

# **Evaluation Report**

## **“Mid-Term Evaluation of UNDP Regional Programme for Europe and the CIS 2018-2021”**

**Elinor Bajraktari**

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*The views expressed herein should not be taken, in any way, to reflect the official opinion of the United Nations, and the United Nations are not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.*

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## Executive Summary

This report presents the main findings of the mid-term evaluation of UNDP's Regional Programme (RP) for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States for the period 2018-2021. The evaluation activities carried out by an independent evaluator in the first half of 2021. The main goal of the evaluation was to assess the extent to which RBEC's RP objectives have been achieved, as well as identify lessons and provide recommendations for the next cycle. While the evaluation was primarily intended to inform UNDP about RP results, it was scheduled in the latter part of the current RP to inform the development of the new RP for the period 2022-2025. The evaluation's methodology was based on mixed methods and involved the use of common tools such as documentary review, interviews, triangulation, analysis and synthesis. A participatory approach was taken for the collection of data, formulation of recommendations and identification of lessons learned. The data collection process involved a comprehensive desk review of programme documents made available by RBEC's Regional Hub and semi-structured interviews with all technical teams in the Regional Hub and six UNDP country offices representing each sub-region. A limitation of the evaluation was the inability of the evaluator to conduct any country or site visits related to the regional projects and have in-person meetings. This was mitigated by relying more extensively on the documentary review. Another limitation was the limited involvement of the perspectives of national stakeholders, beneficiaries or development partners. A mitigating action to this limitation was to identify, where possible, the views of beneficiaries and other national counterparts in the documentary review.

The region covered by UNDP's Regional Programme encompasses 17 countries and one territory<sup>1</sup> in Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (ECIS). This region consists of middle-income countries (MIC) with relatively high levels of human development, yet facing the daunting task of reconciling economic and social progress with environmental sustainability, often aggravated by slow progress in reforming state institutions and igniting the private sector.<sup>2</sup> Before the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, the region had been making progress on several fronts, though the full achievement of the SDGs by 2030 would have required a significant increase in investments. The onset of the global pandemic has profoundly compounded the above-mentioned challenges that the region has been striving to overcome since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990's. Socio-economic impact assessments (SEIAs) of the pandemic undertaken under the "UN's Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to the COVID-19 Crisis" show that "the COVID-19 pandemic is far more than a health crisis: it is affecting societies and economies at their core".<sup>3</sup> The crisis is taking a toll on human lives, over-stretching health systems,

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<sup>1</sup> The countries covered by the programme are Albania; Armenia; Azerbaijan; Belarus; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Georgia; Kazakhstan; Kyrgyzstan; Kosovo (References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)); Moldova; Montenegro; Serbia; North Macedonia; Tajikistan; Turkey; Turkmenistan; Ukraine; and Uzbekistan.

<sup>2</sup> The human development index for 13 programme countries has reached the 'high' or 'very high' human development category.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.undp.org/coronavirus/socio-economic-impact-covid-19>

exacerbating pre-existing social vulnerabilities, putting pressure on public finances, slowing down economic activity and increasing poverty and inequalities.

RBEC's RP serves as a framework for the implementation of regional and sub-regional activities with country-level components. The figure below shows how the RP is structured. The RP consists of regional projects which are managed on the basis of individual project documents, approved as per UNDP's Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures (POPP), with their own earmarked budgets, results framework and each with their own management arrangements/project boards. RP activities are linked to the three outcomes and are organized in four so-called "*umbrella projects*"; three of which correspond to the three outcomes defined in the RP document and the fourth dedicated to cross-cutting issues. These *umbrella projects* have their own budgets, work plans, project boards, reporting, etc. The RP is implemented by the RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub, using various funding sources (including US\$ 4 m from TRAC resources and US\$ 4.4 m from the Turkish contribution). It is overseen by UNDP's Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (RBEC) and is managed by the RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub Manager, under the supervision of the Deputy Regional Director. An Advisory Board, consisting of UNDP resident representatives (RRs)<sup>4</sup> and RBEC senior management, provides overall guidance for the RP and validates its relevance vis-à-vis country and global priorities. To operationalize the RP, four Outcome Boards have been established for each of the three outcomes, with a fourth as a cross-cutting one. RP activities are implemented by RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub's advisory teams, as well as by UNDP country offices and implementing partners. RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub includes eight advisory teams which provide advisory support to UNDP COs and at the same time lead the implementation of regional projects. At the receiving end of the programme are the 18 beneficiary countries and territories in the Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (ECIS) region described in the previous section.

The following is a summary of the main findings identified in the course of this evaluation.

### Conceptualization and Understanding of the Regional Programme

Different stakeholders perceive the RP in different ways, based on their experiences and standpoints. There is no uniform understanding of the RP among staff members in the regional hub and country offices. Some UNDP staff perceive the RP as the totality of the work carried out by RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub. Others see the RP as the totality of the regional projects that are managed by RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub. There is also uncertainty about the role and structure of the "*umbrella projects*" and how they relate to regional projects and the RP or the support delivered to COs through the GPN. Certain interviewees were unclear about the relationship of

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<sup>4</sup> The Regional Advisory Board provides strategic advice, monitors progress and provides inputs on the work of the RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub regarding its core functions of (not limited to the regional programme): 1) advisory support to Country Offices and other clients; 2) regional programme management and implementation; 3) knowledge management and communication; and 4) direct country support.

RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub activities related to vertical funds (such as GEF, GCF, Global Fund, etc.) to the RP. While the absence of clear RP boundaries is less important in practice – given that for COs what matters is not how support services and projects are packaged but only what gets delivered – it will be useful to communicate to COs and Regional Hub staff the fact that the RP is blended with other types of services and supports for COs and that its borders are not clear-cut. A more distinct separation of delivery mechanisms would have perhaps necessitated greater division among responsibilities and teams in the hub. It will also be useful for the RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub to raise the level of awareness and understanding of staff members about the regional programme. It will also be important to dispel misconceptions among COs about the amount of RP financing that is spent by COs as opposed to what is spent for COs by RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub.

### Relevance

A general conclusion of this evaluation is that the RP has been highly relevant to the region in its need for regional cooperation as an instrument for the resolution of a range of challenges that the respective countries face. No RP projects fail the priority test for the needs of the region. All projects target key priority areas. Several projects have had multiple phases and have encompassed more than a decade; a testament of the importance of their interventions. The relevance of the RP was strongly confirmed by most interviewees for this evaluation and is also well documented in many assessments, studies and evaluations conducted in the framework of the RP. An extra degree of validation for RP's relevance is provided by donors who have carefully scrutinized the projects for which they have provided funds. Also, the impressive resource mobilization results of the RBEC's Regional Hub in the framework of the regional programme are an indication of RP's relevance. Another indicator of RP's relevance is the demand by beneficiary countries and COs for its services. The review of programme documents and interviews for this evaluation indicate that there has been strong demand for RP components.

Given its regional nature, the RP is not purposefully aligned with the CPDs of all COs in the RBEC region. Given the diversity of development needs and priorities of these countries, an attempt to fully align the RP with all relevant CPDs would be futile and actually not even desirable. What the RP captures well are the commonalities that these countries share across borders and that represent regional priorities. RP's focus on drivers of vulnerabilities is another aspect that makes it quite relevant to beneficiary countries and fully aligned with the "*leave no one behind*" principle pursued by the UN globally. Significant focus has been on *gender equality*, especially in the areas of employment and income generation opportunities for women, addressing unpaid care work, eliminating sexual and gender-based violence, harnessing participation of women in decision-making, and promoting gender-responsive crisis response and recovery solutions.

Some global projects are quite relevant because they either directly involve certain countries in the region or they bring to the region crucial experiences and knowledge from other parts of the world. However, interviewees identified certain global projects that are assigned to RBEC's Regional

Hub as a result of historical legacies or because of individual advisers who have the capacity to oversee them. These types of projects are not relevant to the region.

The response of RBEC's Regional Hub to the COVID-19 crisis has been swift. Early in 2020, RBEC's Regional Hub initiated measures to repurpose and refocus the RP to respond to the pandemic's effects that cut across the economy, governance, and environment. The regional hub and the country offices supported the conduct of a variety of Socio-economic Impact Assessments (SEIAs) and development of Socio-economic Recovery Plans (SERPs) to identify the needs of the most vulnerable and support national governments to develop targeted interventions. The RP has also provided support to countries in making choices and managing complexity during uncertainty in four integrated areas: governance, social protection, green economy, and digital disruption. UNDP also actively participated in the dedicated "*COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi Partner Trust Fund*" established by the UN to provide financial and technical assistance from multiple UN agencies to find ways to redress this impact, especially on the most vulnerable population and ensure the socio-economic recovery, while building back better. Between October and December 2020, the Regional Hub conducted an assessment of regional projects with a view to adjusting them to the COVID-19 challenges and needs. While some adjustment has taken place, the challenge has been in repurposing these projects' budgets due to the rigid nature of their funding which is related to the fact that these are donor-funded projects with earmarked financial resources. Hence, the importance of "umbrella projects" in times of crises and dynamic changes, given their flexibility to respond due to their more flexible funding.

The strictly "regional" nature of the activities falling under the scope of the regional programme adds another degree of relevance to the work of RBEC's Regional Hub. Thus, the regionality principles which underpin the regional programme have an intrinsic value which adds significantly to the relevance of RBEC's Regional Hub's work. But beyond stating these broad principles, the RBEC's Regional Hub could conduct a "*regionality test*" by which regional projects are measured up against the regionality criteria. This process could involve the translation of principles into more practical scores/measures that allows for the rating of projects in terms of their degree of "*regionality*". This will also allow for a better assessment and prioritization of projects.

The following are some ideas for priority areas and interventions for the upcoming RP. These priorities were identified by interviewees for this evaluation or emerged from the review of available documentation. These ideas combine traditional regional priorities with priorities emerging from or reinforced by the COVID-19 recovery effort.

- Gender and shock responsive social protection systems (focused on vulnerable groups)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The focus should be on systemic solutions for improving the coverage, adequacy and resilience of social protection. Focus on vulnerable groups should be embedded across all thematic areas as part of UNDP's pledge to leave no one behind.

- Economic restoration through creation of decent jobs, tackling informality<sup>6</sup> and a resilient SME sector
- Green growth and recovery (green economy)
- Crisis Management (including Disaster Risk Management)
- Waste management
- Gender-based violence, women's participation in decision making and women's economic empowerment (including addressing unpaid care, women's participation in the green sector and STEM fields Digitalization of economy and governance (e-governance, e-health, e-services, etc.)
- Digitalization of economy and governance (e-governance, e-health, e-services, etc.)
- Data-driven policy analysis and decision-making
- SDG-aligned fiscal and financing mechanisms

In terms of the “how”, the “regional” nature of the RP will continue to be its defining feature. However, there are two additional factors that have the potential to make the RP more relevant and attractive to its partners, especially beneficiary countries. These two factors are “*multi-disciplinary approaches*” to development problems and “*integrated interventions/activities*”. With pandemic setting the region back across a number of economic and human development dimensions, there will be a need for a recovery process across multiple dimensions – health, employment, social security and inclusion, gender inequalities, green development, disaster risk management, etc. Such increased awareness of and need for integrated approaches makes the role of UNDP as an integrator of themes, methodologies and interventions particularly attractive. There are two additional features of the RP that add to its relevance and should be firmly maintained going forward. One is the pursuit of innovative solutions to development challenges of a regional nature. Secondly, the RP should further pursue partnerships with IFIs that leverage significant funding for the region's key development priorities. This is an area where – as will be seen further in this report – RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has been extremely successful in the current programme cycle.

### Effectiveness

Based on data collected by the RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub, this evaluation provided an assessment of the achievement of results for the period 2018-2020. The analysis of the results framework revealed the following situation with regards to the achievement of targets for the 21 indicators.

- ***Already achieved or exceeded: 13***
- ***On track to being achieved: 6***
- ***Unlikely to be achieved (by end of 2021): 2***

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<sup>6</sup> Formalization of employment will guarantee labour rights, decent and predictable income, and social protection.

The following are the main achievements against the targets under outcome 1:

- US\$ 11 m mobilized at the regional level to promote low-carbon and climate-resilient development and implementation of Paris Climate Agreement;
- 14 regional/cross-regional capacity development events advancing low-carbon and climate-resilient development and green growth have been completed;
- 11 regional/sub-regional initiatives, diagnostic tools and guidelines have been developed to promote integrated approaches to social protection, care services and decent jobs for the vulnerable people;
- 14 regional collaboration forums on rule of law organized;
- 6 regional/cross-regional initiatives and partnerships aimed at providing high-quality, gender-responsive and data-driven solutions for conservation, sustainable use, and equitable access to and benefit-sharing of natural resources, biodiversity, and ecosystems, RP exceeded their targets;
- 8 sub-regional initiatives in place to advance legal, policy and institutional reforms to remove structural barriers to women's empowerment;
- US\$ 800,000 invested in energy access, renewable energy and zero-carbon development;
- 4 regional policy/capacity development initiatives and partnerships for reducing disaster and climate change risks (this is expected to be 8 by the end of 2021);
- 10 new forms of evidence and methods explored and leveraged to address public service challenges.

The following are the main achievements against the targets under outcome 2:

- 33 regional initiatives, tools and guidelines developed and applied to support and monitor progress towards the SDGs;
- 9 regional/sub-regional initiatives to facilitate access to sustainable jobs and livelihoods;
- 16 anti-corruption measures developed at regional level to improve public services at (sub)national level;
- 16 new partnerships with emerging donors and other stakeholders on SDGs;
- 10 regional mechanisms established to generate solutions for improving public services at (sub)national level;
- 5 public and private entities benefiting from gender equality tools and guidance;
- 3 countries benefiting from diagnostic assessments for sustainable commodities and green and inclusive value chains.

The following are the main achievements against the targets under outcome 3:

- 15 partnerships, platforms and gender-responsive initiatives developed to mitigate risks, particularly in urban centers;



- 7 regional capacity development initiatives facilitate the application of comprehensive disaster damage and loss accounting systems/post-disaster needs assessment (PDNA) framework for resilient recovery, building partnerships with UNDRR on the promotion of DRR agenda and Sendai monitoring, building resilience of critical infrastructure (airports), strengthening DRR capacity, application of CRNA methodology;
- 10 initiatives established to prevent conflict;
- 18 regional cooperation forums support justice institutions and community security.

### Efficiency

In light of dwindling core resources for the region (as the countries in the region acquire middle-income status), the RP has increasingly relied on external resources. The results of this funding model in the current RP cycle have been very impressive. The financial resources planned for the RP (2018-2021) as of 2017 when the RP document was developed were US\$ 62,6 m. As of the time of this evaluation, the total resources mobilized by the Regional Hub for the RP for 2018-2021 stood at US \$103 m.<sup>7</sup> Exceeding the resource mobilization target by almost 100% before the closing of the programme cycle is without any doubt an astounding success for the Regional Hub. What is even more impressive is the small resource base which was used to leverage the impressive amount of financing that was mobilized. For the period 2018-2021, the Regional Hub has had at its disposal US\$ 4 m from core (TRAC) resources and US\$ 4.4 m from Turkey (for the period 2019-2021). The Regional Hub was able to leverage these unearmarked resources to achieve results that go way beyond RP's original targets. Although regional projects involve a different funding category from country-based projects for many donors, some CO staff pointed to the need for more effective coordination between resource mobilization efforts at the regional level and country level so as to avoid competition.

RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has managed to forge a large number of partnerships, not only with donor and financing organizations, but also a range of international and national organizations in all the areas in which it has operated. With regards to UN agencies, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has worked closely under the "*Delivering as One*" approach with a number of UN agencies - i.e. UNICEF (social assistance, social transfers, gender equality), UNAIDS (health), ILO (social insurance/employment), UNFPA (gender equality), UN Women (gender equality), UNITAID (procurement in the health sector, carbon footprint reduction of healthcare supply chains), etc. With regards to other development partners, the RP has benefitted from strong cooperation with the European Commission. Partnerships have also been forged with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Council of Europe (CoE), World Bank (WB), Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) on topics such as women's economic empowerment in the Western Balkans, Roma inclusion and reintegration of vulnerable returnees or innovative initiatives such as open data and innovative transparency solutions. Further, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has built key partnerships with

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<sup>7</sup> With some projects going into the next programming cycle (2022-2025).

key IFIs. Opportunities for greater cooperation exist with regards to the private sector and civil society, especially academic institutions – in the ECIS region, Turkey and beyond. Given the major role that RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub has played in the generation and dissemination of knowledge – including through the events and debates that it has hosted – it is in a unique position to facilitate the interaction of academics and researchers with practitioners in the beneficiary countries.

A key feature of the RP is its flexibility in terms of how it is structured, financed and delivered. About 93% of RP funds are earmarked for multi-year project implementation, whereas 7% is “flexible” funding for investments. This structure is important. First, having the bulk of investments in multi-year, well-structured projects based on project documents and results frameworks is crucial for institutionalizing these interventions, grounding them on clear management and financing frameworks, making their activities predictable and ensuring long-term engagement. For most projects, such structures are imposed by agreements with donors anyway. But it is also crucial that the RP has a flexible component that enables RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub to quickly deploy resources where and when needed based on demand, urgency and relevance. The unearmarked nature of the Turkish contribution has been extremely important for the flexibility of the RP. It has enabled RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub to invest seed funding in strategic areas and then build on those investments by partnering with donor organizations and development partners to develop a myriad of programmes and activities.

With regards to budget execution, the delivery of RP has been largely in line with what was planned on an annual basis. For the three years in question, deviations from planned budgets have been minimal. The total planned RP budget for 2018-2021 (in Atlas) was USD\$ 79 m, whereas total delivery for the same period (estimated for 2021) has been US\$ 72 m. Overall, the execution of the RP is well within the parameters within which it was planned. Interviews for this evaluation also revealed a number of organizational/administrative issues that require the attention of RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub management. They are outlined below from the perspective of RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub staff and the perspective of CO staff. For some regional projects funded by GEF, there are some unclarities about execution and oversight roles among staff members, including advisors in HQ and RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub. These responsibilities should be clarified on the basis of clear criteria that determine unambiguously the split between execution and oversight. From the perspective of the COs, it is important to have stronger coordination between regional and country-level activities and alignment of regional programme priorities with those of the respective COs. COs prefer more ownership of the regional programme, as more ownership strengthens engagement of national partners and accountability. This need for more ownership from the COs could be accommodated through an enhanced consultative process at the programming and implementation stages.

### Sustainability

For all the variety of issues and needs covered by the regional programme, one issue that often came up in the course of this evaluation is whether it is possible for the RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub to create more depth in certain areas through more intensive interventions and sustained engagement. The wide range of issues covered by RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub in such a large number of countries with different priorities and situations creates a tendency for fragmentation of interventions. The emerging demand from COs and partners calls for integrated support in the areas of green economy, digital transformation, and SDG financing, which will be central priorities for the RP in the coming cycle. RBEC's response already includes a focus on new, integrated ways of working and sets the stage for operationalizing a new methodology to move from projectized to portfolio-driven environments to better navigate complexities and achieve systemic transformations.

There is potential for more strategic and comprehensive programmes, more active interaction of teams and stronger integration of interventions across areas. UNDP has a comparative advantage in its role as integrator and is well equipped to operate at the intersection of key sectors. The COVID-19 crisis showed the importance of integrated approaches to development. The need for integrated, multi-disciplinary and gender-responsive interventions will only increase in the years to come. This includes stronger integration not only between COVID-19 related impacts and other development challenges, but also between sectors such as governance and peacebuilding initiatives, climate change and health, climate change and security/resilience, disaster risk reduction and economic development, etc. It will also be important to embed in programming key enablers such as financing, innovation and digital transformation. To take advantage of these opportunities, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub should conceive a model for the delivery of regional projects that enables more effective integration of activities.

The RP has had a major focus on piloting and demonstrating innovative solutions to development problems, with the expectation that if successful they will be replicated and scaled up by national partners. The catalytic facilities in particular have been designed to stimulate innovative solutions and leverage additional resources. Although these initiatives have been relatively small in volume, they have enabled COs to accelerate the achievement of development priorities at country level closely linked to global and regional strategic priorities. There is a need to strengthen the monitoring and tracking of piloted initiatives over time – the lessons they generate during the piloting stage and the degree to which they get replicated and scaled up. Information about pilots and replication is not easily available or sufficient. More data on these initiatives – especially, after they are completed and expected to have become sustainable - will be useful not only for UNDP, but also for partners and donors.

