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Evaluation of the United Nations Development Cooperation Strategy in Turkey (UNDCS) 2016-2020

Evaluation Report - Executive Summary



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Introduction

This report presents the findings of an independent evaluation of the United Nations Development Cooperation Strategy (UNDCS) for 2016-2020. The evaluation was commissioned by the UN Country Team (UNCT) in Turkey, with oversight provided by the Evaluation Steering Committee (ESC), which functions as the decision-making organ for the UNDCS evaluation. The evaluation was conducted between January and May 2020 by a team of three independent consultants contracted by the Institute for Development Impact (IDI), an independent evaluation service provider. The UNDCS was built around four pillars of cooperation: inclusive growth and sustainable development, democratic governance and human rights, gender and women's empowerment, and migration and international protection. The evaluation focused on the outcomes of the activities of the UN agencies operating in Turkey, their implementations and their achievements. In scope, it covers the totality of the 2016-2020 UNDCS portfolio of programmes from January 2016 to the time when the evaluation field work was conducted in February-March 2020.

Overview of the UNDCS

The United Nations Development Cooperation Strategy (2016-2020) document was signed between contributing UN agencies and the Government of Turkey (GoTR) in December 2015. The UNDCS set out the framework for UN development cooperation with Turkey for the years 2016-2020. It was prepared under the leadership of the Turkish government and with the contributions of UN institutions. It was informed by the developmental priorities of the Turkish Government as outlined in the Tenth Development Plan (2014-2018), and outlined UN's possible contributions in these areas. The UNDCS differed from its predecessors in that Turkey was regarded not only as a recipient, but as both a recipient and a provider of development assistance. The document therefore emphasized the evolution of the nature of the partnership with the UN towards a relationship of mutual cooperation. The document also broke new ground in the sense that it was developed through a process of consultation not only with the government but also with other actors such as civil society, academia, the social partners, the private sector and the donor community.¹

The four strategic areas of cooperation and the eight outcomes of the UNDCS are listed below.

PILLAR 1: SUSTAINABLE, INCLUSIVE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Outcome 1.1: *By 2020, relevant government institutions operate in an improved legal and policy framework, and institutional capacity and accountability mechanisms assure a more enabling (competitive, inclusive and innovative) environment for sustainable, job-rich growth and development for all women and men.*

Outcome 1.2: *By 2020, all underserved population groups have more equitable and improved access to integrated, sustainable and gender sensitive quality services (e.g. health, education, decent employment, and social protection systems).*

Outcome 1.3: *By 2020, improved implementation of more effective policies and practices for all men and women on sustainable environment, climate change, biodiversity by national, local authorities and stakeholders, including resilience of the system/communities to disasters.*

PILLAR 2. DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Outcome 2.1: *By 2020, central and local administrations and other actors more effectively protect and promote human rights, and adopt transparent, accountable, pluralistic and gender sensitive governance systems, with the full participation of civil society, including the most vulnerable.*

PILLAR 3. GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Outcome 3.1: *Improved legislation, policies, implementation and accountability mechanisms to enable equal and effective social, economic and political participation of women and girls by 2020.*

¹ UNDCS Document 2016-2020

Outcome 3.2: *Improved legislation, policies, implementation and accountability mechanisms (on prevention and protection) to promote gender equality and reduce all forms of Sexual and Gender Based Violence by 2020.*

PILLAR 4. MIGRATION AND INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

Outcome 4.1 *Government institutions provide improved and sustainable multi-sectoral services to people under international protection based on the rights and entitlements as stipulated in the Law on Foreigners and International Protection and Temporary Protection Regulation.*

Outcome 4.2: *Central/local administrations and civil society effectively manage migration with a particular focus on vulnerable migrants and people under international protection.*

Each pillar and outcome was accompanied by a corresponding set of indicators, including baselines and targets, specifically designed to measure the progress towards results over the implementation period. These indicators were spelled out in the Turkey-UN Result Matrix, which represented an integral part of the UNDCS.

About the Evaluation

Objective

The overall aim of the evaluation was to assess the strategies implemented under the UNDCS, determine their relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability in achieving the intended results, review their coherence, and draw out lessons learned. The evaluation also sought to provide evidence of the UNCT's contributions to development outcomes at the country level. The intended users of the evaluation include the Government of Turkey, the members of the UNCT, partners from civil society, social partners, academia and other development partners, donors, the international and national community, and beneficiaries.

