

Evaluation Brief: Belarus



The Republic of Belarus is an upper-middle-income country, whose economy mostly depends on the service and industrial sectors. The socio-economic conditions of the country have improved since the late 1990s, with 5.6 percent of the population living below the poverty line and the country ranking 50th in the Human Development Index. Belarus is considered a country with relatively high levels of gender equality, although a gap remains in women's participation in the workforce as well as their involvement in unpaid labour. For all the progress made in preserving biodiversity and expanding specially protected areas, environmental issues are still considered a low priority, resulting in limited funding to the sector.

The UNDP country programme document (CPD) 2016-2020 was premised on the priority development areas identified by the National Sustainable Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2030 and related national development programmes. To support the Government of Belarus in achieving its priorities, UNDP set three goals: i) strengthening effective governance systems that are inclusive, responsible and accountable; ii) pursuing a green growth trajectory based on the principles of inclusion; and iii) ensuring universal access to basic services for vulnerable groups.

Findings and conclusions

In the area of inclusive and responsive governance, UNDP's work to promote the progressive realization of human rights and strengthen public service delivery at local level has not achieved the expected results, as the majority of UNDP's planned interventions have not been approved by the Government or interrupted. In partnership with other United Nations organizations, UNDP successfully enhanced the capacity of State institutions to address irregular migration and human trafficking, although UNDP's role in this area significantly diminished after 2017. Some progress was attained on the promotion of citizens' feedback for State-delivered services.

UNDP worked to enhance Belarus' economic competitiveness by supporting its accession to the World Trade Organization and encouraging the development of the private sector's productive capacities. Operating in economically distressed industrial towns, including in Chernobyl-affected areas, UNDP enhanced awareness on socially responsible approaches to entrepreneurship. UNDP also supported local development initiatives that promoted social contracts and appeared to have improved the livelihoods of vulnerable populations. The capacity of local authorities in the field of area-based-development was strengthened, although outputs have not been systematically integrated into local planning.

In the area of environment and energy, UNDP has played a crucial role in supporting the Government in establishing the institutional infrastructure and strengthening policies and practices for the management of wetlands and peatlands, resulting in the restoration of more than 55,000 hectares of degraded land. UNDP has promoted renewable energy and energy efficiency, introducing new methods and standards for the design of residential buildings. However, economical electricity prices have hampered progress in this area. UNDP has intensified its support for the country's transition to a green economy and urban development. The sustainability of the interventions will depend on the continuation of efforts and the institutionalization of practices by the Government and private sector.

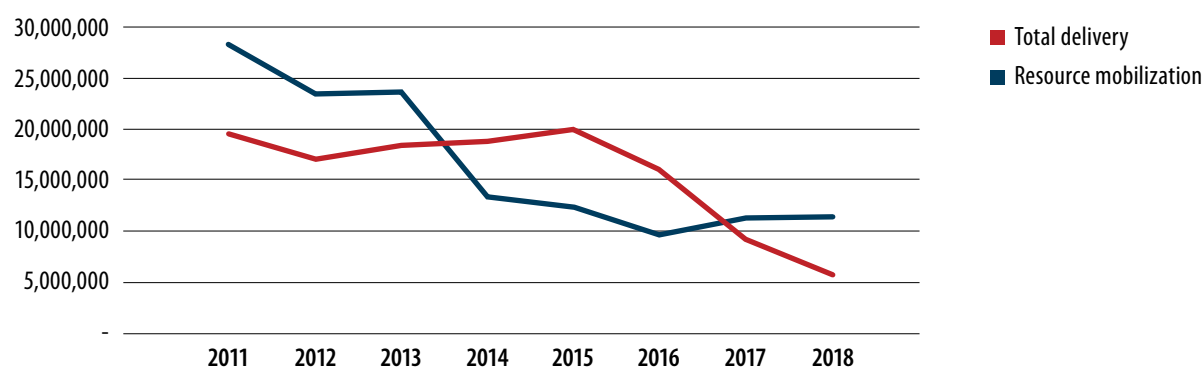
UNDP successfully transferred the management of resources for the prevention, treatment, and care of HIV/AIDS to national institutions. With Global Fund resources directed to national authorities, UNDP's work in this area focused on preventing non-communicable diseases and enhancing awareness of issues faced by people with disabilities. UNDP's work, while relevant for its focus on social vulnerabilities, remained of limited scale.

Overall, UNDP has been an important partner for the Government and contributed to progress in achieving national priorities. UNDP was considered to add the

most value when it focused on inequality reduction, exposed Belarus to international experience and expertise, and promoted cooperation and concerted efforts among national institutions. In particular, UNDP played a catalytic role in supporting the development of the national architecture for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and promoted dialogue with civil society and the private sector.

UNDP's work, however, has been challenged by lengthy project registration processes, specifically in the area of inclusive and responsive governance, fragmentation around individual initiatives, and challenging financial conditions owing to reduced core resources, limited donor interest and minimal cost-sharing. UNDP remains at a critical juncture, with financial sustainability closely tied to a commitment by the Government to invest resources in UNDP for the value it adds to the country's development.

UNDP's delivery and resource mobilization, 2011-2018 (US\$ million)



Recommendations

To strengthen UNDP's work in Belarus in support of national development priorities, the Independent Country Programme Evaluation has made six recommendations:

- **Recommendation 1:** Ahead of the formulation of the CPD 2021-2025, UNDP should discuss with all stakeholders how best to support the Government in implementing initiatives around the four accelerators identified in the Mainstreaming Acceleration and Policy Support report.

- **Recommendation 2:** UNDP should reinforce its support to leaving no one behind, focusing on marginalized areas and vulnerable communities.

- **Recommendation 3:** UNDP should continue engaging with the Government in the area of inclusive and responsive governance to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the public administration system.

- **Recommendation 4:** UNDP should assess the effectiveness of the proposed approaches in the area of small and

medium enterprise development and use the evaluation findings to advise the Government on policy options.

- **Recommendation 5:** UNDP should develop a long-term resource mobilization strategy to ensure the financial sustainability of the country office, including through cost-sharing.

- **Recommendation 6:** UNDP should reinforce the monitoring and evaluation of its programmes and projects, focusing on an assessment of their contribution to outcomes and behavioural change.