### Gender Mainstreaming

The mainstreaming of gender is prioritized in the RP document and is supported by a dedicated team in RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub structure. Based on the RP project list provided by the Istanbul Regional Hub, 70% of RP projects have the gender marker "Gen 1", 26% have the gender

marker “Gen 2” and 3% have the gender marker “Gen 3”. Gender mainstreaming is a good example of cross-team collaboration. The Gender Team has taken a leading role in this area, by engaging with the other technical teams on initiatives. The RP has contributed to the integration of the gender dimension into national policies and has promoted the participation of women in government. Most project proposals developed with RBEC support have included gender assessments and gender action plans.

Despite the achievements outlined above, the gender mainstreaming capacity in the regional hub remains limited to the small gender team. RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub needs to strengthen overall gender capacities within its teams, especially in the area of climate change. There is also a need to strengthen the capacity for gender analysis in the formulation of project documents. There is also a need for the allocation of greater expenditures on gender responsive initiatives and activities. The Istanbul Regional Hub should further encourage greater gender responsiveness of regional programme activities and regional projects supported by adequate financial allocations, and proper quality assurance mechanism and accountability for realization of gender equality results. The RP will benefit from the inclusion of more advocacy initiatives engaging regional stakeholders on gender in general and in particular GBV. The RP will benefit from greater focus on Women and STEM, unpaid care work, and women in green economy.

This evaluation also provided an opportunity for drawing some important lessons from the experience of the RP. The following are some key lessons from the perspective of the evaluator.

### ***Lesson 1: Depth of Interventions***

One observation made in this evaluation is the need for more depth in the impact of regional projects. One common challenge with these projects is that budgets are small and financial resource are spread widely and thinly across multiple countries or activities. Consequently, the impact of these initiatives is limited, especially when infrastructure components are involved. One way of ensuring greater depth and impact is through greater economies of scale which requires stronger integration of various initiatives and activities under one framework that enables greater synergies and cooperation. This project could involve the merging of projects into more consolidated frameworks, implemented by one team under one budgetary framework. However, there is another way of ensuring depth and impact in these interventions – through the so-called “temporal” integration. This type of integration refers to continued engagement in one particular area over a very long period of time without interruption – sometimes one or two decades. The RP is a good example of this as it has included several projects that have been sustained by UNDP and its donor partners for very long periods of time (through several phases), which has enabled the building of trust with government counterparts, accumulation of significant experience and creation of significant impact. Examples of such projects are the initiatives on “Aid for Trade”, Small Weapons, Border Management, SEESAC, etc. The flipside of this approach is the short-term engagement, usually taking place over a couple of years which often ends in a failure to ensure the sustainability of results. Ideally, all regional projects should at least be conceived as

potentially long-term interventions that will allow for deep engagement with a particular challenge in the regional context. Efforts should be made by UNDP to encourage this type of mindset among donor agencies, so that they can understand the benefits of sustained engagement.

### ***Lesson 2: Regional Opportunities for Resource Mobilization***

One important lesson that can be drawn from RBEC's RP is that funding opportunities for regional programming are significant. With its impressive resource mobilization results for the current cycle, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has proved that with creativity and the right offer it is possible to raise significant funding for cross-border initiatives. RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has been particularly successful in two innovative fronts – engaging emerging donors and forging partnerships with IFIs. RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub's experience in this area will be valuable for other UNDP hubs and other organizations. UNDP is uniquely positioned in the RBEC region to deliver country-based programmes complemented regional programming. This is a formidable comparative advantage of UNDP that few other organizations have. In the upcoming cycle, UNDP should take full advantage of its positioning in this area and continue to deliver regionally. The cross-border nature of the COVID-19 crisis is one factor that will provide additional impetus to cross-border activities. Another important factor in the RBEC region is the importance of regional integration processes. Both the EU and the Russian Federation are leading such processes which make them inclined to take a great interest in regional cooperation programmes. Also, emerging donors such as Turkey will be more inclined to invest in regional projects. UNDP is well positioned to channel available resources through its extensive institutional infrastructure in the region. One financing frontier that UNDP could explore more forcefully in the coming programme cycle is private sector financing. Attempts have been made in the past to tackle this challenge, but the results have been limited. The opportunity is still there to engage the private sector in a more effective development partnership, especially for Turkey and the Western Balkans, but this will require the right incentives and modalities to make the partnership attractive to private players.

### ***Lesson 3: Flexibility as a Crucial Factor of Relevance***

The COVID-19 crisis tested the ability of the RP to respond to a rapidly evolving emergency situation of global proportions. One interesting example that was brought up by participants in this evaluation is that of “social protection” as a distinct area of work that was previously part of the regional programme (with significant projects on the Roma community and Inclusive Labour Market Solutions). As a result of continued activities and lack of project financing for this area, the regional hub has lost dedicated “social protection” capabilities in its teams of advisers. When the COVID-19 crisis struck in early 2020, it became quickly obvious that social protection would be an area where there would be a need for substantive engagement going forward. However, the foothold had been lost and now it will have to be reconstructed again – with the new RP presenting an opportunity for anchoring this area more firmly in the new programmatic framework. This experience showed not only the need for flexibility, but also the importance of maintaining capabilities in certain key areas even when project funding is not available for them. Hence, the

importance of unearmarked funds and programming under the “umbrella projects” which allow the RP to fill in gaps, maintain capabilities in critical areas, and quickly respond to emerging needs and dynamic situations. Going forward, these umbrella projects (or the idea embodied in them) should be maintained, and where possible strengthened, and should be deployed to maintain capabilities in those areas which are critical, but for which project funding has been limited.

The following are a set of recommendations that were identified in the course of this evaluation.

***Recommendation 1: Communication of the Regional Programme to RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub and CO Staff***

- It will be useful for the RBEC’S ISTANBUL REGIONAL HUB to raise the level of awareness and understanding of staff members in the hub and country offices about the regional programme. Also, the fact that the regional programme does not have clear-cut boundaries will be useful to communicate to staff members in order to avoid confusion. RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub could produce a package of information on the regional programme that targets staff members. This topic could be included in some of the regular trainings organized for RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub and CO staff. A regular newsletter (monthly or bi-monthly) could be produced to raise the profile of the regional programme by featuring successful RP projects or activities with the highest impact or innovative solutions.
- In the case of regional projects where the CO is not directly involved with, or kept abreast of, communications by RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub advisers with national counterparts, it is important to involve the respective CO in those communications. A protocol for how RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub advisers or regional project staff engage with national counterparts could be developed to create a mechanism that ensures the engagement of COs.
- It will also be important to dispel misconceptions among COs about the amount of RP financing that is spent by COs as opposed to what is spent for COs by the RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub.

***Recommendation 2: Assessment of Regional Projects in Light of the New Situation***

- At the end of the current programme cycle, RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub could consider the conduct of an assessment of regional projects for their ability to respond more effectively to the changing situation in light of the COVID-19 crisis. The assessment could identify ways in which these projects could be adjusted and repurposed to respond more effectively to the new context. Such an assessment will provide a comprehensive picture of what the future looks like for these projects given the current situation and identified changes could be introduced in the upcoming programme cycle.

***Recommendation 3: Maintaining and Further Strengthening RP’s Relevance***

- The flexibility provided by the “umbrella projects” is a positive feature of the current RP, enabled by the unearmarked nature of the Turkish contribution and RBEC’s Istanbul

Regional Hub's TRAC resources. This flexibility should be maintained going forward, and even increased where possible based on fundraising efforts with donors willing to consider the provision of unearmarked funding.

- RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub should review all global projects managed by the hub, screen them for relevance to the region and find appropriate solutions in discussion with BPPS and CB for those that do not pass the regional relevance test.
- The development of regional projects should involve more closely CO staff. RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub could institute procedures for how the involvement of CO staff should take place in the formulation of such projects.
- RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub should develop a system by which regional projects are measured up more rigorously against the regionality principles. This process will involve the translation of principles into more practical scores/measures that allows for the rating of projects in terms of their degree of "regionality". This will also allow for a better assessment and prioritization of projects. Such a system could also be used as part of the results framework to indicate the extent to which a project meets the regionality criteria.

#### ***Recommendation 4: Improving RP's Efficiency***

- There is room for more effective coordination between resource mobilization efforts at the regional level and country level, strengthening their synergies and complementarities. The Regional Hub could consider the development of a consolidated tracking tool for resource mobilization efforts at both levels, accessible by both COs and the Regional Hub, which would show at any point in time the status of discussions and negotiations with any donor by any UNDP entity in the region. This tool could be an integral part of a more integrated planning and resource mobilization framework at the RBEC level, inclusive of all bureau components.
- The Istanbul Regional Hub could explore ways for increasing RP's share of flexible funds (especially, under the umbrella projects) that would allow for a faster and more efficient response to emerging needs.
- The Regional Hub should further clarify and communicate the criteria for execution and oversight roles among technical advisors.
- The Regional Hub should encourage greater involvement of CO staff in the development of regional projects. At the programming stage, there should be earlier engagement of CO specialists in the identification of priorities and design of regional projects. One suggestion provided by CO colleagues is to institute a requirement for the involvement of relevant CO staff. Another suggestion is for the Regional Hub to make more intensive use of detailed assignments for CO staff in the regional hub to give them greater exposure to the RP.

- Regional projects should always use the CO and the RR as the interface (and key interlocutor) for consultations and interactions with national counterparts.

#### ***Recommendation 5: Delivering Integrated Interventions***

- RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub should conceive a model for the delivery of regional projects that enables more effective integration of activities. Although funding for regional project is fragmented and donor-driven, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub could create incentives for closer cooperation between project teams in the delivery of activities. Also, more multi-disciplinary approaches, including mandatory gender mainstreaming, could be used in the design of regional projects. This will also require working with donor partners and convincing them of the usefulness of multi-disciplinary approaches, especially in a regional context. The COVID-19 crisis – and the related socio-economic impact assessments – provide good foundations for pursuing more purposefully integrated approaches to regional programming.

#### ***Recommendation 6: Greater Focus on Gender Equality***

- The RP should further encourage greater gender responsiveness of regional programme activities and regional projects supported by adequate financial allocation, and proper quality assurance mechanism and accountability for realization of gender equality results.
- RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub should strengthen overall gender capacities, especially in the area of climate change. There is also a need to strengthen the capacity for gender analysis in the formulation of project documents. There is also a need for the allocation of greater expenditures on gender responsive initiatives and activities.
- The RP will benefit from the inclusion of more advocacy initiatives engaging regional stakeholders on gender in general and in particular GBV. The RP will benefit from greater focus on Women and STEM, unpaid care work, and women in green economy.

#### ***Recommendation 7: Tracking Innovations and Scaling-up***

- Given RP's focus on innovations and catalyzation, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub should deploy tools and systems that enable it to track pilot initiatives more effectively over time and way beyond the end of a project's lifetime (which is usually too short to allow for a definitive assessment of the success of pilots). As part of the monitoring and evaluation system, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub should strengthen its planning and monitoring of pilot initiatives and their demonstration effects, so that their replicability and scaling up are monitored and supported more effectively. RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub should focus on documenting more consistently results, lessons, experiences, and good practices so that they are shared more widely, replicated, and scaled up.



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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BPPS	Bureau for Policy and Programme Support
CB	Crisis Bureau
CO	Country Office
CoE	Council of Europe
CPD	Country Programme Document
CRNA	Covid-19 Recovery Needs Assessment
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ECIS	Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States
EIB	European Investment Bank
EWNA	Eurasian Women's Network
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GPN	Global Policy Network
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HQ	Headquarters
HR	Human Rights
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IFIs	International Financial Institutions
IICPSD	Istanbul International Center for Private Sector in Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IsDB	Islamic Development Bank
LEA	Legal Environment Assessments
LNOB	Leave no one Behind
MIC	Middle Income Countries
MSME	Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NHRI	National Human Rights Institutions
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OFID	OPEC Fund for International Development
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PDNA	Post Disaster Needs Assessment
POPP	Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
PwDs	Persons with Disabilities

RBEC	Regional Bureau for Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
RFF	Rapid Financing facility
RH	Regional Hub
RP	Regional Programme
RR	UNDP Resident Representative
RRF	Rapid Response Facility
RYCO	Regional Youth Cooperation Office
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEESAC	South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons
SEIAs	Socio-Economic Impact Assessments
SERPs	Socio-Economic Recovery Plans
SME	Small Medium Enterprises
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WB6	Western Balkan Countries
WB	World Bank

## 1. Introduction

This report presents the main findings of the mid-term evaluation of UNDP's Regional Programme for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (hereinafter referred to as the *regional programme* of the Regional Bureau for Europe and CIS or *RBEC's RP*) for the period 2018-2021.<sup>8</sup> The remainder of this section of the report will provide a brief description of the methodology used for the evaluation and a short summary of the context in which the RP and this evaluation have taken place. The successive chapters will provide an overview of the programme and the main findings, lessons learned and recommendations.

### 1) Evaluation Methodology

The main goal of this evaluation was to assess the extent to which RBEC's RP objectives have been achieved, as well as identify lessons and provide recommendations for the next cycle. While the evaluation is primarily intended to inform UNDP about RP results, it was scheduled in the latter part of the current RP to inform the development of the new RP for the period 2022-2025. The box below summarizes the objectives of the evaluation set forth in the Terms of Reference. Annex II of this report presents a full description of the methodology used for this evaluation.

#### **Box 1: Evaluation Objectives<sup>9</sup>**

The evaluation is driven by the following objectives:

- Assess the progress of the RP implementation and identify gaps in achieving planned development results in the region.
- Provide RBEC's management with an objective assessment of the development contributions that have been achieved through RP support and partnerships with other key players during the last three years.
- Adjust implementation through introducing corrective measures, help capture innovations, sustain and scale-up successful approaches that work in the implementation of the current programme and facilitate learning to inform current and future programming at the regional and corporate levels.
- Provide inputs to other relevant evaluations and regional reports with quantitative and qualitative results achieved through the RP.
- Ensure that country level support through the RP is risk informed.
- Contribute to the validation/refinement of the theory of change underlying the RP.
- Assess RP interventions effectiveness in mainstreaming gender in development efforts as well as application of right-based approaches in the region and provide concrete recommended actions, as required.

<sup>8</sup> UNDP has regional programmes for several regions. Since its inception, UNDP has been extending support to groups of countries at regional and sub-regional levels in addition to its global and country-level operations through regional programmes, which have a clear programme structure with results and resources framework. Regional programmes are aligned with the overall programmatic framework, planned results and timelines of the UNDP Strategic Plan, and are approved by UNDP's Executive Board.

<sup>9</sup> These evaluation objectives are spelled out in the Terms of Reference developed by RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub.

- Review and suggest adjustments to the RP results framework to better capture results at regional level.

This evaluation covers the period 2018-2020. As noted, the assessment is forward-looking giving specific programmatic recommendations for RP's final year and for the design of the successor programme (2022-2025).

The evaluation's methodology was based on mixed methods and involved the use of common tools such as documentary review, interviews, triangulation, analysis and synthesis. A participatory approach was taken for the collection of data, formulation of recommendations and identification of lessons learned. Data collection involved a comprehensive desk review of programme documents that were made available by RBEC's Regional Hub. The evaluation also relied on semi-structured interviews with all technical teams in the Regional Hub. To better capture the view from the beneficiary countries, the evaluation engaged six UNDP country offices representing each sub-region (Kosovo<sup>10</sup> in Western Balkans, Belarus, Georgia and Armenia in the South Caucasus and Western CIS, and Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in Central Asia). The evaluation also benefited from the experience of the evaluator with a number of evaluations of UNDP programmes and projects in the region. In particular, it benefited from the evaluation of the Turkish contribution to the RP conducted in 2019. It also made use of existing reports, including the independent mid-term evaluation "*UNDP Regional Programme for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (2014-2017): Midterm Outcome Evaluation*" conducted in 2016 and evaluations of regional projects.

The evaluation activities carried out by an independent evaluator in the first half of 2021. Information obtained through the documentary review and interview process was triangulated against available documented sources, and then synthesized using analytical judgement. The analysis of information was conducted on the basis of the standard criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability, which are described in more detail in Annex III of this report.

Two limitations were encountered in this evaluation.

- One was the inability of the evaluator to conduct any country or site visits related to the regional projects and have in-person meetings. The effect of this limitation was the inability to see examples of projects on the ground and listening to the views and perspective of direct beneficiaries. A mitigating action to this limitation was to rely more extensively on the documentary review.
- A second limitation also related to the pandemic and lack of in-country visits was the limited involvement of the perspectives of national stakeholders, beneficiaries or development

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<sup>10</sup> References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

partners in this evaluation. The effect of this limitation is that the main views presented here are those captured through interviews or project reports, which primarily reflect the views of UNDP staff in the regional hub or in the respective country offices. A mitigating action to this limitation was to identify, where possible, the views of beneficiaries and other national counterparts in the documentary review.

## 2) Regional Context

The region covered by UNDP's Regional Programme encompasses 17 countries and one territory<sup>11</sup> in Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (ECIS). This region consists of middle-income countries (MIC) with relatively high levels of human development, yet facing the daunting task of reconciling economic and social progress with environmental sustainability, often aggravated by slow progress in reforming state institutions and igniting the private sector.<sup>12</sup>

Before the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, the region had been making progress on several fronts, though the full achievement of the SDGs by 2030 would have required a significant increase in investments. Countries were grappling with multiple challenges, the most important of which can be categorized in the following three groups (which also underpin UNDP's Regional Programme and define its main components): i) *achieving prosperity and well-being for citizens*; ii) *improving governance in the public sector*; and, iii) *preventing and mitigating conflicts and disaster risks*.

- ***Prosperity and Well-being*** - Despite progress in human development, especially education and health, the region experienced growing inequalities in incomes and opportunities. Social exclusion, driven by gender, ethnicity, age, location, etc., has prevented women, youth and disadvantaged and marginalized groups such as people with disabilities, Roma, and ethnic minorities, from sharing in the benefits of economic growth. Social protection systems lack the resources and mechanisms to cope with these challenges. The informal economy continues to offer livelihoods opportunities to substantial segments of the population. In many countries, population growth is slowing down below the replacement rate. Outward migration flows are some of the highest globally, causing extensive 'brain drain' and depletion of human capital. Many countries are experiencing depopulation and lack of skills, especially in rural areas. Problems of poverty, marginalization and inequality are further exacerbated by environmental degradation and pollution (land degradation, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, low agriculture productivity, pollution by chemicals and emissions, etc.) caused by unbalanced use of natural resources and lack of adaptive systems in response to climate change. Unless properly managed, transitions to low carbon and climate and disaster-resilient economies may put many

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<sup>11</sup> The countries and territories covered by the programme are Albania; Armenia; Azerbaijan; Belarus; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Georgia; Kazakhstan; Kyrgyzstan; Kosovo; Moldova; Montenegro; Serbia; North Macedonia, Tajikistan; Turkey; Turkmenistan; Ukraine; and Uzbekistan.

<sup>12</sup> The human development index for 13 programme countries has reached the 'high' or 'very high' human development category. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan had their status changed from Low Income Country to Middle Income Country in 2014 and 2015 respectively.

formal and informal workers and businesses at high risk of losing their livelihoods. In Europe and Central Asia, inequalities persist between women and men in access to decent work and income. Women perform more than twice as much unpaid care and domestic work as men, reducing their ability to work for income this situation worsened during the COVID 19 crisis. On average, the gender gap in labour force participation is 17 percent in the region. Women face multiple challenges as they try to advance their careers, such as earning on average 30 percent less than men. In addition, women entrepreneurs encounter more difficulties than men in accessing the finance, credit, skills, technology and networks they need to be successful in employment.