Methodology

The evaluation was designed according to a non-experimental, mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods and triangulating the data to compile a robust and credible evidence base. A variety of data collection methods were used including: stakeholder mapping; context mapping; an in-depth and structured review of documents related to the design of the UNDCS, the approaches adopted in its implementation and the results achieved; a review of policy documents and legislative frameworks; a contribution analysis, carried out to identify factors that promoted or impeded progress against the intended results; a systems analysis of management, monitoring, quality control and assurance strategies; a mapping of risks analyses and mitigation measures; an analysis of sustainability strategies and systemic barriers to sustainability; an online survey conducted with 32 representatives of UN agencies, and interviews and group discussions with representatives of the UNRC office, UN agencies, government institutions, civil society, the private sector and donors. A total of 46 key informant/expert interviews (KIIs) and group discussions (GDs) were held, in Ankara only, with 93 stakeholders, including ministries, UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, labour unions and private companies. In terms of the methodology, the main limitations of the evaluation stem from the lack of a comprehensive Theory of Change (TOC) for the UNDCS, incomplete indicator status data, the limited availability of reliable, disaggregated data particularly for outcome-level results, and lack of consistency of data across the various means of documentation.

Main Findings

Relevance

The evaluation of the UNDCS finds that it was relevant to national priorities and to the country context. The areas of cooperation proposed by the UNDCS were strongly aligned to the four strategic objectives of the Government's Tenth Development Plan. Overall, UNDCS interventions in Turkey were highly aligned with the national priorities and sectoral policies.

The UNDCS also took into consideration the global development agenda and was well designed to support the Government of Turkey in its efforts to align its national development policies accordingly and generate progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The four pillars and eight results of the UNDCS addressed Turkey's development priorities from a cross-cutting sustainable human development perspective, and in a manner that supported the SDGs and the Agenda 2030.

The UNDCS was also broad and flexible enough to remain relevant over time. The UN was able to respond to the needs of rights holders, including refugee/migrants, as the country situation evolved, and to maintain the relevance of its presence in alignment with the evolving and changing priorities of the Government.

Partnering with government institutions was a relevant and successful way of reaching out to vulnerable populations, including those affected by migration, in line with the principle of "leaving no one behind". Cooperating with the government allows the UN to respond to many different issues at the same time and to reach a very large number of people efficiently.

Partnerships with civil society and the private sector proved relevant and beneficial. The UN should maintain and enhance these partnerships alongside its partnerships with government.

The UN has been and should continue to be a beacon and upholder of human rights, governance and equality and a supporter of the most vulnerable groups. There is room for more substantial coverage of some areas of engagement, particularly in human rights and governance. Mainstreaming of human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment should be further promoted in the forthcoming cycle of cooperation.

Effectiveness

The UN promoted and provided well-conceptualized support for institutional and policy reforms around inclusive growth, social inclusion and protection, and environmental governance, and contributed to the enabling environment for improved public services and human rights. The UN established strong partnerships at national and sub-national levels to respond to national priorities in these areas. In this context:

- The UN contributed to the enabling environment for inclusive, sustained, job-rich growth, reduced inequalities, innovation and employment opportunities, particularly for vulnerable groups, although further support needs to be ensured.
- With regard to social inclusion and inclusive access to public services, the UN successfully built capacity, improved the legal and policy framework and ensured access to services for vulnerable groups.
- The UN supported Turkey in fulfilling its international commitments and strengthening its policy frameworks and institutional capacities in the areas of climate change, biodiversity, and the sustainable environment. Policies and practices were promoted to ensure an enabling environment and resource efficiency to achieve inclusive and sustainable development.

The investments of UN agencies in demonstration pilots had mixed results. In some cases these investments led to important and scalable models of work. However, the institutionalization and scaling-up of results from the pilots continues to depend on a number of factors, including political buy-in, financial resources and commitment to take up the tested models.

The UN offered itself as a partner for democratic governance and human rights. The UN's support within the justice sector was responsive to the needs and vulnerabilities of children, women, refugees and asylum seekers. The UN positioned itself as a key actor in strengthening the legislative framework and empowering democratic and independent institutions. The UN also actively implemented measures necessary for the capacity development of migration and border authorities, but financial support needs to continue to ensure the continuity of their work.

The UN successfully fulfilled its advocacy roles and made contributions to short- and medium-term results for women's empowerment and gender equality in Turkey. While the UN's work under Pillar 3 of the UNDCS focused exclusively on gender equality and women's empowerment, the UNCT was continuously committed to these values across all four pillars of its support. Gender was at least formally mainstreamed in interventions of individual agencies. The UN successfully advocated for women's rights and worked with the Turkish government and in partnership with CSOs and the private sector to help maintain and/or improve the policy, legislative, and institutional framework for gender equality, women's participation and leadership in economic and public life, and in preventing and combating violence against women and girls. Through gender sensitive service delivery, leadership, vocational training, entrepreneurship programme, and skills development education, the UN contributed to the improvement of the socio-economic status of women, especially women from refugee/migrant communities, whose empowerment has been an important driver of the resilience of the refugee/migrant community as a whole.

