed that the far-reaching changes envisioned by the UNDS and the RC system reforms have indeed been seeded. Now the transformation needs to deepen and accelerate to meet the new demands of the response and recovery to get the SDGs back on track.
93. The transition to new arrangements and structures is mostly complete. This includes the establishment of RCOs and the DCO presence in the regions and in New York, as well as the roll-out of new tools and guidelines to embed the new approach into Cooperation Frameworks and Business Operations Strategies. A new regional architecture and the MCO review implementation are being rolled out, with engagement and support of the full RC system. 2020 marked the conclusion of a QCPR cycle that enabled the deepest reforms of the

UNDS in its history and started a new cycle to advance the 2030 Agenda and achieve the SDGs.

94. In 2021, the UNDS, guided by the Principals of the UNSDG and under the leadership of RCs at the country level, will continue to accelerate support to countries to respond to and recover from the COVID-19 crisis by: advancing vaccine equity and the roll-out of vaccines in 145 countries through the COVAX facility and the leadership of WHO and UNICEF; and supporting the socioeconomic response and recovery efforts led by UNDP, as a bridge to accelerate implementation of the SDGs.
95. The RC system review offers an opportunity to comprehensively assess progress and make improvements to strengthen the value proposition of the reinvigorated development coordination function in the context of the broader objectives of the UNDS reform. Doing so will help ensure a future in which we consolidate progress and address remaining weaknesses, to fully leverage the transformative potential of a more coordinated, effective, efficient and accountable UNDS that is capable of providing countries with the support required to recover better from the COVID-19 crisis and advance the SDGs during the Decade of Action.
96. I commend Member States for their ongoing commitment to a reinvigorated RC system, including in the boards of UN entities, in their funding decisions and in the support they provide on the ground in programme countries. It is essential that we deepen this engagement as Member States continue to accompany the reforms.

## Annex

### Overview of resources of the special purpose trust fund of the RC system

Table 1  
Financial resources by component

(Thousands of United States dollars)

Component	2020 expenditure	2021 estimate	Changes		2022 estimate
			Variance amount	Variance percentage	
A. Executive direction and management	2 169.7	2 844.3	(35.1)	-	2 809.2
B. Programme of work					
1. Global coordination	12 077.4	14 453.8	2,252.7	0.8	16 706.5
2. Regional coordination	6 864.9	9 504.1	857.8	0.3	10 361.9
3. Country coordination	160 833.2	243 318.0	(3,323.1)	(1.2)	239 994.9
<b>Subtotal, B</b>	<b>179 775.5</b>	<b>267 275.9</b>	<b>(212.6)</b>	<b>(0.1)</b>	<b>267 063.3</b>
C. Programme support	9 951.0	11 706.2	247.7	0.1	11 953.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>191 896.2</b>	<b>281 826.4</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>281 826.4</b>

Table 2  
Financial resources by object of expenditure

(Thousands of United States dollars)

	2020 expenditure	2021 estimate	Changes		2022 estimate
			Variance amount	Variance percentage	
Post	118 577.7	164 321.1	12,062.0	4.3	176 383.1
Non-post	73 318.5	117 505.3	(12 062.0)	(4.3)	105 443.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>191 896.2</b>	<b>281 826.4</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>281 826.4</b>

Table 3  
**Post resources by component for 2022**

	<i>Professional and higher</i>									<i>General Service and related</i>		<i>National staff</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>USG</i>	<i>ASG</i>	<i>D-2</i>	<i>D-1</i>	<i>P-5</i>	<i>P-4</i>	<i>P-3</i>	<i>P-2/1</i>	<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>Principal level</i>	<i>Other level</i>	<i>National Professional Officer</i>	<i>Local level</i>	
A. Executive direction and management	–	1	1	–	2	2	1	–	7	2	1	–	–	10
B. Programme of work														
1. Global coordination	–	–	–	2	10	16	12	–	40	–	3	–	–	43
2. Regional coordination	–	–	5	–	8	11	5	–	29	–	–	–	6	35
3. Country coordination	–	2	47	70	87	124	2	–	332	–	–	414	396	1 142
<b>Subtotal, B</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>414</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>1 220</b>
C. Programme support	–	–	–	1	3	5	2	–	11	5	1	–	–	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>419</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>414</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>1 247</b>

The overall resource requirements for 2022 are maintained at the same level as the approved 2021 resources. To ensure the efficient utilization of resources, the estimated 2022 requirements have been redeployed among the objects of expenditure to accommodate all necessary changes. The combined increase of \$13.8M in posts and other staff costs reflects the increase in the number of positions. This increase is partially offset by the reduction in the use of consultants and contractual services. The continuation of online and hybrid format of work and meetings, which proved to be effective and successfully contributed to positive outcomes, resulted in a reduction of \$4.5M in staff travel. These new practices can be sustained in 2022 without negatively impacting full and effective mandate implementation. The slight increase in general operating expenses signifies the additional cost of increasing technological resources to support continued activities. These efforts have been made to ensure that the additional staff and operating requirements could be met while remaining budget neutral overall.

## Overview of financial results for 2020

Results for 2020 are reflected in tables 4 and 5 for information purposes.

Table 4  
**Financial results by component**

(Thousands of United States dollars)

<i>Component</i>	<i>2020 Budget</i>	<i>2020 Expenditure</i>	<i>Variance</i>
<b>A. Executive direction and management</b>	2 346.4	2 169.7	176.7
<b>B. Programme of work</b>			
Global coordination	14 392.3	12 077.4	2 314.9
Regional coordination	6 659.4	6 864.9	(205.5)
Country coordination	246 298.7	160 833.2	85 465.5
<b>Subtotal B. Programme of work</b>	<b>267 350.4</b>	<b>179 775.5</b>	<b>87 574.9</b>
<b>C. Programme support</b>	11 609.7	9 951.0	1 658.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>281 306.5</b>	<b>191 896.2</b>	<b>89 410.3</b>

Table 5  
**Financial results by budget class**

(Thousands of United States dollars)

	<i>2020 Budget</i>	<i>2020 Expenditure</i>	<i>Variance</i>
Post	160 462.5	118 577.7	41 884.8
Non-post	120 844.0	73 318.5	47 525.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>281 306.5</b>	<b>191 896.2</b>	<b>89 410.3</b>