- ***Governance*** - Institutional reforms in the region have been very slow, with cases of backtracking in the reform process. Political crises have been severe, resulting in weak accountability and transparency of state institutions vis-à-vis the citizens. Women's representation in parliaments in the ECA region is still well below the one-third threshold considered the participation minimum to shape policy for gender equality, and women politicians are especially a target of sexist threats and sexual harassment. Public administration capacities are low, resulting in lack of implementation of key policies. Moreover, women's underrepresentation in decision-making positions, including in the public administration, results in women's social and economic interests and perspectives being overlooked. Civil service is generally politicized and lacks incentives for performance. Independent institutions that hold decision-makers accountable lack power and resources. Citizens lack equitable access to public services. There has been growing interest in innovative approaches to public service delivery that foster transparency, accountability, efficiency and meaningful civic participation and engagement, but progress remains limited. Social norms, gender-based discrimination continues to restrict women's political and economic opportunities. Limited or unequal access to justice and legal services, especially during crises and conflicts, can weaken protections for marginalized groups. A functional law enforcement and justice system is particularly important in preventing sexual and gender-based violence, which remains a pervasive violation of the fundamental rights of women, girls, and members of LGBTI communities. Stigma towards people living with HIV and low coverage of anti-retroviral treatment keep the incidence of HIV in certain countries in the region high. Furthermore, frozen conflicts and tensions are still rife among neighbouring countries, with a number of breakaway territories dotting the region. A number of countries in the region have been affected by increased extremism worldwide and large migration flows.
- ***Conflict and Disasters*** - Governance concerns are often exacerbated by human insecurity, weak social cohesion, ethnic, religious or other discrimination, and vulnerability to violent extremism. The region is a source, destination, and transit of migration, displacements, and refugee movements, which pose humanitarian and development challenges, as well as opportunities for national economies and local communities. The region faces energy,



environment, and climate-related risks, including risks associated with disasters and energy shortages. UNDP has estimated that during the past 30 years natural disasters in the region have inflicted damages in excess of \$70 billion, burdening local economies with significant costs and challenging countries' development. According to the 2016 UNDP Regional Human Development Report, unsustainable water and land management practices, particularly in the Aral Sea basin, continue to threaten household food and energy security, biodiversity, and other forms of natural capital. For men in the traditional provider role, periods of crisis linked with food and other insecurities can cause extreme pressure, with a wide range of consequences on their health and family wellbeing. During crises and disaster women from low-income families in particular those that rely on natural resources for their livelihood face economic vulnerabilities. Disasters and crises increase women's unpaid care and domestic work burden, since they are often the primary caretakers within the household. Disasters and displacement also exacerbate women's vulnerability to gender-based violence and sexual assault.

The onset of the global pandemic has profoundly compounded the above-mentioned challenges that the region has been striving to overcome since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990's. The consequences of the pandemic have been devastating across the region. Socio-economic impact assessments (SEIAs) of the pandemic undertaken under the "UN's Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to the COVID-19 Crisis" show that "the COVID-19 pandemic is far more than a health crisis: it is affecting societies and economies at their core".<sup>13</sup> The crisis is taking a toll on human lives, over-stretching health systems, exacerbating pre-existing social vulnerabilities, putting pressure on public finances, slowing down economic activity and increasing poverty and inequalities. The COVID-19 pandemic has also affected the quality of governance, citizens access to services and posing risks to human rights. The pandemic revealed new forms of social and gender-based inequalities related to unequal access to ownership and use of digital tool, reinforcing the digital divide. SEIAs also show that women are disproportionately affected in accessing job opportunities; vulnerabilities are also rising among migrant labor and informal workers; educational decline due to ineffective distant learning, as well as geographic and gender-based digital gaps.<sup>14</sup> Women have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. They have suffered higher rates of unemployment, rising levels of violence within the home and a sharp increase in unpaid care and domestic work. The COVID-19 pandemic and its far-reaching socioeconomic impacts has clearly exposed the vulnerabilities of the informal economy and its world of work. Informal workers particularly in urban areas, were at significantly higher risk and more severely hit than their formal counterparts and yet government response mechanisms often left them out of social protection and economic recovery (the so-called 'missing middle').

These challenges have presented UNDP with an opportunity to strengthen its engagement with regional stakeholders in support of their response to the COVID-19 impact, especially in assisting with the conduct of socio-economic impact assessments across the region. These assessments

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.undp.org/coronavirus/socio-economic-impact-covid-19>

<sup>14</sup> Brief #2: Putting the UN Framework for Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19 Into Action: Insights, June 2020.

provide strong foundations for the development of the UNDP programming at the country and regional level promoting a number of key priorities that have been identified, including promoting risk informed development, social inclusion and decent employment, curbing violent extremism, improving the accountability and transparency of state institutions, improving access to rights and basic public services for women and disadvantaged groups, addressing irregular migration, assisting with disaster risk reduction and preparedness, mitigation, etc. These priorities should be captured in the new regional programme, whose preparation will start shortly and which is expected to be informed by the findings of this evaluation.

\* \* \*

This report will provide an overview of how UNDP's RP was positioned and was performing before the COVID-19 crisis and how it was repurposed to respond to the quickly evolving needs of the region in response to the crisis. The rest of the report is organized as follows. The following (second) chapter provides a brief introductory overview of the RP. The third chapter presents the major findings organized along the standard dimensions of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. The fourth chapter identifies key "lessons learned" drawn from the experience of the RP and the fifth chapter summarizes the main conclusions. The last (sixth) chapter provides a set of recommendations for the consideration of UNDP. Additional information supporting the arguments made throughout the document are provided in the annexes attached to this report.

## 2. Overview of the Regional Programme

This section provides a broad overview of the RP – the way it is structured, financed and delivered.

The Regional Programme for Europe and the CIS 2018-2021 was developed through extensive consultations with the 18 respective country offices and partners and was approved by the UNDP Executive Board in its first regular session in January 2018. It is one of the five UNDP regional programmes in the world and targets Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) – see the box below for more details about UNDP regional programmes.

### Box 2: UNDP's Regional Programmes

UNDP delivers cross-country and regional-level results through Regional Programmes (RPs). Similarly to Country Programme Documents (CPDs), RPs are approved by the Executive Board under each Regional Bureau. UNDP's regional bureaus implement the RPDs through their regional programme implementation capacities in the regional hubs according to the POPP and delegated authority to the Deputy Regional Director or the Hub Manager (where regional director is not in the hub). RPDs have similar management and oversight arrangements across all regions, as well as consistent Regional Advisory Board TORs.

RBEC's RP is fully aligned with UNDP's Strategic Plan 2018-2021, sharing its expected outcomes and approach. It focuses on helping countries eradicate poverty in all its forms, accelerate structural transformation for sustainable development and build resilience to crises and shocks by strengthening development pathways. The box below provides a short description of the RP's outcomes and five "regionality" principles.

### Box 3: Summary of Regional Programme Outcomes

The RP's outcomes, corresponding to the outcomes of the UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2021, are:

- Outcome 1: Accelerating structural transformations through more effective governance systems
- Outcome 2: Addressing poverty and inequalities through more inclusive and sustainable development pathways
- Outcome 3: Building resilience to shocks and crises through enhanced prevention and risk-informed development

The RP is grounded in five mutually reinforcing 'regionality' principles which define the particular value-added of regional or sub-regional approaches. They include:

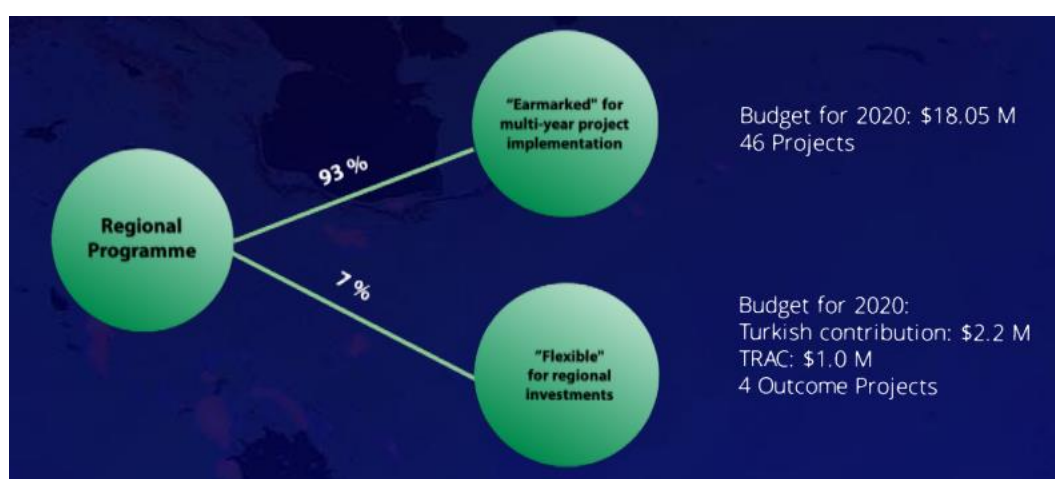
1. Promotion of regional public goods based on strengthened regional cooperation and integration;
2. Management of cross-border externalities and spill overs that are best addressed collaboratively on an inter-country basis;
3. Advancement of awareness, dialogue and action on sensitive and/or emerging development issues that benefit strongly from multi-country experiences and perspectives;
4. Promotion of experimentation and innovation that overcomes institutional, financial and/or informational barriers that may be too high for an individual country to surmount;
5. Generation and sharing of knowledge, experience and expertise, so that countries can connect to, and benefit from, relevant experiences from the region and beyond.

Two additional principles were added in 2017:

6. Inter-regionality, that is, cooperation and coordination on issues that are of interest to 2 or more regions due to their particular relevance to, connections between and impact on these regions.
7. Partnership-building and network development at regional and sub-regional levels that benefit from resources and opportunities that exist primarily or only at these levels.

RBEC's RP serves as a framework for the implementation of regional and sub-regional activities with country-level components. The figure below shows how the RP is structured. The RP consists of regional projects which are managed on the basis of individual project documents, approved as per UNDP's Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures (POPP), with their own earmarked budgets, results framework and each with their own management arrangements/project boards. Annual Workplans are approved based on which projects are implemented, using multiple funding sources. As such, project funds are not "fungible" across projects or activities. As can be seen from the figure below (taken from the Regional Hub reporting), under the 2020 budget RBEC's Regional Hub was managing 46 regional projects for a total budget of US\$ 18.05 m. RP activities are linked to the three outcomes and are organized in four so-called "*umbrella projects*"; three of which correspond to the three outcomes defined in the RP document and the fourth dedicated to cross-cutting issues. These *umbrella projects* have their own budgets, work plans, project boards, reporting, etc. In the current cycle, these umbrella projects have been funded with US\$ 4 m from TRAC resources and US\$ 4.4 m from the Turkish contribution. This part of the RP is more flexible (within the approved regional programme parameters).

**Figure 1: RP Structure<sup>15</sup>**



The RP is implemented by the RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub, using various funding sources. It is overseen by UNDP's Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (RBEC) and is managed by the RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub Manager, under

<sup>15</sup> Figure taken from RBEC's Regional Hub online report for 2020.

the supervision of the Deputy Regional Director. An Advisory Board, consisting of UNDP resident representatives (RRs)<sup>16</sup> and RBEC senior management, provides overall guidance for the RP and validates its relevance vis-à-vis country and global priorities. Board meetings constitute an integral part of the overall RBEC management and communications cycle to ensure the RP is tied to CO strategies. The Board meets on an annual basis in person; however, mid-year virtual consultations and regular updates take place when needed. The table below shows the composition of the RP Board for 2021.

**Table 1: Composition of RP's Advisory Programme (2021)**

<b>Chairperson:</b>		Mirjana Spoljaric-Egger, Director, Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS
<b>Members</b>	<i>RBEC</i>	Agi Veres, Deputy Assistant Administrator and Deputy Regional Director, RBEC Gerd Trogemann, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub Manager
<i>Western Balkans and Turkey:</i>		Maria Suokko, Resident Representative, UNDP in Kosovo Sukhrob Khajimatov, Resident Representative a.i., UNDP in Turkey
<i>South Caucasus and Western CIS</i>		Mihaela Stojkoska, Resident Representative, a.i., UNDP in Armenia Alexandra Solovieva, Resident Representative, UNDP in Belarus
<i>Central Asia:</i>		Pratibha Mehta, Resident Representative, UNDP in Tajikistan Matilda Dimovska, Resident Representative, UNDP in Uzbekistan
<i>BPPS:</i> <i>BMS</i> <i>BERA:</i>		Haoliang Xu, Director (or his designated representative) BMS Director - delegated to Priya Gajraj, BMS Deputy Director BERA Director - delegated to Maria Luisa Silva, Director, UNDP Office in Geneva
<b>Board Secretariat</b>		Ekaterina Paniklova, Chief, CO Solutions/RP Coordination Abusabeeb Elsadig, Regional Programme Coordination /RBM/QA Specialist

To operationalize the RP, four Outcome Boards have been established for each of the three outcomes, with a fourth as a cross-cutting one. The Boards are chaired by RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub Manager (3 Outcomes) and Deputy Regional Director (cross-cutting). Outcome Boards consist of at least four RRs and/or Deputy Resident Representatives (DRRs) from the Country Offices. Sub-regional representation is always ensured. The figure below shows the composition of Outcome Boards for 2021. A planning and priority setting exercise for RP Outcomes takes place every year in November-December. Annual Work Plans are presented to Outcome Boards in the beginning of the following year (usually at the end of January).

<sup>16</sup> The RBEC'S ISTANBUL REGIONAL HUB Regional Advisory Board provides strategic advice, monitors progress and provides inputs on the work of the RBEC'S ISTANBUL REGIONAL HUB regarding its core functions of (not limited to the regional programme): 1) advisory support to Country Offices and other clients; 2) regional programme management and implementation; 3) knowledge management and communication; and 4) direct country support.

**Figure 2: Composition of RP Outcome Boards<sup>17</sup>**



RP activities are implemented by RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub's advisory teams, as well as by UNDP country offices and implementing partners. RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub includes eight advisory teams which provide advisory support to UNDP COs and at the same time lead the implementation of regional projects (the teams are described in more detail in the box below). At the receiving end of the programme are the 18 beneficiary countries in the Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (ECIS) region described in the previous section.

#### **Box 4: RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub Teams Implementing the RP**

RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub includes eight teams of advisors that are primarily responsible for RP's implementation and delivery. These teams are listed as follows.

1. Climate & Disaster
2. Nature, Climate & Energy
3. Governance & Peace Building
4. Sustainable Development
5. Health & HIV
6. Gender Equality
7. Knowledge & Innovation
8. Partnerships

The *Sustainable Development, Governance and Peacebuilding, Nature, Climate & Energy, Knowledge & Innovation, Climate and Disaster* and *Partnership*<sup>18</sup> teams lead the implementation of regional projects in the outcome areas outlined above. The *HIV, Health and Development Team* is responsible for health-related activities and ensures that links are made between socio-economic and environmental dimensions and health outcomes. This work consists primarily of support to people living with HIV/AIDS, waste management in the health sector and efficient and transparent procurement of medical material. The *Gender Equality* team works with the other teams to ensure that gender equality is incorporated in all RP activities and implements stand-alone initiatives promoting accountability of national institutions to gender equality in all spheres, advocating for gender-responsive data collection in national statistics, creating opportunities and improve skills for women's economic empowerment, especially in the future world of work, promoting women's decision-making in the public and private sectors ensuring that climate change mitigation and adaptation policies and programmes respond to the

<sup>17</sup> Figure taken from RBEC's Regional Hub online report for 2020.

<sup>18</sup> The Partnerships team fosters partnerships with governments, private sector, or multilateral/ bilateral organizations, ensuring greater scale and impact of RBEC'S ISTANBUL REGIONAL HUB's work.

specific experiences and needs of women and men and addressing and preventing violence and all forms of discrimination against women and girls.

RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub includes additional teams that provide crucial support to RP activities. These include a Communications Team, Coordination and Quality Assurance Team and Operations Team.

The RP document estimates a total budget of US\$ 62.6 m (of which US\$ 4 m TRAC1, US\$ 6,6 m from the Government of Turkey, \$48 million bilateral, multilateral partner institutions, trust funds/vertical funds and other partners). This original plan has grown significantly, and as of November 2020, the RP's total expenditure was more than \$60 million for the period 2018-2020 (50 global and regional projects linked to the RP).

### 3. Findings

This evaluation's findings section opens with a sub-section on the conceptualization and understanding of the RP and proceeds with the four standard evaluation dimensions: i) relevance - the extent to which RP activities have been relevant to regional priorities and needs; ii) effectiveness - whether the RP has been effective in achieving desired and planned results; iii) efficiency - whether results have been delivered efficiently; iv) sustainability - the extent to which benefits are likely to be sustained.

#### 3.1. Conceptualization and Understanding

A discussion of the conceptualization of the RP and the way it is understood by UNDP staff members in RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub and COs is necessary given the lively discussions that the question "What is the RP?" provoked during interviews for this evaluation. This section of the report will address three key issues related to the conceptualization of the RP and the way it is perceived by staff members.

##### Definition of the RP

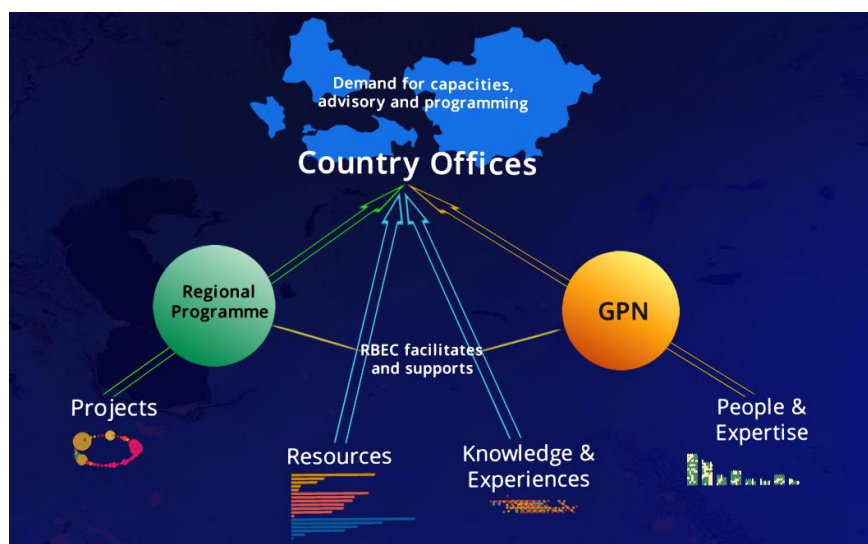
RBEC's RP is conceived as part of a package of programming and advisory services and interventions that benefit the 18 beneficiary countries and territories. The figure below (taken from RP reporting) shows the RP, alongside the Global Policy Network (GPN), as an integrated instrument for the delivery of knowledge, expertise, experiences, resources and projects to COs. In other words, the RP encompasses projects and services for COs that are not delivered through the GPN.

#### **Figure 3: RP and GPN as Delivery Instruments<sup>19</sup>**

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<sup>19</sup> Figure taken from RBEC's Regional Hub online report for 2020.





The model shown in the figure above is intended to be an integrated model of delivery that blends services and supports to COs and as such blurs that boundaries between the RP and other delivery channels. Indeed, one common reaction of interviewees for this evaluation was uncertainty about the boundaries of the RP. This applied to both team members in the hub and CO staff. Different stakeholders perceive the RP in different ways, based on their experiences and standpoints. The following is a description of the various perceptions of the RP identified during the interviews.

- Some UNDP staff perceive the RP as the totality of the work carried out by RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub. Others see the RP as the totality of the regional projects that are managed by RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub on the basis of specific project documents and budgets and which involve more than one country, which leaves out RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub’s advisory services delivered through the Global Policy Network (GPN) and other activities such as the “*development debates*”, “*MAPS assessments*”, etc.
- There is also uncertainty about the role and structure of the “*umbrella projects*” and how they relate to regional projects and the RP or the support delivered to COs through the GPN. Most COs are unable to differentiate between the support they receive through the “*umbrella projects*” from that received through the GPN.
- Some staff members perceive the RP as the totality of activities that are led directly by the RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub, as opposed to activities originating from the substantive bureaus (BPPS and CB) in HQ.
- Certain interviewees were unclear about the relationship of RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub activities related to vertical funds (such as GEF, GCF, Global Fund, etc.) to the RP.
- There is also some confusion about whether the “*global*” projects managed by RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub are part of the RP or not.

An overall observation that can be drawn from this evaluation is there is no uniform understanding of the RP among staff members in the regional hub and country offices. While the absence of clear

RP boundaries is less important in practice – given that for COs what matters is not how support services and projects are packaged but only what gets delivered – it will be useful to communicate to COs and Regional Hub staff the fact that the RP is blended with other types of services and supports for COs and that its borders are not clear-cut. A more distinct separation of delivery mechanisms would have perhaps necessitated greater division among responsibilities and teams in the hub.