The UN effectively supported the government's substantial efforts, both financial and humanitarian, in responding to the protracted refugee/migrant situation. Through a strong partnership between national stakeholders and international donors, the UN contributed to greater refugee access to education, health and protection services and decent jobs, helped to improve the living conditions and wellbeing of the refugees, supported the delivery of effective migration management processes and built up the resilience of the refugee population.

The UN succeeded in a strategy of designing and implementing programmes to meet the needs of migrants/refugees via national systems while at the same time increasingly focusing on strengthening those systems. This approach generally led to wide coverage and more equitable and sustainable outcomes. Overall, the sectoral objectives were met due to the substantial political and financial support of the government. The UN agencies' pre-existing partnerships with the line ministries improved and added value to the effectiveness of the response to the Syria refugee situation. The needs of unregistered migrants/refugees were relatively unattended to.

Design and Coherence

Some improvements are recommended to improve the design and monitoring of the next cycle of UN engagement. A clearer 'Theory of Change' would help to refocus UNCT strategies and roles within the reform processes in which it can add value, maximising effectiveness and utilizing available resources strategically. The results framework should contain a smaller but stronger set of indicators that can realistically be monitored and can capture the achievements of the UN. The monitoring framework should clearly state how, when and by whom monitoring activities will be conducted and should include a plan for monitoring financial aspects.

Coordination can be improved further. The UNCT invests in implementing the work of the UN agencies through results groups and other coordination structures. A small number of joint programmes engaging two or more UN agencies have promoted coherence, synergies and more

effective resource mobilization. However, UN interventions in Turkey could still be more coherent, helping to elaborate change strategies and streamline limited resources. More joint programmes and initiatives would increase efficiency, synergy, and strategic level decision-making. Meanwhile, coordination bodies would benefit from stronger ownership and continuity of membership.

The UN is also recommended to make efforts to address gaps in availability of data to measure progress against the SDGs, ensuring that disaggregated data is available for disadvantaged groups.

Efficiency

UN Agencies exercise diligence in programmatic and financial portfolio management. With regards to implementation, the country context and the economic downturn affected the implementation and timeliness of some activities.

Overall, the UN human resource frameworks were plausible for the scope of work. UN agencies responded in a timely manner to needs for increased staffing as a result of the expansion of interventions to respond to the refugee/migrant situation.

Qualified UN staff with technical capacity has been one of the added values of the UN, acknowledged by most partners but there is scope to strengthen technical expert pools.

At UNCT level, there has been limited analysis of cost effectiveness. Variations in the financial administrative systems of agencies make aggregate financial reporting difficult. The focus is mainly on absorption rates. Joint work plans have not served as tools for planning, synergies and monitoring of achievement of results across interventions, and their fragmented design –as compilations of activities distributed across results – restricts analysis of financial efficiency per outcome/output.

UN agencies will need to be innovative regarding financial resources and to diversify their resource portfolios. There was a significant flow of financial resources to the UN because of the Syria crisis, but mobilizing resources in some outcome areas was difficult. Challenges include donor conditionality, the provision of annual rather than multi-year funding, restrictions on overheads, declining core resources, limited funding opportunities for upper middle-income countries, the shrinking landscape of donors and development partners and unpredictable government cost sharing.

Sustainability

The sustainability of many achieved effects and benefits remains fragile. The UNCT has striven to ensure sustainability and invested considerable efforts in developing national capacities to lead reforms, implement new laws and strategies, and make use of new models, practices, methodologies and tools. However, the sustainability of interventions often depends on factors outside of UN's control such as political complexities, staff turnover in targeted institutions, and challenges related to socio-political conditions or community resilience. Funding shortages, system weaknesses and/or insufficient government commitment due to emerging agendas may also limit the sustainability of results.

Engagement on public or private finance is needed to ensure the sustainability of the results achieved for migrants and refugees, given the uncertainty of the Syria response funding. Further investment in different partnerships and strategies, including the transition from humanitarian to development priorities, is also recommended.