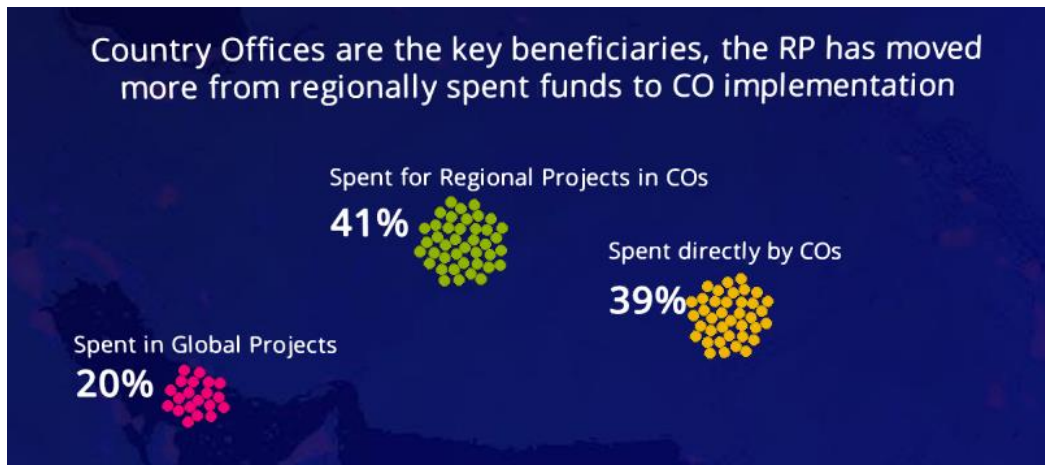
A couple of additional observations can be made in relation to how the RP is perceived among CO staff interviewed for this evaluation.

- ***Country-level Interface of the RP*** - The discussion above on the understanding of the RP from staff members leads to another point that emerged in discussions for this evaluation. As can be seen from the figure above, the RP is envisaged to deliver a range of supports to the COs. In this understanding, COs are at the receiving end of RP inputs, ultimately channeling them to national counterparts. However, some CO staff perceive the RP operating as a separate channel with its own direct interface to national governments and counterparts. These COs emphasized the need for UNDP to interact with national counterparts through one interface, being ultimately represented by the RR (this is discussed further in the efficiency section of this report).
- ***Direct Beneficiaries of RP Funding*** – Another issue that emerged during the evaluation is the perception among COs that the RP is primarily managed out of the RH and that the bulk of resources are spent by the hub, leaving few direct financial benefits for COs. Based on an analysis of the Regional Hub presented in RP’s annual report for 2020, this appears to be a misperception. As can be seen in the figure below, about 39% of RP resources are spent directly by COs for RP components managed directly by the COs. In addition, about 41% of RP resources are spent by the Regional Hub for activities that relate to and are channeled through COs. Only about 20% is spent on global projects that have no footprint on the RBEC COs.

**Figure 4: RP and GPN as Delivery Instruments<sup>20</sup>**

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<sup>20</sup> Figure taken from RBEC’s Regional Hub online report for 2020.



The above observations lead to three practical recommendations primarily related to how the RP is designed and communicated to RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub and CO staff.

- It will be useful for the RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub to raise the level of awareness and understanding of staff members about the regional programme. Also, the fact that the regional programme does not have clear-cut boundaries will be useful to communicate to staff members in order to avoid confusion. RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub could produce a package of information on the regional programme that targets staff members. This topic could be included in some of the regular trainings organized for RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub and CO staff. A regular newsletter (monthly or bi-monthly) could be produced to raise the profile of the regional programme by featuring successful RP projects or activities with the highest impact or innovative solutions.
- In the case of regional projects where the CO is not directly involved with, or kept abreast of, communications by RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub advisers with national counterparts, it is important to involve the respective CO in those communications. A protocol for how RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub advisers or regional project staff engage with national counterparts could be developed to create a mechanism that ensures the engagement of COs.
- It will also be important to dispel misconceptions among COs about the amount of RP financing that is spent by COs as opposed to what is spent for COs by RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub.

## 3.2. Relevance

This section provides an assessment of the relevance of the regional programme. First, given the unprecedented times in which this RP cycle has taken place, the first part of this section examines how the RP has responded to the unfolding COVID-19 crisis. The agility of the RP to respond swiftly and effectively to the region's evolving needs is a crucial indicator of relevance. Further relevance is assessed by examining RP's responsiveness to the region's needs and the extent to which it has been aligned with COs' country programme documents (CPDs). Further, this section examines the extent to which the RP has complied with the regionality principles identified in the RP document. Lastly, this section provides a discussion of RP's positioning going forward, especially in light of the challenges and development issues revealed and opportunities that the pandemic has created.

### 3.2.1. Responsiveness to the COVID-19 Crisis

Given the magnitude and profound impact of the COVID-19 crisis, UNDP's response has been global and largely coordinated with the efforts of other UN agencies under the UN Framework for Socio-Economic Response to Covid-19. Therefore, the first part of this section briefly lays out UNDP's global response to the crisis. The second part examines the way in which the Regional Programme was repurposed to contribute to the response.

#### Context of UNDP's Global Response

Right at the outset of the COVID-19 crisis, UNDP presented its integrated Prepare, Respond, Recover response to COVID with a focus on three immediate priorities: health systems support, multi-sectoral crisis management, and socio-economic impact assessment and response. In this context, UNDP identified three immediate priorities:<sup>21</sup>

- Supporting countries to strengthen their health systems in the face of COVID-19, including procuring urgently needed health and medical supplies, strengthening health infrastructure, managing health waste, and ensuring salary payments to health workers.
- Helping countries advance inclusive and integrated crisis management by supporting governments to maintain core functions, and to plan, coordinate, communicate and finance their responses.
- Helping countries assess and understand the social, economic and political impacts of COVID-19 and to find ways to mitigate them with sustainable, resilient and rights-based solutions crafted with the public and private sectors.

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<sup>21</sup> These priorities underpin UNDP's so-called "*Integrated Approach to Socio-economic Response to COVID-19: UNDP Offer 1.0*".

- Assess and support adoption of range of COVID-19 measures and develop comprehensive policy recommendations for a gender-responsive COVID-19 response and recovery programmes.

As technical leads for the socio-economic response, UNDP and its country offices worldwide, under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinators and in close collaboration with specialized UN agencies, UN Regional Economic Commissions and International Financial Institutions (IFIs), started to assess the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on economies and communities. It supported the conduct of a variety of Socio-economic Impact Assessments (SEIAs) and development of Socio-economic Recovery Plans (SERPs) to identify the needs of the most vulnerable and support national governments to develop targeted interventions. UNDP has also established two COVID-19 rapid response facilities (Rapid Response Facility and Rapid Financing Facility) to help low-and middle-income countries to prepare, respond and recover from the devastating effects of COVID-19. The facility has disbursed funds through a fast-track mechanism.

In the second phase,<sup>22</sup> UNDP provided a more comprehensive programmatic offer that went far beyond the priorities listed above. This offer was designed to help decision-makers make choices and manage complexity during uncertainty in four integrated areas: governance, social protection, green economy, and digital disruption.

UNDP is also actively participating in the dedicated “*COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi Partner Trust Fund*” established by the UN to provide financial and technical assistance from multiple UN agencies to find ways to redress this impact, especially on the most vulnerable population and ensure the socio-economic recovery, while building back better.

### RP’s Response

Early in 2020, RBEC’s Regional Hub initiated measures to repurpose and refocus the RP to respond to the pandemic’s effects that cut across the economy, governance, and environment. Similarly to the steps undertaken by UNDP globally, RBEC’s Regional Hub initiated support for the conduct of socio-economic assessments in the region, some of which were conducted using the Covid-19 Recovery Needs Assessment (CRNA) methodology.<sup>23</sup> Several COs used an enterprise and households survey developed by IRH. IRH supported country teams throughout the entire cycle of the SEIAs and SERPs preparation from designing the methodology to data analysis and recommendations. The box below shows examples of assessments conducted thus far in the region, but does not represent the complete list of assessments supported by RBEC’s Regional Hub.

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<sup>22</sup> This renewed approach to socio-economic assessments is labelled “*Integrated Approach to Socio-economic Response to COVID-19: UNDP Offer 2.0*”.

<sup>23</sup> The COVID-19 Recovery Needs Assessment (CRNA) methodology has been applied in some of these assessments. This is a methodology that has been developed guide UN, EU, WB and partners to assist governments in conducting socio economic impact assessments.

## Box 5: Examples of COVID-19 Impact Assessments in the RBEC Region

Regional Reports	COVID-19 and Central Asia: Socio-economic impacts and key policy considerations for recovery
	COVID-19 and the countries of South Caucasus, Western CIS and Ukraine
Gender Equality	Progress at risk: Gender equality in COVID-19 response in Europe and Central Asia (UNDP & UNICEF) <sup>24</sup>
Armenia	Socio-economic impact assessment of the COVID-19 outbreak in Armenian communities
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in BiH
Kosovo (as per UNSCR 1244)	Rapid Socio-Economic impact assessment of COVID-19 in Kosovo
Kyrgyz Republic	COVID-19 in the Kyrgyz Republic: Socioeconomic and vulnerability impact assessment and policy response
Republic of Moldova	Social and economic impact assessment of COVID-19 in the Republic of Moldova (first assessment) Social and economic impact assessment of COVID-19 in the Republic of Moldova (final assessment)
Republic of North Macedonia	Socio-Economic Assessment of COVID-19 in North Macedonia
Serbia	Socio-economic impact assessment
Tajikistan	Impact of COVID-19 on Lives, Livelihoods and Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMEs) in Tajikistan
Turkey	Survey on impact of COVID-19 on enterprises and needs Survey on Impact of COVID-19 on enterprises
Ukraine	COVID-19 in Ukraine: Impact on households and businesses
Uzbekistan	UN consolidated multilateral COVID-19 socio-economic response & recovery

Furthermore, as part of the COVID-19 response, RBEC's Regional Hub launched in partnership with emerging donor partners and Koc Holding the BOOST initiative, conceived as an accelerator for the generation of innovative solutions to problems emanating from COVID-19. RBEC's Regional Hub has also supported a regional assessment of COVID-19 impacts on Women Living with HIV and has supported COs in the integration of gender dimensions in their SEIAs. It has also issued a regional advocacy paper on gender-responsive recovery measures against the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. The role of National Disaster Management Authorities in COVID-19 response was evaluated, with UNDP providing technical assistance and support to

<sup>24</sup> In addition to the UNDP-UNICEF report, the IRH gender team developed a rapid gender assessment of SEIA reports in the ECA region to examine the extent to which SEIAs address gender dimensions in their analyses and policy proposals. The assessment was designed for internal use.

UNCTs and COs in Sendai monitoring and in strengthening disaster loss database capacities, as well as the development of recovery strategies. RBEC's Regional Hub also organized a series of “*Future of Governance*” dialogues to catalyze forward-thinking on governance & peacebuilding solutions, highlighting the implications of COVID-19 and resulting digitalization trends. The newly launched Polish Challenge Fund project received an additional contribution of \$250,000 for a new call for proposals addressing COVID-19 responses in pilot countries.

Between October and December 2020, the Regional Hub conducted an assessment of regional projects with a view to adjusting them to the COVID-19 challenges and needs. The assessment included monitoring frameworks, mapping projects' outputs against the COVID-19 marker, identifying the projects' level of contribution to COVID-19 areas of work, and identifying and tracking COVID-19 related knowledge products, as well as conducting gender assessment of COVID 19 programming response. While some adjustment has taken place, the challenge has been in repurposing these projects' budgets due to the rigid nature of their funding which is related to the fact that these are donor-funded projects with earmarked financial resources. Hence, the importance of “umbrella projects” in times of crises and dynamic changes, given their flexibility to respond due to their more flexible funding. What could be done with regards to the regional projects though, at the end of this cycle, is to conduct an assessment of their ability to respond more effectively to the changing situation in light of the COVID-19 crisis. The assessment could identify ways in which these projects could be adjusted and repurposed to respond more effectively to the new context, while addressing right-based issues and gender inequalities. Such an assessment will provide a comprehensive picture of what the future looks like for these projects given the current situation and identified changes could be introduced in the upcoming programme cycle.

### **3.2.2. Responsiveness to Countries' Needs and Alignment with CPDs**

A general conclusion of this evaluation is that the RP is highly relevant to the region in its need for regional cooperation as an instrument for the resolution of a range of challenges that the respective countries face. First, it is obvious from an analysis of the list of RP projects (see Annex IV of this report for the list of RP projects) that there are no projects that seem out of place or that do not pass the priority test for the needs of the region. All projects target key priority areas. Several projects, such as the *Aid for Trade* or *SEESAC*<sup>25</sup> – have had multiple phases and have encompassed more than a decade; a testament of the importance of their interventions. The relevance of the RP was strongly confirmed by most interviewees for this evaluation and is also well documented in many assessments, studies and evaluations conducted in the framework of the RP. An extra degree of validation for RP's relevance is provided by donors who have carefully scrutinized the projects for which they have provided funds. Also, the impressive resource mobilization results of the RBEC's Regional Hub in the framework of the regional programme are an indication of RP's relevance.

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<sup>25</sup> South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons project.



Certainly, given the earmarked nature of most regional projects – and the fact that often these project’s priorities are also shaped by the political priorities of the respective donors – it is difficult to corral these projects under a fully cohesive and uniform programmatic framework. The framework has to be broad and high-level enough to accommodate these interventions. One good feature of the current RP is that 7% of its budget is allocated under the so-called “*umbrella projects*” which are flexible vehicles for the delivery of interventions and support from the RBEC’s Regional Hub to COs on the basis of urgent priorities. Funds for “umbrella projects” are not earmarked, unlike funding for regional projects which are earmarked on the basis of project documents and budgets. Activities under these “umbrella projects” can be used as the glue that fills the gaps and holds the whole framework together. The flexibility provided by the “umbrella projects” is a positive feature of the current RP, enabled by the flexible nature of the Turkish contribution and Regional Hub’s TRAC resources. This flexibility should be maintained going forward, and even increased where possible based on fundraising efforts with donors willing to consider the provision of unearmarked funding.

Another indicator of RP’s relevance is the demand by beneficiary countries and COs for its services. The review of programme documents and interviews for this evaluation indicate that there has been strong demand for RP components. For example, some RP services (such as the catalytic facilities) have been made available on a competitive basis and the large number of proposals submitted by COs is a good indication of the demand for this type of support. Also, the MAPS missions have been on high demand and have been largely appreciated by the COs. The demand for these components is not only indicative of the value that UNDP COs place on them, but also a reflection of appreciation by the respective countries (government and non-governmental partners), as ultimately CO demands are a reflection of the priorities and needs of their national counterparts.

Given its regional nature, the RP is not purposefully aligned with the CPDs of all COs in the RBEC region. Given the diversity of development needs and priorities of these countries, an attempt to fully align the RP with all relevant CPDs would be futile and actually not even desirable. What the RP captures well are the commonalities that these countries share across borders and that represent regional priorities. The SDG process has to some extent facilitated this alignment by enabling countries to identify and articulate their priorities in a concrete and structured manner (through national SDG frameworks). RBEC’s Regional Hub’s support for the development of national SDG platforms – through MAPS missions and other SDG-related activities – has provided a major contribution to the alignment of development assistance, including UNDP’s, to national priorities.

Some Regional Hub staff noted that one function that the teams are not carrying out sufficiently, but which is extremely important, is delivering policy advice support directly to partner governments and national entities. They noted that this is something that was done to some extent before, but recently the focus of hub teams has been almost entirely on running regional projects and supporting COs. Responsibilities of RBEC’s Regional Hub staff are already stretched in managing or overseeing regional projects and providing support to CO’s based on their demands.



Most RBEC's Regional Hub teams reported to being short in human capacities and unable to meet demand due to limited funding. Some RBEC's Regional Hub staff suggested that policy support for national counterparts could be reinvigorated in the new programme (outside the strict frameworks of regional projects or the support delivered to COs) by making more funding available for this line of work. It should also be noted that the idea of providing policy advice support directly to partner governments and national entities contradicts the CO's need to be the single interface for UNDP interactions with national counterparts. So, any internal discussion on this matter should be framed in the context of the role of COs in the delivery of UNDP supports for national partners.

RP's focus on drivers of vulnerabilities is another aspect that makes it quite relevant to beneficiary countries and fully aligned with the "*leave no one behind*" principle pursued by the UN globally. Significant focus has been on *gender equality*, especially in the areas of employment and income generation opportunities for women, addressing unpaid care work, eliminating sexual and gender-based violence, harnessing participation of women in decision-making, and promoting gender-responsive crisis response and recovery solutions. The programme's strong *human rights* focus can be seen in a range of activities – support for the implementation of countries' international obligations related to human rights, increasing importance of social inclusion, even in areas such as delivery of public services or adaptation to climate change, disaster risk reduction, supporting women, youth and vulnerable groups (i.e. persons with disabilities, Roma, the poor and disenfranchised, minorities, migrants, etc.,) to access their rights. The programme has also had a *conflict-sensitive* and *risk-informed* approach, with focus on the prevention of conflicts and disaster risk reduction and prevention of their effects. This can be seen in areas such as control of small arms and light weapons, support for the management of youth radicalization and extremism, conflict prevention activities at the community level, especially in border areas, climate-disaster early warning system, etc. Overall, the regional programme seems quite well-positioned in these dimensions.

Some RBEC's Regional Hub advisers brought up the issue of the relevance of global projects. Some global projects are quite relevant because they either directly involve certain countries in the region or they bring to the region crucial experiences and knowledge from other parts of the world. However, interviewees identified certain global projects that are assigned to RBEC's Regional Hub as a result of historical legacies or because of individual advisers who have the capacity to oversee them. These types of projects are not relevant to the region.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, RBEC's Regional Hub advisers do not understand sufficiently well the context in which these projects are implemented, making their oversight role less effective. One suggestion is to review all global projects managed by RBEC's Regional Hub, screen them for relevance to the region and find

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<sup>26</sup> Examples of this are "*Management of the Nubian Sandstone Aquifer System*", "*Nile Basin - Management of Surface and Groundwaters*" and "*Reducing Maritime Trafficking of Wildlife Between Africa and Asia*" which concern countries in Northeast Africa and Asia.

appropriate solutions in discussion with Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS) and Crisis Bureau (CB) for those that do not pass the regional relevance test.

### **3.2.3. Compliance with Regionality Principles**

RP's defining feature is its regional nature, which means that by definition programme activities involve more than one country, thus reinforcing regional cooperation. The strictly "regional" nature of the activities falling under the scope of the regional programme adds another degree of relevance to the work of RBEC's Regional Hub. This is a niche which very few organizations are able to fill. Regional cooperation is important for many reasons, but two reasons are particularly important for the ECIS region. First, building bridges of communication and cooperation is important in a region where cross-border tensions and conflicts are rife (note the number of breakaways territories in this particular region). Second, given the common communist past and similar challenges that most of these countries share, they have a lot to share with and learn from each other. Thus, the regionality principles which underpin the regional programme have an intrinsic value which adds significantly to the relevance of RBEC's Regional Hub's work. It should also be added that the global nature of some of RBEC's Regional Hub's activities and its ability to facilitate the exchange of experience and lessons across regions further adds to its relevance.

To ensure the "regional" nature, the RP is grounded in five mutually reinforcing 'regionality' principles which define the particular value-added of regional or sub-regional approaches. These principles include:

1. Promotion of regional public goods based on strengthened regional cooperation and integration;
2. Management of cross-border externalities and spill overs that are best addressed collaboratively on an inter-country basis;
3. Advancement of awareness, dialogue and action on sensitive and/or emerging development issues that benefit strongly from multi-country experiences and perspectives;
4. Promotion of experimentation and innovation that overcomes institutional, financial and/or informational barriers that may be too high for an individual country to surmount;
5. Generation and sharing of knowledge, experience and expertise, so that countries can connect to, and benefit from, relevant experiences from the region and beyond.

The rest of this section will consist of two parts. The first part will assess the extent to which the RP has complied with the regionality principles listed above. The second part will provide a discussion of the current regionality principles and provide suggestions for strengthening them going forward.

#### **RP's Compliance with Regionality Principles**

The following is a quick assessment of the extent to which the current RP has met the regionality principles.

- ***Promotion of regional public goods*** – All RP projects are of a regional or global nature (see project list in Annex III to this report). As such, they promote cooperation in the context of the outcome areas defined in the RP document and around specific issues of regional importance. Cooperation at the regional level – and its derivatives such peace, prosperity, stability, etc. – are fundamental public goods accessible to everyone. Therefore, all regional projects contribute to the promotion of regional public goods as long as they facilitate cooperation. Another type of regional public good are the regional institutions that some of the RP projects have helped establish. One good example of such institutions is the Regional Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) coordination mechanism in Central Asia, which is the only regional DRR coordination mechanism in ECIS serving as a platform for national emergency agencies, the international community and NGOs to share their DRR knowledge and best practices and coordinate regional preparedness and responses. This coordination mechanism is a perfect example of a high-value public good in the regional context. The civil service hub in Kazakhstan is another example of a high-value regional public good supported by UNDP through the RP. Another example is the establishment of the Women’s Economic Empowerment co-action framework in the Western Balkans. This is a comprehensive cooperation framework designed by UNDP and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) that brings together various regional partners, including governments, with the aim of advancing women’s economic empowerment in the Western Balkans.
- ***Cross-border externalities and spill overs*** – The region is characterized by multiple former conflicts, frozen conflicts, several breakaway territories, closed borders, diplomatic tensions and cross-border violence. In this context, the actions of one country have significant consequences for others. The RP has played an important role in addressing cross-border violence and conflict. In particular, RBEC’s Regional Hub has supported peacebuilding through conflict management mechanisms. It supported a Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment in Ukraine, leading to the development of a strategy coupled with strengthening of the women mediators. With funding from the Catalytic Facility, RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub has developed micro-narratives on conflict, peace and tolerance in the Georgian-Abkhaz context and Countering Violent Extremism in Kosovo, a Youth Facility for Social Cohesion in Kumanovo (North Macedonia), and ‘Managing Political Risks to Development’ project in Tajikistan. RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub has also supported research, such as the community risk survey conducted in Abkhazia, needs analysis in Kosovo on counter-radicalization and dialogue to support youth in relation to efforts for preventing violent extremism. In the Western Balkans, the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC) project has strengthened security through regional coordination meetings on the implementation of the WB Small Arms and Light Weapons Control Roadmap. The regional project for flood risk management in the Drin River Basin in Western Balkans

(Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia) has also produced positive spill-over effects for the countries involved. Another example of positive spill-overs are the peer-to-peer exchanges among national human rights institutions in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kosovo, Serbia, and Ukraine which were supported to participate in the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and strengthen their roles in conflict prevention.

- ***Awareness, dialogue and action on sensitive and/or emerging development issues*** – The RP has facilitated dialogue and action across borders in multiple ways. For example, RP's facilitation of regional cooperation in war crimes cases in the Western Balkans led to a continuous dialogue between prosecution offices of Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia for overcoming problems in cross-border cooperation and more efficient war crimes case processing. In 2020, RBEC's Regional Hub organized a judges' forum in collaboration with the Supreme Court of Tajikistan and developed a Judges' Forum online platform that has helped justice institutions to share relevant information and experiences among judges. The Forum has provided a platform for judges to discuss the latest scientific, medical and epidemiological evidence, international and regional guidance, and social and structural factors that increase the vulnerability of people living with HIV, women and girls in particular. RBEC's Regional Hub has also developed the first ECIS compendium of HIV related litigation cases to assist judges, lawyers, law enforcement and others across the region. Raising awareness among judges and knowledge and experience sharing among countries continues to be an important driver of cooperation. Another example is the sub-regional survey and micro-narratives on the socio-economic position of the Roma community in the Western Balkans, which has provided the necessary evidence base to public discourse and policy making on the pressing challenges related to the Roma population. In 2020, RBEC's Regional Hub launched the Future of Governance Dialogues series, which aimed to catalyze new, forward-looking thinking on governance and peacebuilding in the region, building on RBEC's NextGenGov Innovation Days in 2018, and to advance digital approaches in promoting social contracts. The Development Debates organized with the support of the Turkish Government have become flagship events that engage influential personalities to discuss key development matters related to the region. In 2018-2019, considering the high demand by RBEC countries and territories to understand better global trends of disaster financing market development and opportunities for the region, the RBEC RH organized regional and sub-regional (Balkan sub-region) dialogues in association with international and public-sector players to set a multi-stakeholder platform for disaster financing knowledge sharing in ECIS and coordinated actions for disaster financing development.
- ***Experimentation and innovation*** – The RP has had a major focus on piloting and demonstrating innovative solutions to development problems, with the expectation that if successful they will be replicated and scaled up by national partners. The catalytic facilities in particular have been designed to stimulate innovative solutions and leverage additional

resources. To achieve this, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has had to identify actions which although small have had the potential for scale, not only within one country, but also regionally or even globally. The general idea behind their approach is that UNDP is not in the business of solving specific problems, but helping national stakeholders identify systemic and sustainable solutions to these problems. The catalytic facilities have led to the establishment of innovation labs in countries like Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and North Macedonia. Conceived as vehicles to incubate and pilot innovative approaches to public service delivery, budgeting, and data-driven decision-making, these labs help governments to experiment with new solutions to persistent development problems. Although small in volume, they have provided an enabling mechanism to support the COs to accelerate the achievement of development priorities at country level closely linked to global and regional strategic priorities. Support for innovation has become a defining feature of the regional programme, supporting countries with new perspectives, partnerships and sources of financing. This has become particularly important within the context of SDG implementation, as new ways of achieving and operationalizing integrated approaches have to be tested, and new ways of attracting development financing found. For example, MAPS and “*SDG Acceleration Labs*”,<sup>27</sup> have helped countries improve their capabilities for analysis and implementation of SDGs. Overall, key results of the RP relate to its use as an incubator for scaling up small, but promising and innovative initiatives, into new donor-financed projects or regional activities.

- ***Generation and sharing of knowledge, experience and expertise*** – By virtue of its regional (cross-border) nature, the RP has been a vehicle for the generation and sharing of knowledge, experience and expertise across borders. Almost all RP projects have knowledge sharing components. Across all areas and projects, South-South cooperation at the regional level has been strengthened by facilitating peer-to-peer or institutional collaboration. When it comes to practices replicated across countries, a good example is the Climate Box education curricula which has now been expanded to nine countries, reaching over 60,000 school children. Another example is the regional platform established with IRH's support to share knowledge and raise awareness on breaking gender stereotypes in the STEM<sup>28</sup> fields.
- ***Inter-regionality*** – Several RP projects have involved more than one sub-region within the broader ECIS region, thus contributing cooperation and coordination between these sub-regions. Good examples of such projects are “*Transformative Governance and Finance Facility*”, “*Enhancing Access to Climate Finance in the ECIS Region*”, “*Sustainable Development Pathways*”, etc. Another example is the “*New World: Inclusive Development*” initiative which has included not only countries from the ECIS region, but also countries from Asia and Africa, contributing to the exchange of knowledge and expertise across continents.
- ***Partnership-building and network development*** – Another key feature of the RP programme is the partnerships it has forged. Most RP projects are the product of crucial partnerships with

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<sup>27</sup> Formerly called *SDG Incubation Centers*.

<sup>28</sup> Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

hosting countries and donor organizations. A whole section of this report (3.4.2) is dedicated to the analysis of partnerships fostered under the RP.

### Assessment of Regionality Principles and Suggestions Going Forward

The following is a brief discussion of the regionality principles based on conversations held for this evaluation and the review of available RP documentation.

- ***Promotion of regional public goods based on strengthened regional cooperation and integration*** – This first principle is crucial in that it sets the requirement for regional cooperation and integration; key outcomes that should be pursued by any project of a regional nature. Although public goods here include partnerships with the private sector, the term “public good” could be misleading to some as it could lead to an exclusionary understanding of the principle that leaves out the private sector. Therefore, the focus of this principle could be placed more simply on “*regional cooperation and integration*”.
- ***Management of cross-border externalities and spill overs that are best addressed collaboratively on an inter-country basis*** – Cross-border externalities and spillovers are a crucial aspect of regional cooperation and as such should be firmly used as criteria for the development and approval of regional projects. These types of projects – especially those that alleviate tensions or conflicts among countries (e.g. over water resources or pollution) should receive a high priority under the RP.
- ***Advancement of awareness, dialogue and action on sensitive and/or emerging development issues that benefit strongly from multi-country experiences and perspectives*** – Also, the dialogue and actions on sensitive and emerging development issues are key to regional cooperation and should be maintained as a key factor in the selection and prioritization of regional projects. The concept of dialogue could be further unpacked to categorize different types of dialogue in order to prioritize those types that promote solutions to critical situations such as conflicts, emergencies, etc.
- ***Promotion of experimentation and innovation that overcomes institutional, financial and/or informational barriers that may be too high for an individual country to surmount*** – Experimentation and innovation is a general principle, prioritized in UNDP’s current Strategic Plan, that applies to all projects and situations and not only to the regional context. This principle is not directly related to the regional nature of the RP and should be pursued as a general and cross-cutting priority like the “*gender equality*” or “*leave no one behind*” principles.<sup>29</sup>
- ***Generation and sharing of knowledge, experience and expertise, so that countries can connect to, and benefit from, relevant experiences from the region and beyond*** – This is another crucial principle that could be expanded beyond generation and sharing of knowledge, experience and expertise to include adoption and scaling up.

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<sup>29</sup> In addition to being cross-cutting priorities, gender equality and innovation are also mutually intersecting.

- ***Inter-regionality*** – This another key principle that should be maintained and even further strengthened in the upcoming programme. This are will benefit from stronger interconnections and collaboration of RBEC’s Regional Hub with the other UNDP regional hubs with the aim for strengthening the exchange of expertise and knowledge, especially in the context of the RP.
- ***Partnership-building and network development*** – This is a dimension that has been a crucial feature of the current RP and should be maintained in the coming cycle. One area that will benefit from greater focus here – as will be noted further in this report – is partnerships with academia and the private sector.

But beyond stating these broad principles, the RBEC’s Regional Hub could conduct a “*regionality test*” by which regional projects are measured up against the regionality criteria. This process could involve the translation of principles into more practical scores/measures that allows for the rating of projects in terms of their degree of “*regionality*”. This will also allow for a better assessment and prioritization of projects. Such a system could also be used as part of the results framework to indicate the extent to which a project meets the regionality criteria. Such a system would further strengthen the relevance of the programme.

### **3.2.4. RP’s Positioning Going Forward**

There are two arguments that can be made with regards to the RP going forward – the “what” and the “how”. The “what” concerns the areas of work where the RP should be concentrated based on UNDP’s regional comparative advantages. And the “How” refers to the way in which the RP will be best suited to the needs and priorities of the region.

In terms of the “what”, there are a number of factors that drive UNDP’s comparative advantage and funding opportunities in the region. First, given its transformative impact, the COVID-19 crisis has and will continue to shape regional priorities by compounding existing challenges in the region, but also by exacerbating problems in certain areas where the effects of the crisis are going to be more profound. Second, for a part of the region the EU integration process will continue to be a driving force for reforms and development efforts. Thirdly, a number of emerging donors offer opportunities for more development work in the region – and as will be seen further in this report, RBEC’s Regional Hub has been more than successful in engaging with these new partners in the region. When superimposed to the existing (traditional) challenges with which UNDP and its partners have been grappling for years in the region, the combination of these factors will determine the region’s key priorities, some of which have already been identified in RBEC’s Regional Hub’s recent analyses and strategic documents.

The following are some ideas for priority areas and interventions for the upcoming RP. These priorities were identified by interviewees for this evaluation or emerged from the review of available documentation. These ideas combine traditional regional priorities with priorities emerging from or reinforced by the COVID-19 recovery effort.

- Gender and shock responsive social protection systems (focused on vulnerable groups)<sup>30</sup>
- Economic restoration through creation of decent jobs, tackling informality<sup>31</sup> and a resilient SME sector
- Green growth and recovery (green economy)
- Crisis Management (including Disaster Risk Management)
- Waste management
- Gender-based violence, women's participation in decision making and women's economic empowerment (including addressing unpaid care, women's participation in the green sector and STEM fields)
- Digitalization of economy and governance (e-governance, e-health, e-services, etc.)
- Digitalization of economy and governance (e-governance, e-health, e-services, etc.)
- Data-driven policy analysis and decision-making
- SDG-aligned fiscal and financing mechanisms

These priorities are also confirmed by the main areas of COVID-19 response projects funded by the RRF facility in the RBEC region (see figure below).

**Figure 5: RRF Projects in the RBEC Region**



In terms of the “how”, the “regional” nature of the RP will continue to be its defining feature. However, there are two additional factors that have the potential to make the RP more relevant and attractive to its partners, especially beneficiary countries. These two factors are “*multi-disciplinary approaches*” to development problems and “*integrated interventions/activities*”. With pandemic

<sup>30</sup> The focus should be on systemic solutions for improving the coverage, adequacy and resilience of social protection. Focus on vulnerable groups should be embedded across all thematic areas as part of UNDP’s pledge to leave no one behind.

<sup>31</sup> Formalization of employment will guarantee labour rights, decent and predictable income, and social protection.



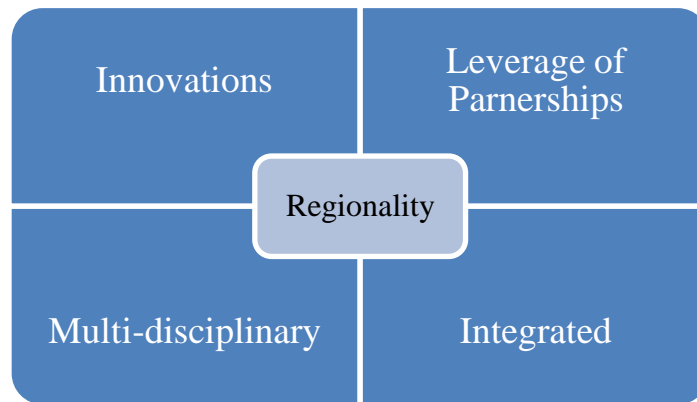
setting the region back across a number of economic and human development dimensions, there will be a need for a recovery process across multiple dimensions – health, employment, social security and inclusion, gender inequalities, green development, disaster risk management, etc. Such increased awareness of and need for integrated approaches makes the role of UNDP as an integrator of themes, methodologies and interventions particularly attractive. For example, a recent study undertaken by RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub with the WHO on “Health and Climate Change” is a good example of the inter-disciplinary and integrated approach that the two organizations have offered to examine health and climate issues in an integrated fashion. Both issues had been until recently addressed separately, despite obvious linkages which have been further thrust into the limelight of public opinion by the COVID-19 crisis. Another intersection pursued by RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub more recently is that of climate and security.

Health and climate change will dominate the international (and regional) agenda for decades to come and RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub is well-positioned to offer value in the intersection of these two large areas. To make the offer even more attractive, RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub could superimpose to that intersection another layer – that of crisis management. The world will be dealing with a number of crisis for years to come – the health crisis, the climate crisis, the debt crisis, disaster risks, etc. Strengthening crisis management capabilities is another strength of UNDP – and in particular RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub – thanks to many years of engagement in disaster risk management in many countries of the region. Those capabilities should be preserved or resurrected and planned accordingly in the new RP.

The fact that, unlike “specialized” UN agencies, UNDP has traditionally worked in key intersections of development activities adds a significant advantage to its credibility as an experienced organization when it comes to multidisciplinary approaches. And within UNDP, RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub is well-positioned in this regard due to its experience with integrated interventions, especially those at the regional level. However, when it comes to the integration of activities, as will be seen in the sustainability chapter of this report, many regional projects remain small and isolated and this will be an area where RP’s offer can significantly improve through greater effort at integration across projects and teams.

There are two additional features of the RP that add to its relevance and should be firmly maintained going forward. One is the pursuit of innovative solutions to development challenges of a regional nature. As will be discussed further in this report, the methodological basis for innovations should be further strengthened. Secondly, the RP should further pursue partnerships with IFIs that leverage significant funding for the region’s key development priorities. This is an area where – as will be seen further in this report – RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub has been extremely successful in the current programme cycle. These features are summarized in the chart below. Driven by long-standing regional priorities and informed by changes in the regional context due to COVID-19, integration processes, etc., these features will make for a very attractive regional programme delivered by an organization with a lot of experience and good standing in the region.

**Figure 6: Key Features of the RP**



### 3.3. Effectiveness

This section presents the assessment of RP's effectiveness. First, it presents an analysis of the achievement of RP results by the end 2020 against the targets identified in the results framework. Second, it will provide a broad overview of RP's development contributions.

#### 3.3.1. Achievement of Expected RP Results

The RP document included a results framework that linked the three overarching outcomes (corresponding to the SP 2018-2021 outcomes) to 19 outputs expected to be delivered by the RP (see Table 2 below for the list of RP outputs). A total of 21 indicators, complete with baselines and targets for the whole cycle, were identified to measure the achievement of outputs.

Based on data collected by the RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub, this evaluation provided an assessment of the achievement of results for the period 2018-2020. The analysis of the results framework revealed the following situation with regards to the achievement of targets for the 21 indicators.

- *Already achieved or exceeded*: 13
- *On track to being achieved*: 6
- *Unlikely to be achieved (by end of 2021)*: 2

Table 3 below shows the full analysis of the achievement of RP targets by 2020. A total of 18 targets have been already achieved or are on track to be achieved, whereas 3 seem to be unlikely to be achieved by the end of the RP cycle. Table 2 below shows the achievement of 19 outputs by outcome area.

**Table 2: Achievement of Outputs by Outcome Area**

Outcome 1	Outcome 2	Outcome 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 4 already exceeded their targets</li><li>• 1 already achieved their targets</li><li>• 4 on track to be achieved</li><li>• 1 unlikely to be achieved</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 4 already exceeded their targets</li><li>• 2 on track to be achieved</li><li>• 1 unlikely to be achieved</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 3 already exceeded their targets</li><li>• 1 already achieved their targets</li></ul>

The following are the main achievements against the targets under outcome 1:

- US\$ 11 m mobilized at the regional level to promote low-carbon and climate-resilient development and implementation of Paris Climate Agreement;
- 14 regional/cross-regional capacity development events advancing low-carbon and climate-resilient development and green growth have been completed;

- 11 regional/sub-regional initiatives, diagnostic tools and guidelines have been developed to promote integrated approaches to social protection, care services and decent jobs for the vulnerable people;
- 14 regional collaboration forums on rule of law organized;
- 6 regional/cross-regional initiatives and partnerships aimed at providing high-quality, gender-responsive and data-driven solutions for conservation, sustainable use, and equitable access to and benefit-sharing of natural resources, biodiversity, and ecosystems, RP exceeded their targets;
- 8 sub-regional initiatives in place to advance legal, policy and institutional reforms to remove structural barriers to women's empowerment;
- US\$ 800,000 invested in energy access, renewable energy and zero-carbon development;
- 4 regional policy/capacity development initiatives and partnerships for reducing disaster and climate change risks (this is expected to be 8 by the end of 2021);
- 10 new forms of evidence and methods explored and leveraged to address public service challenges.

The following are the main achievements against the targets under outcome 2:

- 33 regional initiatives, tools and guidelines developed and applied to support and monitor progress towards the SDGs;
- 9 regional/sub-regional initiatives to facilitate access to sustainable jobs and livelihoods;
- 16 anti-corruption measures developed at regional level to improve public services at (sub)national level;
- 16 new partnerships with emerging donors and other stakeholders on SDGs;
- 10 regional mechanisms established to generate solutions for improving public services at (sub)national level;
- 5 public and private entities benefiting from gender equality tools and guidance;
- 3 countries benefiting from diagnostic assessments for sustainable commodities and green and inclusive value chains.

The following are the main achievements against the targets under outcome 3:

- 15 partnerships, platforms and gender-responsive initiatives developed to mitigate risks, particularly in urban centers;
- 7 regional capacity development initiatives facilitate the application of comprehensive disaster damage and loss accounting systems/post-disaster needs assessment (PDNA) framework for resilient recovery, building partnerships with UNDRR on the promotion of DRR agenda and Sendai monitoring, building resilience of critical infrastructure (airports), strengthening DRR capacity, application of CRNA methodology;
- 10 initiatives established to prevent conflict;
- 18 regional cooperation forums support justice institutions and community security.