Annexes

Annex 1: Summary of Conclusions

| No. | Domain | Conclusion |
|------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I | Relevance | The UNDCS has been broadly in line with Turkey's national development priorities and in particular responsive to evolving needs in light of the refugee situation. The document has been sufficiently broad to remain continuously relevant to the context and responsive to the needs of right holders across refugee/migrant and host population. |
| II | Design and Coherence | UN Country team invests efforts in coordination of work of UN agencies through results groups and joint initiatives. Joint programmes are scarce in Turkey and this is a challenge resulting in partial utilization of the partnership potential. UNDCS offers for a broad set of actions and allows for demand-driven interventions, however it lacks stronger coherence of interventions and a more elaborate presentation of pathways of change within and across its pillars. Such approach is understandable taking into account the financial circumstances, however, ambitious strategic targets and shrinking financial resources limit the UN's ability to achieve the intended and planned results effectively. |
| III | Efficiency | Overall, UN Agencies exercised diligence in programmatic and financial portfolio management. Turkey's UMIC status, declining core resources, shrinking landscape of donors and development partners and unpredictable government cost sharing presents UN Agencies with a demand to be innovative and diversify their resource portfolio. |
| IV | Effectiveness | UNCT has made notable contributions in promoting and supporting institutional and policy reforms around inclusive growth, social protection and environmental governance creating an enabling environment for improved public services and human rights. UN Agencies invested in demonstration pilots, which in some cases brought important and scalable models of work. However, overall, the institutionalization and scaling-up of results from the pilots depends on a number of factors, including political buy in, financial resources and commitment to uptake the tested models. |
| V | Effectiveness | UN has provided well-conceptualized support to productivity and innovation and contributed to Turkey's inclusive and sustainable growth and development. UN was successful at creation of more effective policies and practices ensuring enabling environment for sustainable environment and resources management. UN has taken effort to enhance social inclusion and employment opportunities, in particular for vulnerable groups, although further support needs to be ensured. |
| VI | Effectiveness | Maintaining the achievements and established frameworks underpinning gender equality and women's rights has been a result within the existing gender equality agenda in Turkey. UN successfully fulfilled its advocacy roles and made a contribution towards achieving important short- and medium-term results for women and gender equality in Turkey. |
| VII | Effectiveness | The UN strategy in responding to the protracted refugee situation in Turkey was to channel its humanitarian response through national systems to reach the vulnerable while increasingly focusing on strengthening those national systems. This approach is achieved successfully by UN Country Team (UNCT), especially in the education response, the health response, the protection response and migration management response. Overall, the sectoral objectives were met due to the substantial political and financial support from the Government of Turkey. The partnership with the line ministries preceded the response to the Syrian refugee situation and has definitely improved and added value for the effectiveness of the refugee response. |
| VIII | Sustainability | The sustainability of many achieved effects and benefits remains fragile. |

Annex 2: Summary of Lessons Learned

| No. | Domain | Lesson Learned |
|-----|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I | Design and Coherence | Joint programs engaging two or more UN agencies have promoted coherence, synergies, and more effective resource mobilization and, joint initiatives implied joint decision making on the most strategic issues. This shown that frequent joint programs and initiatives will increase efficiency, synergy, and strategic level decision-making. |
| II | Design and Coherence | Programs operating within a sensitive or politically challenging setting require an elaborate theory of change and results framework, and analysis and elaboration of risk and mitigation strategies in the program design process will enhance efficiency. All these components and the practice of innovative methods and tools to inform and involve stakeholders will ensure their commitment and support |

Annex 3: Summary of Recommendations

| No. | Domain | Recommendation |
|------|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I | Design and Coherence | Articulate a clear Theory of Change for the next cycle of UN engagement in Turkey based on deeper analysis of areas where UN holds comparative advantage to help refocus UNCT strategies and roles within the reform processes in which it can add value. This will help maximize UN effectiveness and utilize available resources strategically. |
| II | Design and Coherence | The results framework for the forthcoming UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) should contain a smaller but stronger set of indicators selected based on their realistic potential to be monitored and to be able to capture the achievements of the UN. |
| III | Relevance | Mainstreaming of human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment should be further promoted across the new cycle of UNSDCF 2021-2025 |
| IV | Design and Coherence | Coordination structures for implementation and monitoring the next cycle of UNDCS should be strengthened by investment in strengthening ownership and continuity of membership in results groups and other types of working bodies. |
| V | Design and Coherence | The Monitoring Framework for the UNSDCF should be more robust with a clear plan on how/by whom/in which way/when monitoring activities will be conducted. The framework should include a devised plan of monitoring financial aspects of the UNSDCF. |
| VI | Effectiveness | The UN should maintain and enhance its partnerships with civil society and the private sector along with partnerships with government |
| VII | Relevance | The UN should continue to be a beacon and upholder of human rights, governance and equality and supporter of the most vulnerable groups. |
| VIII | Design and Coherence | The UN should invest efforts to address gaps in availability of data to measure progress against SDGs, ensuring that disaggregated data is available for disadvantaged groups. |
| IX | Sustainability | Given the uncertain prospects for the Syrian refugee population hosted in Turkey and uncertain funding prospects, a consistent investment in different strategies, including on the transition from humanitarian to development priorities, and new partnerships should be designed. Urgent engagement on public or private finance for refugee-focused programmes is needed to ensure the sustainability of the results achieved for the most vulnerable so far. |



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