**Table 3: Status of Achievement of RP Results (2018-2020)**

Output	Output Indicator	Baseline	Target by end 2021	Achievements	Assessment / Analysis
				2018-2020	
1.1. Low-emissions and climate resilience objectives are integrated into development policies and plans through regional initiatives promoting economic diversification and green growth.	1.1.1. Amount of climate finance resources brokered by UNDP at regional level for enhanced sectoral policies and climate information to promote low-carbon and climate-resilient development and implementation of Paris Climate Agreement	0	\$12.2 million	\$ 10.949.398	On track to being achieved
1.1. Low-emissions and climate resilience objectives are integrated into development policies and plans through regional initiatives promoting economic diversification and green growth.	1.1.2. Number of regional/cross-regional capacity development initiatives, diagnostic assessments and programming tools advancing low-carbon and climate-resilient development and green growth, including in health sector	0	11	14	Already exceeded
1.2. Regional capacity development initiatives and dialogues facilitated to improve social protection systems	1.2.1. Number of regional/subregional initiatives, diagnostic tools and guidelines which promote integrated approaches to social protection, care services and decent jobs for the vulnerable people	2	14	11	On track to being achieved
1.3. Regional/subregional collaboration and peer-to-peer exchanges to enable enhanced awareness and expanded access to justice, strengthened security and rights protection	1.3.1. Number of regional collaboration forums on rule of law introduced and applied supporting fulfilment of national and international human rights obligations or strengthening security and access to justice for women and marginalized people	2	6	14	Already exceeded
1.4. New forms of evidence and methods explored and leveraged through digital technologies, new sources of data and other innovative methods to address public service challenges common to the region	1.4.1. Number of new forms of evidence and methods explored and leveraged to address public service challenges	0	20	10	Unlikely to be achieved

Output	Output Indicator	Baseline	Target by end 2021	Achievements	Assessment / Analysis
				2018-2020	
1.5. Data and risk-informed development policies, plans, systems and financing incorporate integrated solutions to reducing disaster risks, enabling climate change adaptation and mitigation, and preventing conflict	1.5.1. Number of regional policy/capacity development initiatives and partnerships addressing integrated solutions to social cohesion and reducing disaster and climate change risks.	3	8	4	On track to being achieved
1.6. Solutions and regulatory frameworks to address conservation, sustainable use and equitable benefit-sharing of natural resources, developed in line with international conventions and national legislation through regional and cross-regional initiatives	1.6.1. Number of regional/cross-regional initiatives and partnerships aimed at providing high-quality, gender-responsive and data-driven solutions for conservation, sustainable use, and equitable access to and benefit-sharing of natural resources, biodiversity, and ecosystems	0	5	20	Already exceeded
1.7. Solutions developed, financed and applied at scale for transformation to clean energy and zero-carbon development, for poverty eradication and structural transformation	1.7.1. Amount of resources brokered by UNDP for investment in energy access, renewable energy and zero-carbon development	\$0	\$1 million	\$800 000	On track to being achieved
1.8. Regional/subregional initiatives developed to advocate for necessary legal, policy and institutional reforms to reduce structural discrimination and inequities	1.8.1. Number of subregional initiatives in place to advance legal, policy and institutional reforms to remove structural barriers to women's empowerment: (a) Discrimination in labour markets (public and private sectors) (b) Access to and control over assets and services (c) Reduction or redistribution of unpaid care work (d) Sexual and gender-based violence	0	7	8	Already exceeded
1.9. Regional standards/practices improve institutional responsiveness, transparency and accountability, inclusive electoral and parliamentary processes, and expand civic space, enabling implementation of reforms	1.9.1. Extent of regional/subregional peer-to-peer knowledge-sharing among parliamentarians and public officials to improve equal participation, accountability, and transparency  Not adequately (1), very	2	4	largely (4)	Already achieved

Output	Output Indicator	Baseline	Target by end 2021	Achievements	Assessment / Analysis
				2018-2020	
and use of new technologies and media, and creating spaces for collaboration, particularly for youth.	partially (2), partially (3), largely (4)				
2.1. Whole of government approaches strengthened across the region to integrate the 2030 Agenda, the Paris and Sendai agreements, and international/regional human rights and other agreements in development plans and budgets, and to analyse regional progress towards the SDGs, using innovative and data-driven solutions	2.1.1. Number of regional initiatives, tools and guidelines developed and applied that promote integrated approaches, and enhances data collection/analysis mechanisms providing disaggregated data to support and monitor progress towards the SDGs	2	17	33	Already exceeded
2.2. Regional innovative solutions for integrated and gender-responsive social protection and care services to promote access to basic services, sustainable jobs and livelihoods for vulnerable groups	2.2.1. Number of regional/subregional initiatives, utilizing innovative solutions, knowledge and advocacy products, promoting inclusive delivery of social protection, care services and access to sustainable jobs and livelihoods	0	6	9	Already exceeded
2.3. Enabling environment strengthened through diverse partnerships to expand opportunities for public and private sector, including alternative financing, for achievement of the SDGs	2.3.1. Number of new partnerships with emerging donors and other stakeholders (including through South-South and triangular cooperation), regional and financial mechanisms created and sustained in support of the SDGs	0	22	16	On track to being achieved
2.4. Regional awareness, advocacy and partnerships on corruption prevention strengthened contributing to enhanced integrity of national and subnational	2.4.1. Number of anti-corruption measures developed at regional level to mitigate and remedy sector-specific corruption risks	0	7	16	Already exceeded
2.5. Scalable solutions for sustainable commodities and green and inclusive value chains captured and disseminated	2.5.1. Number of countries benefiting from diagnostic assessments for sustainable commodities and green and inclusive value chains	0	6 in RPD, but SD team confirmed 2 in total	3	Unlikely to be achieved

Output	Output Indicator	Baseline	Target by end 2021	Achievements	Assessment / Analysis
				2018-2020	
2.6. Regional/subregional standards and practices enable evidence-based sustainable urbanization and local development, through smart cities and delivery of innovative, responsive public services, including for marginalized and key populations	2.6.1. Regional mechanisms established to generate solutions for improving the planning, budgeting, management and monitoring of public services at (sub)national level	0	3	10	Already exceeded
2.7. Gender equality tools and guidance aiming to advance women's empowerment developed and tested and disseminated in public and private entities	2.7.1. Number of public and private entities benefiting from gender equality tools and guidance	0	6	5	On track to being achieved
3.1. Evidence-based assessment and innovative planning tools and capacities developed regionally for use by countries to enable implementation of gender-sensitive, risk-informed prevention and preparedness to limit the impact of natural hazards, pandemics and conflict.	3.1.1. Number of partnerships, platforms and gender-responsive initiatives supported regionally for countries to enable mechanisms for mitigating risks, particularly to urban centers	1	6	15	Already exceeded
3.1. Evidence-based assessment and innovative planning tools and capacities developed regionally for use by countries to enable implementation of gender-sensitive, risk-informed prevention and preparedness to limit the impact of natural hazards, pandemics and conflict.	3.1.2. Number of regional capacity development initiatives facilitating application of comprehensive disaster damage and loss accounting systems/post-disaster needs assessment (PDNA) framework for resilient recovery	1	4	7	Already exceeded



Output	Output Indicator	Baseline	Target by end 2021	Achievements	Assessment / Analysis
				2018-2020	
3.2. Regional gender-responsive, risk-informed mechanisms and initiatives support strengthened capacities for reconciliation, consensus-building, confidence-building, social cohesion, peaceful management of conflict, and prevention of violent extremism, including youth engagement in sustaining peace and women's leadership in social dialogue and security sector mechanisms	3.2.1. Number of initiatives at regional/subregional level (including through South-South cooperation) that enable confidence-building, social cohesion, and dialogue mechanisms for the prevention of conflict or violent extremism	2	7	10	Already exceeded
3.3. Regional cooperation enables national systems to ensure the restoration of justice institutions, redress mechanisms and community security, including armed violence reduction and small arms and light weapons (SALW) control	3.3.1. Number of regional cooperation forums that support redress mechanisms, justice institutions, and community security (including SALW control)	5	18	18	Already achieved

### 3.3.2. Development Contributions

The following is a brief overview of the RP development contributions in the three outcome areas identified in the RP document.<sup>32</sup>

#### *Outcome 1: Accelerating structural transformations for sustainable development through more effective governance systems*

The RP has assisted 11 countries' capacities to access climate finance by providing technical support, training and policy advice. Nine countries have accessed new climate funding for integrated planning/strategy/policy development for climate resilience and low GHG emissions development. The Climate Box education curricula was expanded to cover nine countries, with over 60,000 school children reached. At the municipal level, the RP assisted the launching of the Solar City Initiative, bringing together cities from five countries in applying innovative financing methods to accelerate the transition to renewables/solar energy.

<sup>32</sup> These contributions are formulated on the basis of information drawn from RBEC'S ISTANBUL REGIONAL HUB reporting.

RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has established a dialogue with EU (DG NEAR), World Bank and Council of Europe on the sustainable reintegration of returnees in the Western Balkans, leading to a sub-regional project in three countries (Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia) aimed at strengthening national and local systems, policies and programmes to provide effective socio-economic reintegration of vulnerable returnees, with a specific focus on the Roma people.

In 2020 RBEC organized the second “judges forum” in collaboration with the Supreme Court of Tajikistan and developed the Judges' Forum online platform to share relevant information and experiences among judges. RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub developed the first ECIS compendium of HIV related litigation cases to assist judges, lawyers, law enforcement and others across the region. With the adoption of the three-year roadmap for cooperation of NHRIs of Central Asia, a series of regional knowledge and peer-to-peer exchanges were closely coordinated by RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub, OHCHR and the Asia Pacific Forum of NHRIs. About 30 NHRI staff were trained on SDGs, HR & LNOB and peer to peer exchanges among NHRIs (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kosovo, Serbia, Ukraine) were facilitated in partnership with European Network of NHRIs to strengthen their roles in conflict prevention.

Through its flagship SEESAC project, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has strengthened the capacities of national partners in addressing the security deficits by focusing on the control and reduction of the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and advancing gender equality in security sector reforms. It has supported partners to address SALW threats, which led to the integration of SALW control policies, improved capabilities to combat illicit proliferation, and increased transparency of arms transfers. It has also contributed to mainstreaming gender in policing and strengthened cooperation on gender mainstreaming in security sector reform in the Western Balkans.

To address public service challenges common to the region, the RP has supported the identification of various forms of evidence and sources of data. Examples: (1) the Measuring the Unmeasured Project supported work in six countries in measuring SDG16 Tier 3 indicators (Moldova & Kyrgyzstan were supported through pilot surveys to measure the satisfaction with public service delivery); (2) a first regional CoP took place in Tashkent and explored new ways of public services delivery (digitalization, one-stop shops and human centered design); (3) support to local municipalities expanded from 3 to 5 countries where subregional public service delivery processes have been analyzed to detect corruption risks and increase integrity; (4) a new tool providing insights into digital governance, knowledge creation, online labor and network dynamics, relying on big data methods and close to real-time data, was developed to help assess digital development in the region (an analysis for tech skills was presented at the Digital Summit); (5) an AI-based tool was developed to support efficient public service management, including greening areas, reforestation and waste collection systems; (6) through a collaboration with Magic Leap, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub developed an AR powered visualization that displays the impacts of climate change in people's movements; and (7) a Data Innovation Clinic brought together COs from different regions to accelerate design and implementation of projects applying new evidence.

RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub advanced Disaster Risk Financing in Central Asia and contributed to the update and tailoring of the Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) tool to the COVID-19 pandemic and conducted presentations and trainings for COs on the resulting COVID-19 Recovery Needs Assessment (CRNA) and its application at the national level. RP supported data-driven solutions for conservation, sustainable use, and equitable access to and benefit sharing of natural resources, biodiversity, and ecosystems. These initiatives included support for Integrated River Basin Management of Kura River, Dniester River and Dinaric Karst and other GEF funded initiatives, as well as the EU funded Black Sea Monitoring project. RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub implemented stress reduction demo projects in Azerbaijan and Georgia in the fields of rational water use in the municipal and agriculture sector, constructed wetlands as wastewater treatment facilities and pollution abatement plans for the main water polluting industries.

The RP supported the introduction of new renewable energy technologies in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan with OPEC/OFID funding for energy access for SMEs in remote areas. Results include an enabling policy framework and capacity development for green energy SMEs; improved access to finance and piloted business models for green energy SMEs and energy service users; and improved access to sustainable energy services in remote rural areas on household and community levels (including women led SMEs and NGOs).

RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub supported the completion, validation and dissemination of HIV Legal Environment Assessments (LEAs) in Belarus and Moldova. Belarus LEA recommendations contributed to the establishment of a working group which developed and submitted amendments to parliament for legislative changes related to criminalization of HIV transmission, non-disclosure and exposure. The HIV LEA findings and recommendations in Moldova led to the formulation and development of targeted legislative amendments and further advocacy in parliament related to laws that criminalize people living with HIV and Key Populations. In Tajikistan, results of regional support included strengthened CSO advocacy capacity and support for the removal of legal barriers and monitoring of rights violations (8 strategic litigation cases related to the criminalization of HIV transmission were supported).

Another relevant initiative has been the establishment of the Equal Future platform in 2020 (and updated in 2021), to generate greater public awareness on the importance of gender equality in parliaments. The platform was developed as a tool to support data-driven analysis and hold governments accountable to their commitments to gender equality. It shows that, despite relevant achievements obtained in the past few years, the ECA region is still a long way from gender parity in parliaments and the STEM fields.

### ***Outcome 2: Addressing poverty and inequalities through more inclusive growth***

Social inclusion has been a strong theme of the work of RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub, both in terms of the groups that it has targeted and the approaches that it has followed. The groups that

have been targeted have been women, persons with disabilities (PwDs), youth at risk of radicalization, Roma people, migrants, displaced populations and returnees and even inmates at correctional institutions. The main instruments for social inclusion have been labour markets and trade policies, social protection and care policies, social contracting, etc. This work has included policy research on a variety of related topics, public employment services, training schemes for a variety of skills and groups, support for the establishment of businesses for these groups, and facilitation of cross-border trade in goods and services.

RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has supported the implementation of national roadmaps for integrated and user-centered provision of public employment and social welfare services for marginalized groups in the Western Balkans. Existing services were assessed and integrated in system designs, including information management systems, case management approaches developed. A global compendium of lessons learned from NGO social contracting was developed, making strong examples from region available, and presented at global level consultation. RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub's cooperation with UNECE on poverty, inequality and social exclusion resulted in the preparation of two guidebooks on measuring poverty and social exclusion.

COs in North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo and Azerbaijan were supported to expand and adapt capacities of public employment offices to ensure business continuity and to respond effectively to the surging needs of societies during the pandemic, including through development of digital solutions. Collaborative service provision models between employment and centers for social work were supported in Albania, Serbia and Montenegro. A Western Balkans inclusive labour market solutions knowledge hub has been established and can be accessed live through the UNDP Eurasia website. RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub partnered with Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) in promoting women's participation in STEM professions. Under the umbrella of the Digital Summit 2020, RBEC and RCC co-organized a high-level panel to address issues of gender disparity in STEM by prominent scientists, policy makers, managers and women activists. A regional platform "*STEM 4 All*" was also established and will be expanded in partnership with UNICEF.<sup>33</sup>

RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has supported the prevention of corruption in a number of countries, such as Armenia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and North Macedonia. Jointly with partners such as OECD, OSCE and the Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative, a discussion has been initiated among regional and global anti-corruption actors to develop "Anti-Corruption Performance Indicators", which will help governments/development partners, donors and CSOs to clearly identify corruption loopholes and find solutions to these obstacles. UNDP partnered with EBRD and OECD to strengthen business integrity in the region, including in Ukraine, Georgia and Uzbekistan. With OECD and OSCE, the Anti-Corruption

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<sup>33</sup> <https://stem4all.eurasia.undp.org/>

Performance Indicators were developed, and a concept note for the development of a self-assessment online toolkit drafted.

With the support of RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub's regional City Experiment Fund in North Macedonia, Moldova, Serbia and Armenia, innovative methods are being deployed to strengthen the social contract, engage citizens and improve well-being overall. A system thinking workshop brought together five COs and external expertise to draw out key system dynamics to issues ranging from air pollution to mobility in the region. Cities in the region also received support to test crowd-investment modalities to support transition to more sustainable energy sources. Practices, challenges and opportunities for strengthening the capacities for sustainable urban governance were identified and analyzed based on case presentations presented by municipal officials and stakeholders, UNDP COs, and UN agencies during a dedicated technical workshop. In the first cohort of the regional City Experiment Fund, Chisinau, Kragujevac, Nis, Yerevan and Skopje have been supported to address urbanization issues through the application of innovative methods. RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub initiated a dialogue with the IFC Global Innovation Lab of Climate Finance on a municipal bond for fighting air pollution.

### ***Outcome 3: Building resilience to shocks and crises***

The Regional Hub has also supported the establishment of a Regional Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) coordination mechanism in Central Asia, which is the only regional DRR coordination mechanism in ECIS serving as a platform for national emergency agencies, the international community and NGOs to share their DRR knowledge and best practices and coordinate regional preparedness and responses. RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has supported regional inter-agency DRR coordination calls; contributed to the Central Asia DRR conference; organized a webinar on "Gender and DRR"; designed a "*Gender in Disaster Risk Reduction*" guide for workshop facilitators;<sup>34</sup> and conducted series of training for DRR professional in the region.

With funding from the catalytic facilities, the Bosnia and Herzegovina CO piloted a Disaster Risk Analysis System information management tool and an integrated approach at increasing resilience of community and households to climate change impact and disasters (especially floods). As a result of this work, a new USD 9 million regional project for flood risk management in the Drin River Basin in Western Balkans (Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia) was started in 2019 with funding from the Adaptation Fund.<sup>35</sup>

RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has contributed to risk-informed development approaches through dissemination of the regional Risk Monitor tool. A conflict sensitivity training was organized to

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<sup>34</sup> In collaboration with UNFPA and UN Women.

<sup>35</sup> The project will be implemented in 2019-2024 to assist the implementation of an integrated climate-resilient river basin flood risk management approach in order to better manage flood risk at regional, national and local levels and to enhance the resilience of vulnerable communities in the Drin river basin to climate-induced floods. [https://www.adaptation-fund.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/6215\\_AF\\_Regional\\_Project-Proposal\\_resubmission\\_06-Feb-2019-clean-version.pdf](https://www.adaptation-fund.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/6215_AF_Regional_Project-Proposal_resubmission_06-Feb-2019-clean-version.pdf)

support COs in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia and led a conflict sensitivity review of a DRR project in Kosovo. The latter was leveraged for a social cohesion analysis in partnership with the Folke Bernadotte Academy. Facilitation of regional cooperation in war crimes cases in the Western Balkans led to a continuous dialogue between prosecution offices of Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia for overcoming problems in cross-border cooperation and more efficient war crimes case processing.

Through the UN-RYCO (Regional Youth Cooperation Office) project, the development of research on youth perceptions and priorities for peace in the Western Balkans and capacity building of youth actors on peacebuilding and conflict analysis was supported. RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub's convening capacity on Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) has been further leveraged through the organization of a regional dialogue and a high-level dialogue convening Deputy Ministers and international partners in Central Asia, as part of the Government of Japan-funded regional Prevention of Violent Extremism project. To support the Youth, Peace and Security agenda, two regional youth consultations on peace and security in Central Asia were organized to advance awareness of UNSCR 2250.

Through the SEESAC project, UNDP set up a comprehensive coordination, monitoring and funding mechanism for the Western Balkans SALW Control Roadmap; secured the buy-in of the WB6 and the support of partners (OSCE, NATO, UNODC) and donors (EU, Germany, France, UK, Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, US). The roadmap has become a model for effective regional arms control. UNDP was invited to showcase it in the UN-SC Africa meeting and requested by donors to explore replication/adaptation options in West Africa (ECOWAS) and the Caribbean.

### 3.4. Efficiency

This section of the evaluation examines key dimensions of the efficiency of the RP. First, it examines the way in which the Regional Hub has used the RP to leverage resources. Second, it examines the extent to which the Regional Hub has been able to mobilize partnerships. Third, it examines the flexibility of the RP as a key factor of efficiency, especially in times of dynamic changes like currently. Last but not least, the efficiency assessment also examines operational (administrative) parameters such as budget execution, timeliness of activities, etc.

#### 3.4.1. Leveraging Financial Resources

In light of dwindling core resources for the region (as the countries in the region acquire middle-income status), the RP has increasingly relied on external resources. The results of this funding model in the current RP cycle have been very impressive. The financial resources planned for the RP (2018-2021) as of 2017 when the RP document was developed were US\$ 62,6 m. As of the time of this evaluation, the total resources mobilized by the Regional Hub for the RP for 2018-2021 stood at US \$103 m.<sup>36</sup> Exceeding the resource mobilization target by almost 100% before the closing of the programme cycle is without any doubt an astounding success for the Regional Hub.

What is even more impressive is the small resource base which was used to leverage the impressive amount of financing that was mobilized. For the period 2018-2021, the Regional Hub has had at its disposal US\$ 4 m from core (TRAC) resources and US\$ 4.4 m from Turkey (for the period 2019-2021). The Regional Hub was able to leverage these unearmarked resources to achieve results that go way beyond RP's original targets.

Key to this success has been the ability of the Regional Hub to identify and leverage new sources of funding, in addition to traditional sources such as the vertical funds (e.g. GEF, GCF, Global Fund, etc.). These new partners have been emerging donor countries and international financial institutions (IFIs).

- By successfully partnering with non-DAC upper-middle-income countries, in particular those willing to play a role in development cooperation by sharing expertise, knowledge, and resources, RBEC's Regional Hub has positioned itself as a 'go-to' multilateral development partner for new donors in the ECIS region. The most important partnerships forged by RBEC's Regional Hub in the region are with the governments of Turkey, Czech Republic, Kazakhstan, Romania, the Russian Federation, Poland and Slovakia.
- RBEC's Regional Hub has also worked very closely with IFIs, fostering major partnerships with European Investment Bank (EIB), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Council of Europe Development Bank, European Investment Fund (EIF) and the

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<sup>36</sup> With some projects going into the next programming cycle (2022-2025).

Islamic Development Bank (IsDB). UNDP's role in these partnerships is that of the facilitator of the implementation or monitoring of loan agreements.<sup>37</sup>

Overall, the Regional Hub's resource mobilization results have been impressive, especially in light of its transition to the so-called "*low-core funding model*", which implies less reliance on its own institutional funds as a result of reduced funding from headquarters linked to the achievement of middle-income status by all countries and territories in the region.

Although regional projects involve a different funding category from country-based projects for many donors, some CO staff pointed to the need for more effective coordination between resource mobilization efforts at the regional level and country level so as to avoid competition. One idea floated during the interviews was the development of a consolidated tracking tool for resource mobilization efforts at both levels, accessible by both COs and RBEC's Regional Hub, which would show at any point in time what is the status of discussions and negotiations with any donor by any UNDP entity in the region. This tool could be an integral part of a more integrated planning and resource mobilization framework at the RBEC level, inclusive of all bureau components.

### **3.4.2. Fostering Partnerships**

Another important aspect of efficiency is the creation of synergies with other development partners and avoidance of duplication. Cooperation can be taken to an altogether higher scale when capitalizing on skills and knowledge residing in existing institutions, rather than reinventing the wheel. This section will briefly review the synergies of the regional programme with the work of other UN agencies and other development partners.

RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has managed to forge a large number of partnerships, not only with donor and financing organizations, but also a range of international and national organizations in all the areas in which it has operated.

With regards to UN agencies, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has worked closely under the "*Delivering as One*" approach with a number of UN agencies - i.e. UNICEF (social assistance, social transfers, gender equality), UNAIDS (health), ILO (social insurance/employment), UNFPA (gender equality), UN Women (gender equality), UNITAID (procurement in the health sector, carbon footprint reduction of healthcare supply chains), etc. Although this evaluation did not include interviews with partner organizations which would have allowed the examination of this dimension from their perspective, the feedback from COs was that the regional programme is complementary to the regional activities of other UN agencies in the respective areas. Also, the fact that RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub is co-located with the regional offices of a number of UN

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<sup>37</sup> Examples of ground-breaking partnerships with IFIs include cooperation with EIB in Armenia on loan implementation in the area of energy efficiency or another cooperation with EIB in Ukraine in the implementation of a loan for recovery activities in Donbas region. A new MOU with the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) made a breakthrough in its partnership in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia. Concrete cooperation with EBRD is pursued in Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine. Partnerships with the World Bank and Islamic Development Bank (IDB) were developed in Serbia, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.



agencies (i.e. UN Women, UNICEF, DPA) plays an important role in facilitating coordination and collaboration.

With regards to other development partners, the RP has benefitted from strong cooperation with the European Commission. This cooperation has resulted in a number of regional projects that leverage EU funding, such as Roma-related interventions, environmental monitoring, EU4Climate.<sup>38</sup> More recently, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has launched new initiatives in partnership with the EU, such as the Mayors4EconomicGrowth (targeting innovation). Partnerships have also been forged with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Council of Europe (CoE), World Bank (WB), Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) on topics such as women's economic empowerment in the Western Balkans, Roma inclusion and reintegration of vulnerable returnees or innovative initiatives such as open data and innovative transparency solutions. Further, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has built key partnerships with key IFIs. Multiple high-level engagements have resulted in renewed MoUs with EIF and EDB, and development of Action Plans with EBRD, EIB, EDB and IsDB. A new partnership has been developed with the IsDB on innovation through NGOs. The work on Western Balkans Facility, being jointly developed with EIF, continues to be in the works in 2021. In terms of bilateral donors, the RP has benefitted from partnerships with Austria, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, UK and USA.

Opportunities for greater cooperation exist with regards to civil society, especially academic institutions – in the ECIS region, Turkey and beyond. Given the major role that RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has played in the generation and dissemination of knowledge – including through the events and debates that it has hosted – it is in a unique position to facilitate the interaction of academics and researchers with practitioners in the beneficiary countries.

Certain RP activities have involved the private sector. For example, more recently the BOOST initiative, an innovative COVID-19 solutions accelerator and another element of RBEC's programmatic response framework, was launched in partnership with emerging donor partners and Koc Holding (largest industrial conglomerate in Turkey). In Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub supported through the Aid for Trade Project the launching of the entrepreneur mentorship programme for women and youth. Another example of involvement of the private sector is UNDP's first and joint innovative financing instrument with the European Investment Fund for MSME lending in the Western Balkans. RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has jointly with the Istanbul International Center for Private Sector in Development (IICPSD) organized events targeting engagement with the private sector. However, participants for this evaluation think that there is further potential for engagement with the private sector that can be

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<sup>38</sup> A regional initiative in support of the development and implementation of climate policies in the six countries of the Eastern Partnership - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

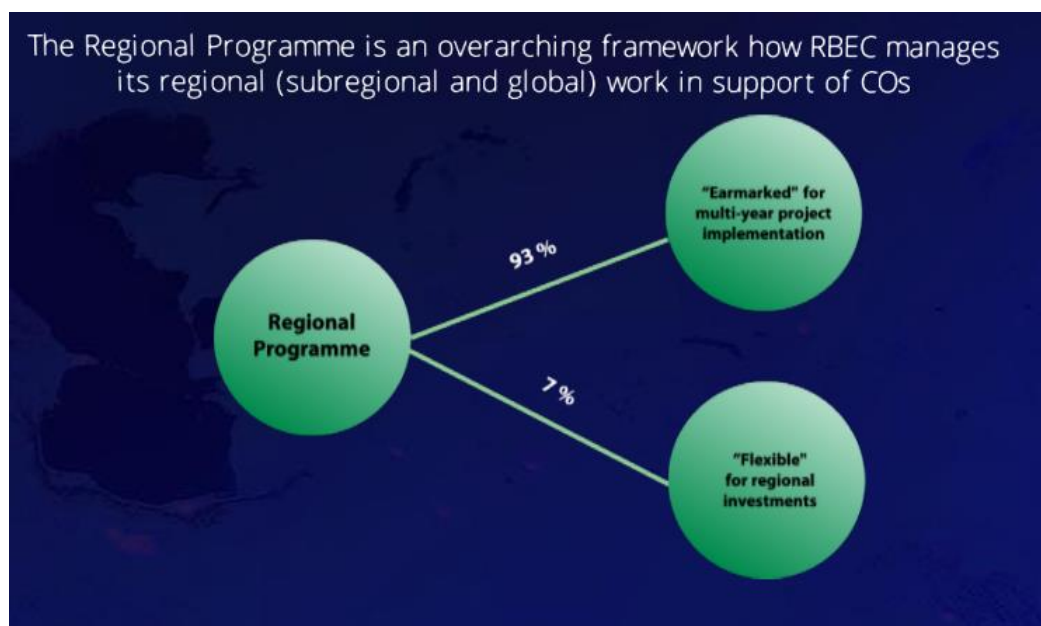
tapped more effectively. Stronger ties can be forged with the private sector, especially with regards to financing for development.

### 3.4.3. Flexibility

A key feature of the RP is its flexibility in terms of how it is structured, financed and delivered. Flexibility is a crucial determinant of efficiency as an inflexible programme is unable to respond swiftly to a changing development context – which for the region in question is the rule, rather than the exception given the prevailing political volatility and social instability. The profound shifts that COVID-19 is causing in the region’s social, political and economic fabric – as evidenced by SEAIIs – is a testament of this uncertainty and the value of flexibility.

As can be seen from the figure below, 93% of RP funds are earmarked for multi-year project implementation, whereas 7% is “flexible” funding for investments. This structure is important. First, having the bulk of investments in multi-year, well-structured projects based on project documents and results frameworks is crucial for institutionalizing these interventions, grounding them on clear management and financing frameworks, making their activities predictable and ensuring long-term engagement. For most projects, such structures are imposed by agreements with donors anyway. But it is also crucial that the RP has a flexible component that enables RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub to quickly deploy resources where and when needed based on demand, urgency and relevance.

**Figure 7: RP’s Financing Modalities<sup>39</sup>**



Without this flexibility, the RP would be quite monolithic and slow in its response. The COVID-19 crisis proved the importance of this flexibility. Perhaps, the share of flexible funds could be

<sup>39</sup> Figure taken from RBEC’s Regional Hub online report for 2020.

increased, although it is understandably a difficult task given the earmarked nature of the bulk of donor funding. The unearmarked nature of the Turkish contribution has been extremely important for the flexibility of the RP.<sup>40</sup> It has enabled RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub to invest seed funding in strategic areas and then build on those investments by partnering with donor organizations and development partners to develop a myriad of programmes and activities.

### 3.4.4. Operational Efficiencies

The evaluation examined a number of management and operational aspects related to the RP. The following are the issues that were prioritized by interviewees.

With regards to budget execution, the delivery of RP has been largely in line with what was planned on an annual basis. For the three years in question, as can be seen from the table below, the deviations from planned budgets have been minimal.

**Table 4: RP's Budget Execution**

RP	2018		2019		2020		2021	
	Workplan Budget	Delivery	Workplan Budget	Delivery	Workplan Budget	Delivery	Workplan Budget	Delivery (as of 1 July 2021)
Outcome 1	9,994,558	9,982,093	9,445,312	10,623,133	8,995,890	8,865,455	8,221,785	3,512,068
Outcome 2	4,077,984	4,026,367	5,228,975	5,764,430	6,926,116	6,758,735	7,955,576	7,517,353
Outcome 3	3,927,458	3,893,346	3,825,713	4,348,713	5,077,994	4,072,632	4,972,638	2,804,104
<b>Total</b>	<b>18,000,000</b>	<b>17,901,806</b>	<b>18,500,000</b>	<b>20,736,277</b>	<b>21,000,000</b>	<b>19,696,822</b>	<b>21,150,000</b>	<b>13,833,524</b>

The total planned RP budget for 2018-2021 (in Atlas) was USD\$ 79 m, whereas total delivery for the same period (estimated for 2021) has been US\$ 72 m. Overall, the execution of the RP is well within the parameters within which it was planned.

Without going into the details of RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub's governance structure, participants in the interviews for this evaluation concurred that management arrangements applied to the regional programme are adequate (see the box below for a brief description of management arrangements for regional projects).

### Box 6: Management Arrangements for Regional Projects

Management arrangements for all regional projects are the same, following UNDP's oversight policy and governance arrangements prescribed in the project document. The role of the Project Manager is assumed by advisors or full-time project managers depending on the scope, nature and size of the project. Each project is supervised by a Project Board, which meets annually and is chaired either by Deputy Regional Director or by RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub Manager. The board also includes an advisor of the respective thematic portfolio and representatives from relevant UNDP COs. Project Managers report to the Manager and respective Team Leader. The Quality Assurance Team provides quality assurance, whereas the Operations Team provides operational support as needed. Project activities are implemented on the basis of Annual Work

<sup>40</sup> RBEC'S ISTANBUL REGIONAL HUB has had large versatility over the use of funds, with the Turkish side involved primarily in providing strategic direction and oversight, but not in the micro-management of activities.

Plans (this applies also to umbrella projects), which are approved by the project board. Governance arrangements also include an Advisory Board which is responsible for reviewing progress on the implementation of the regional programme and providing strategic advice on strategic matters and initiatives.

Interviews for this evaluation also revealed a number of organizational/administrative issues that require the attention of RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub management. They are outlined below from the perspective of RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub staff and the perspective of CO staff.

For some regional projects funded by GEF, there are some unclarities about execution and oversight roles among staff members, including advisors in HQ and RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub. These responsibilities should be clarified on the basis of clear criteria that determine unambiguously the split between execution and oversight.

From the perspective of the COs, it is important to have stronger coordination between regional and country-level activities and alignment of regional programme priorities with those of the respective COs. COs prefer more ownership of the regional programme, as more ownership strengthens engagement of national partners and accountability. This need for more ownership from the COs could be accommodated through an enhanced consultative process at the programming and implementation stages. The following are some practical suggestions collected in the course of this evaluation.

- Some COs suggested that at the programming stage there should be earlier engagement of CO specialists in the identification of priorities and design of regional projects. They noted that some projects are designed by RBEC's Regional Hub advisers in cooperation with respective donor organizations, with limited involvement of CO staff, and sometimes even national counterparts. One suggestion provided by CO colleagues here is to institute a requirement for the involvement of relevant CO staff in the development of all regional projects. Another suggestion was for RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub to make more intensive use of detailed assignments for CO staff in the regional hub to give them greater exposure to the regional programme.
- Some CO staff suggested that RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub make more extensive use of regional analyses in a particular sector or thematic area to inform the development of regional projects. They suggested that while this is done for some flagship projects, smaller ones are designed on a limited analysis and understanding of the regional context. In reality, many of the RP projects reviewed for this evaluation have either resulted from extensive regional studies or have themselves generated a large amount of research a regional nature. Going forward, the RP will benefit from greater focus on regional studies and assessments to lay the foundations for the design of regional projects.

- Another suggestion was that regional projects should always use the CO and the RR as the interface (and key interlocutor) for consultations and interactions with national counterparts. There are cases when regional projects that do not have local components interact with national stakeholders without the involvement or knowledge of CO staff. COs suggested the establishment of some uniform standard procedure and clear identification of responsibilities with regards to how regional projects communicate, consult and interact with national partners.
- Another issue raised by some COs was to revise the formula for the division of regional project funds and administrative overheads to better reflect the use of time by CO staff in activities related to regional projects.
- With regards to the timeliness and responsiveness of the regional programme, COs are appreciative of RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub's ability to quickly address their demands for assistance and provide support on new themes as required. Certainly, COVID-19 has affected the *modus operandi* of regional technical advisers - field visits have been delayed/canceled and all meetings are conducted virtually. However, COs reported that there has been a continued improvement by RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub in the planning of its support for COs, which has led to more predictability and better quality of support.

This evaluation does not provide any prescriptive recommendations on how these issues should be resolved, but recommends that they are reviewed and addressed as a package of organizational issues in the framework of the preparation of the new regional programme.

### 3.5. Sustainability

Sustainable solutions to development problems are transformative when they have depth and scale. These are two key features of sustainability that will be reviewed in the context of the regional programme. Two additional features covered in this section are the implementation of policies and laws supported by the regional programme and the extent of behaviour change resulting from UNDP interventions.

#### 3.5.1. Depth and Integration of RP Interventions

For all the variety of issues and needs covered by the regional programme, one issue that often came up in the course of this evaluation is whether it is possible for the RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub to create more depth in certain areas through more intensive interventions and sustained engagement. The wide range of issues covered by RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub in such a large number of countries with different priorities and situations creates a tendency for fragmentation of interventions. The emerging demand from COs and partners calls for integrated support in the areas of green economy, digital transformation, and SDG financing, which will be central priorities for the RP in the coming cycle.<sup>41</sup> RBEC's response already includes a focus on new, integrated ways of working and sets the stage for operationalizing a new methodology to move from projectized to portfolio-driven environments to better navigate complexities and achieve systemic transformations.

Some interviewees felt that designing regional projects in ways that ensure stronger integration and sustainability is a challenge as the budgets of RP projects are usually small and fragmented. However, depth does not necessarily have to be created only with more money. It can also be achieved through stronger integration of interventions across teams and outcome areas and by avoiding silos. Although resource constraints limit the possibilities for strategic and integrated programming approaches, regional programming and support to COs as one package has the potential to strengthen the efficiency, relevance and most importantly sustainability of interventions. Striking the right balance between CO support, regional programming, and alignment with corporate priorities is difficult, but not impossible.

Based on the review of documentation for this evaluation, this is already identified as a challenge within RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub and certain steps have been taken. The technical teams have tried to incorporate in the work different strands from the activities of other teams. For example, an integrated approach has underpinned the new EU-funded flagship programme with municipalities (\$10 m over 4 years). Further, attempts have been made to create stronger linkages between research (and flagship publications such as the human development reports) and interventions on the ground.

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<sup>41</sup> It is also important to mainstream gender in regional and CO initiatives/projects, especially in the areas of green economy, digital transformation and SDG financing.

However, there is potential for more strategic and comprehensive programmes, more active interaction of teams and stronger integration of interventions across areas. As noted previously in this report, UNDP has a comparative advantage in its role as integrator and is well equipped to operate at the intersection of key sectors. The COVID-19 crisis showed the importance of integrated approaches to development. The need for integrated, multi-disciplinary and gender-responsive interventions will only increase in the years to come. This includes stronger integration not only between COVID-19 related impacts and other development challenges, but also between sectors such as governance and peacebuilding initiatives, climate change and health, climate change and security/resilience, disaster risk reduction and economic development, etc. It will also be important to embed in programming key enablers such as financing, innovation and digital transformation.

To take advantage of these opportunities, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub should conceive a model for the delivery of regional projects that enables more effective integration of activities. Although funding for regional project is fragmented and donor-driven, the RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub could create incentives for closer cooperation between project teams in the delivery of activities. Also, more multi-disciplinary approaches could be used in the design of regional projects. This will also require working with donor partners and convincing them of the usefulness of multi-disciplinary approaches, especially in a regional context. The COVID-19 crisis – and the related socio-economic impact assessments – provide good foundations for pursuing more purposefully integrated approaches to regional programming.

### **3.5.2. Tracking and Scaling-up Innovations**

The RP has had a major focus on piloting and demonstrating innovative solutions to development problems, with the expectation that if successful they will be replicated and scaled up by national partners. The catalytic facilities in particular have been designed to stimulate innovative solutions and leverage additional resources. To achieve this, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has had to identify actions which although small have had the potential for scale, not only within one country, but also regionally or even globally. The general idea behind their approach is that UNDP is not in the business of solving specific problems, but helping national stakeholders identify systemic and sustainable solutions to these problems. Support for innovation has become a defining feature of the regional programme, supporting countries with new perspectives, partnerships and sources of financing. This has become particularly important within the context of SDG implementation, as new ways of achieving and operationalizing integrated approaches have to be tested, and new ways of attracting development financing found.

One key strength of the RP has been its role as an incubator for scaling up small, but promising and innovative initiatives, into new donor-financed projects or regional activities. Different modalities were used to achieve these results. For example, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub's catalytic facilities have supported COs in testing new solutions to particular development problems. Although these initiatives have been relatively small in volume, they have enabled COs

to accelerate the achievement of development priorities at country level closely linked to global and regional strategic priorities. The catalytic facilities have led to the establishment of innovation labs in countries like Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and North Macedonia. Conceived as vehicles to incubate and pilot innovative approaches to public service delivery, budgeting, and data-driven decision-making, these labs have helped governments to experiment with new solutions to persistent development problems. Further, the catalytic mechanism piloted by RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub have been scaled up by UNDP globally. More recently, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has also contributed to the establishment of “*SDG Acceleration Labs*”,<sup>42</sup> a global initiative designed to help countries improve their capabilities for analysis and implementation of SDGs. Such labs are being established globally, with a plan of having more than 60 operating worldwide. Another example is the long-standing SEESAC initiative. Through this project, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has established a comprehensive coordination, monitoring and funding mechanism for the Western Balkans; secured the buy-in of the region's governments and the support of partners (OSCE, NATO, UNODC) and donors (EU, Germany, France, UK, Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, US). The coordination roadmap has become a model for effective regional arms control. UNDP was invited to showcase it in the UN-SC Africa meeting and requested by donors to explore replication/adaptation options in West Africa (ECOWAS) and the Caribbean. Several donors are considering to replicate the model in other areas.

An area where RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub could make improvements is the strengthening of monitoring and tracking of piloted initiatives over time – the lessons they generate during the piloting stage and the degree to which they get replicated and scaled up. Information about pilots and replication is not easily available or sufficient (in the documentation reviewed for this evaluation). More data on these initiatives – especially, after they are completed and expected to have become sustainable - will be useful not only for UNDP, but also for partners and donors.

Given RP's focus on innovations and catalyzation, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub should deploy tools and systems that enable it to track pilot initiatives more effectively over time and way beyond the end of a project's lifetime (which is usually too short to allow for a definitive assessment of the success of pilots). As part of the monitoring and evaluation system, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub should strengthen its planning and monitoring of pilot initiatives and their demonstration effects, so that their replicability and scaling up are monitored and supported more effectively. RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub should focus on documenting more consistently results, lessons, experiences, and good practices so that they are shared more widely, replicated, and scaled up.

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<sup>42</sup> Formerly called *SDG Incubation Centers*.



## 4. Gender Mainstreaming

The mainstreaming of gender is prioritized in the RP document and is supported by a dedicated team in RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub structure. Based on the RP project list provided by the Istanbul Regional Hub, 70% of RP projects have the gender marker "Gen 1", 26% have the gender marker "Gen 2" and 3% have the gender marker "Gen 3".

Gender mainstreaming is a good example of cross-team collaboration. The Gender Team has taken a leading role in this area, by engaging with the other technical teams on initiatives such as the *"Women's Economic Empowerment in the Western Balkans"*, *"Women in STEM"*, *"Regional Socio-economic Impact Assessment of COVID from a Gender Perspective"*, *"Care Economy and Domestic Work"*, etc. The following are some key achievements reported under the gender dimension for the current programme cycle.

The RP has contributed to the integration of the gender dimension into national policies and has promoted the participation of women in government (at least 30%) in five regional capacity building events. Most project proposals developed with RBEC support have included gender assessments and gender action plans targeting at least GEN2 level of gender mainstreaming in climate action. Gender equality and women's empowerment were incorporated into design of regional and sub-regional projects and considered as part of the technical assistance to private sector and governments, gender responsive DRR, gender review of SEIAs and other areas. RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub has further supported the development of a range of knowledge products, as well as the important process of *"Gender Seal"* certification in the region.

A major area of activities under the RP has been support for the participation of women in decision-making. The RP has strengthened the engagement and knowledge of parliamentarians, civil society and local elected officials for gender-responsive parliaments (Caucasus and Central Asia), with focus on gender-responsive lawmaking and implementation of laws on sexual and gender-based violence. Gender equality has been pursued by promoting gender quotas and other legislative provisions that promote women's political participation, mobilizing women in politics and public institutions at all levels, and supporting coalitions that promote gender equality in national agendas. A regional dialogue under the theme of Women in Politics was initiated in the Western Balkans, led by Women's Political Network from Montenegro. The dialogue achieved enhanced awareness and enabled joint reflections among women parliamentarians, local councilors and CSO leaders on the advancement of women's rights, women's access to politics and joint action against gender backlash in the region.

In 2019, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub launched a community-led regional report on the main barriers of women living with HIV and who have experienced violence encounter while accessing services. The report helped trigger the development of country level action plans with specific commitments for governments, civil society, UN, development partners and donors to support improved access to services for women living with HIV who have experienced violence. Ahead

of Beijing +25, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub supported the regional review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. With UNICEF, UNDP issued a regional policy advocacy paper on the gender dimensions of the socio-economic impact of COVID-19, which analyzed the COVID-19 socio-economic impact from a gender perspective; assessed the gender-responsiveness of response measures; and, provided policy recommendations for gender-responsive recovery in response to the pandemic and its socio-economic impacts.

With UN Women, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub issued a regional factsheet for the COVID-19 global gender response tracker,<sup>43</sup> providing an overview of 82 gender-sensitive measures across three key dimensions: surge in violence against women/girls; burden of unpaid care work; and, women's economic insecurity. RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub launched the #EqualFuture Platform, raising attention for the progress of women's participation in politics over the past 25 years in the region and advocating for the implementation of policy and institutional reforms to reduce gender gaps in politics. With the Regional Cooperation Council, RBEC'S ISTANBUL REGIONAL HUB launched a sub-regional initiative in support of 'Women's Economic Empowerment in the Western Balkans' to advance women's economic empowerment by promoting systemic change through policy, institutional and legal reforms as well as through regional cooperation and partnerships. With UNFPA and UNAIDS, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub supported community-led assessment on the impacts of COVID-19 on women living with HIV to access SRH and GBV services and ARV treatment. Research commissioned to the Eurasian Women's Network (EWNA) covered 12 countries (Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine) and provided concrete recommendations targeting decision and policy makers, civil society and international development organizations.

Jointly with UN Women, UNDP established a cooperation platform on gender-based violence (GVB) which has involved judges, ombudspersons. Support was provided to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to run a sub-regional advocacy campaign led by survivors and activists to end violence against women and girls. Jointly with UN Women, UNFPA and UNICEF, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub organized a regional conference to promote policy dialogue on all forms of violence against women and girls in Central Asia, which involved more than 60 government, parliamentary and civil society representatives. This work has contributed to greater awareness of international community and national partners on the urgency to address this important development issue. As a result, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have drawn laws on GBV. Gender equality capacities of relevant ministries in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia were strengthened to address gender violence and provide gender sensitive services.

Two sub-regional initiatives were launched in 2020: (1) with the Regional Cooperation Council, a Women's Economic Empowerment framework for the Western Balkans; (2) with the UNRCCA,

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<sup>43</sup> <https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/>

the Central Asian Women Leaders' Caucus. Gender Equality Seal Accelerated Gold Track, an initiative proposed by RBEC Director, will be launched in 2021.

RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub consolidated and shared stories on women role in climate action on the International Rural Women Day. Analytical framework and households and MSMEs surveys conducted for the purpose of the socio-economic assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis embraced the gender perspective. In Tajikistan, Energy Women Groups based on Women Resource Centers were established to help solve energy scarcity problems in 10 pilot villages, develop local energy efficiency strategies and diversify energy sources. Training of energy women groups and on-the-job practical activities for use of RES technologies and basic operation and maintenance of installations were conducted. Gender Mainstreaming Training in water management was organized in Azerbaijan and Georgia. In 2018, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub developed a guide for facilitators and trainers working to incorporate gender perspectives in disaster risk reduction (DRR) programmes and initiatives and trained all RBEC COs and relevant national counterparts on how to use it.

RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub developed guidance and tools to bring attention to structural barriers women face in STEM fields. In collaboration with UNFPA, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub launched an advocacy campaign for the International Day of Women and Girls in Science in February 2020. A series of social media teasers in form of gifs were published via UNFPA and UNDP social media channels to bring attention of public and private stakeholders to the need to promote women's access to STEM jobs and to remove structural barriers women encounter when entering STEM fields. A regional platform to share knowledge, raise awareness and break gender stereotypes in STEM fields was launched.<sup>44</sup> The gender equality in STEM platform presents a range of issues in STEM fields, including education, employment opportunities and research, from a gender perspective.

Despite the achievements outlined above, the gender mainstreaming capacity in the regional hub remains limited to the small gender team. RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub needs to strengthen overall gender capacities within its teams, especially in the area of climate change. There is also a need to strengthen the capacity for gender analysis in the formulation of project documents. There is also a need for the allocation of greater expenditures on gender responsive initiatives and activities. The Istanbul Regional Hub should further encourage greater gender responsiveness of regional programme activities and regional projects supported by adequate financial allocations, and proper quality assurance mechanism and accountability for realization of gender equality results. The RP will benefit from the inclusion of more advocacy initiatives engaging regional stakeholders on gender in general and in particular GBV. The RP will benefit from greater focus on Women and STEM, unpaid care work, and women in green economy.

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<sup>44</sup> <https://stem4all.eurasia.undp.org/?hl=en>

## 5. Lessons Learned

This evaluation also provides an opportunity for drawing some important lessons from the experience of the RP. The following are some key lessons from the perspective of the evaluator.

### ***Lesson 1: Depth of Interventions***

One observation made in this evaluation is the need for more depth in the impact of regional projects. One common challenge with these projects is that budgets are small and financial resource are spread widely and thinly across multiple countries or activities. Consequently, the impact of these initiatives is limited, especially when infrastructure components are involved. One way of ensuring greater depth and impact is through greater economies of scale which requires stronger integration of various initiatives and activities under one framework that enables greater synergies and cooperation. This project could involve the merging of projects into more consolidated frameworks, implemented by one team under one budgetary framework. However, there is another way of ensuring depth and impact in these interventions – through the so-called “temporal” integration. This type of integration refers to continued engagement in one particular area over a very long period of time without interruption – sometimes one or two decades. The RP is a good example of this as it has included several projects that have been sustained by UNDP and its donor partners for very long periods of time (through several phases), which has enabled the building of trust with government counterparts, accumulation of significant experience and creation of significant impact. Examples of such projects are the initiatives on “Aid for Trade”, Small Weapons, Border Management, SEESAC, etc. The flipside of this approach is the short-term engagement, usually taking place over a couple of years which often ends in a failure to ensure the sustainability of results. Ideally, all regional projects should at least be conceived as potentially long-term interventions that will allow for deep engagement with a particular challenge in the regional context. Efforts should be made by UNDP to encourage this type of mindset among donor agencies, so that they can understand the benefits of sustained engagement.

### ***Lesson 2: Regional Opportunities for Resource Mobilization***

One important lesson that can be drawn from RBEC’s RP is that funding opportunities for regional programming are significant. With its impressive resource mobilization results for the current cycle, RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub has proved that with creativity and the right offer it is possible to raise significant funding for cross-border initiatives. RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub has been particularly successful in two innovative fronts – engaging emerging donors and forging partnerships with IFIs. RBEC’s Istanbul Regional Hub’s experience in this area will be valuable for other UNDP hubs and other organizations. UNDP is uniquely positioned in the RBEC region to deliver country-based programmes complemented regional programming. This is a formidable comparative advantage of UNDP that few other organizations have. In the upcoming cycle, UNDP should take full advantage of its positioning in this area and continue to deliver regionally. The cross-border nature of the COVID-19 crisis is one factor that will provide additional impetus to

cross-border activities. Another important factor in the RBEC region is the importance of regional integration processes. Both the EU and the Russian Federation are leading such processes which make them inclined to take a great interest in regional cooperation programmes. Also, emerging donors such as Turkey will be more inclined to invest in regional projects. UNDP is well positioned to channel available resources through its extensive institutional infrastructure in the region. One financing frontier that UNDP could explore more forcefully in the coming programme cycle is private sector financing. Attempts have been made in the past to tackle this challenge, but the results have been limited. The opportunity is still there to engage the private sector in a more effective development partnership, especially for Turkey and the Western Balkans, but this will require the right incentives and modalities to make the partnership attractive to private players.

### ***Lesson 3: Flexibility as a Crucial Factor of Relevance***

The COVID-19 crisis tested the ability of the RP to respond to a rapidly evolving emergency situation of global proportions. One interesting example that was brought up by participants in this evaluation is that of “social protection” as a distinct area of work that was previously part of the regional programme (with significant projects on the Roma community and Inclusive Labour Market Solutions). As a result of continued activities and lack of project financing for this area, the regional hub has lost dedicated “social protection” capabilities in its teams of advisers. When the COVID-19 crisis struck in early 2020, it became quickly obvious that social protection would be an area where there would be a need for substantive engagement going forward. However, the foothold had been lost and now it will have to be reconstructed again – with the new RP presenting an opportunity for anchoring this area more firmly in the new programmatic framework. This experience showed not only the need for flexibility, but also the importance of maintaining capabilities in certain key areas even when project funding is not available for them. Hence, the importance of unearmarked funds and programming under the “umbrella projects” which allow the RP to fill in gaps, maintain capabilities in critical areas, and quickly respond to emerging needs and dynamic situations. Going forward, these umbrella projects (or the idea embodied in them) should be maintained, and where possible strengthened, and should be deployed to maintain capabilities in those areas which are critical, but for which project funding has been limited.

## 6. Conclusions

Due to the unique nature of regional development challenges, UNDP's RP plays an important role that cannot be fulfilled by country programmes. Amongst many international organizations present in Europe and CIS, UNDP has emerged as one of the most important promoters of regional cooperation in the region. This is an impressive achievement, especially in light of the formidable performance of the RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub on the resource mobilization front.

This report has provided an overview of the many contributions of UNDP's RP in the region across a number of thematic areas. Some of the most impressive contributions have been made in areas where UNDP has stayed engaged for many years – sometimes even more than one or two decades. Such sustained engagement has enabled UNDP to create depth in terms of experience, level of invested resources, trusting relations with partners, and ultimately impact.

The COVID-19 crisis will have a transformative impact on the development landscape globally – and certainly in the RBEC region. The first effects are already visible, as evidenced by the socio-economic assessments spearheaded by UNDP under the joint UN framework and supported by RBEC's RP. Going forward, each country will seek to address the urgent challenges presented by the pandemic and rekindle the longer-term development process. The road ahead will not be easy because COVID-19 has already set the region back on many dimensions. Public finances will be strained for years to come due to the countries' debt obligations, which will make resources dedicated for development investments scarcer. Thus, the importance of development organizations such as UNDP and the resources they bring to the region will increase.

It should also be noted that the global Covid-19 crisis has thrust into the limelight the importance of regional and global cooperation. The mantra *“No country is safe until every country is safe”* now resonates with everyone around the world. The pandemic has reinforced a stronger sense of awareness for what goes on the other side of the border. Therefore, it is quite possible that the post-pandemic world will demand ever greater coordination at the regional and global level. This places a high premium on UNDP's regional programming. Many COVID-19- related activities will be approached and tackled from a regional perspective. Health and climate will be crucial areas where strong regional coordination will be required. UNDP, and RBEC in particular, are well-positioned to take advantage of this shifting landscape and become even more relevant to the region as a trusted, resourceful and experienced development partner.

## 7. Recommendations

The following are a set of recommendations that were identified in the course of this evaluation.

### ***Recommendation 1: Communication of the Regional Programme to RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub and CO Staff***

- It will be useful for the RBEC'S ISTANBUL REGIONAL HUB to raise the level of awareness and understanding of staff members in the hub and country offices about the regional programme. Also, the fact that the regional programme does not have clear-cut boundaries will be useful to communicate to staff members in order to avoid confusion. RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub could produce a package of information on the regional programme that targets staff members. This topic could be included in some of the regular trainings organized for RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub and CO staff. A regular newsletter (monthly or bi-monthly) could be produced to raise the profile of the regional programme by featuring successful RP projects or activities with the highest impact or innovative solutions.
- In the case of regional projects where the CO is not directly involved with, or kept abreast of, communications by RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub advisers with national counterparts, it is important to involve the respective CO in those communications. A protocol for how RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub advisers or regional project staff engage with national counterparts could be developed to create a mechanism that ensures the engagement of COs.
- It will also be important to dispel misconceptions among COs about the amount of RP financing that is spent by COs as opposed to what is spent for COs by the RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub.

### ***Recommendation 2: Assessment of Regional Projects in Light of the New Situation***

- At the end of the current programme cycle, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub could consider the conduct of an assessment of regional projects for their ability to respond more effectively to the changing situation in light of the COVID-19 crisis. The assessment could identify ways in which these projects could be adjusted and repurposed to respond more effectively to the new context. Such an assessment will provide a comprehensive picture of what the future looks like for these projects given the current situation and identified changes could be introduced in the upcoming programme cycle.

### ***Recommendation 3: Maintaining and Further Strengthening RP's Relevance***

- The flexibility provided by the “umbrella projects” is a positive feature of the current RP, enabled by the unearmarked nature of the Turkish contribution and RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub's TRAC resources. This flexibility should be maintained going forward,



and even increased where possible based on fundraising efforts with donors willing to consider the provision of unearmarked funding.

- RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub should review all global projects managed by the hub, screen them for relevance to the region and find appropriate solutions in discussion with BPPS and CB for those that do not pass the regional relevance test.
- The development of regional projects should involve more closely CO staff. RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub could institute procedures for how the involvement of CO staff should take place in the formulation of such projects.
- RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub should develop a system by which regional projects are measured up more rigorously against the regionality principles. This process will involve the translation of principles into more practical scores/measures that allows for the rating of projects in terms of their degree of "regionality". This will also allow for a better assessment and prioritization of projects. Such a system could also be used as part of the results framework to indicate the extent to which a project meets the regionality criteria.

#### ***Recommendation 4: Improving RP's Efficiency***

- There is room for more effective coordination between resource mobilization efforts at the regional level and country level, strengthening their synergies and complementarities. The Regional Hub could consider the development of a consolidated tracking tool for resource mobilization efforts at both levels, accessible by both COs and the Regional Hub, which would show at any point in time the status of discussions and negotiations with any donor by any UNDP entity in the region. This tool could be an integral part of a more integrated planning and resource mobilization framework at the RBEC level, inclusive of all bureau components.
- The Istanbul Regional Hub could explore ways for increasing RP's share of flexible funds (especially, under the umbrella projects) that would allow for a faster and more efficient response to emerging needs.
- The Regional Hub should further clarify and communicate the criteria for execution and oversight roles among technical advisors.
- The Regional Hub should encourage greater involvement of CO staff in the development of regional projects. At the programming stage, there should be earlier engagement of CO specialists in the identification of priorities and design of regional projects. One suggestion provided by CO colleagues is to institute a requirement for the involvement of relevant CO staff. Another suggestion is for the Regional Hub to make more intensive use of detailed assignments for CO staff in the regional hub to give them greater exposure to the RP.
- Regional projects should always use the CO and the RR as the interface (and key interlocutor) for consultations and interactions with national counterparts.



### ***Recommendation 5: Delivering Integrated Interventions***

- RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub should conceive a model for the delivery of regional projects that enables more effective integration of activities. Although funding for regional project is fragmented and donor-driven, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub could create incentives for closer cooperation between project teams in the delivery of activities. Also, more multi-disciplinary approaches, including mandatory gender mainstreaming, could be used in the design of regional projects. This will also require working with donor partners and convincing them of the usefulness of multi-disciplinary approaches, especially in a regional context. The COVID-19 crisis – and the related socio-economic impact assessments – provide good foundations for pursuing more purposefully integrated approaches to regional programming.

### ***Recommendation 6: Greater Focus on Gender Equality***

- The Istanbul Regional Hub should further encourage greater gender responsiveness of regional programme activities and regional projects supported by adequate financial allocations, and proper quality assurance mechanism and accountability for realization of gender equality results.
- The Istanbul Regional Hub should strengthen overall gender capacities, especially in the area of climate change. There is also a need to strengthen the capacity for gender analysis in the formulation of project documents. There is also a need for the allocation of greater expenditures on gender responsive initiatives and activities.
- The RP will benefit from the inclusion of more advocacy initiatives engaging regional stakeholders on gender in general and in particular GBV. The RP will benefit from greater focus on Women and STEM, unpaid care work, and women in green economy.

### ***Recommendation 7: Tracking Innovations and Scaling-up***

- Given RP's focus on innovations and catalyzation, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub should deploy tools and systems that enable it to track pilot initiatives more effectively over time and way beyond the end of a project's lifetime (which is usually too short to allow for a definitive assessment of the success of pilots). As part of the monitoring and evaluation system, RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub should strengthen its planning and monitoring of pilot initiatives and their demonstration effects, so that their replicability and scaling up are monitored and supported more effectively. RBEC's Istanbul Regional Hub should focus on documenting more consistently results, lessons, experiences, and good practices so that they are shared more widely, replicated, and scaled up.