



MAYORS FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH (M4EG)

Final Evaluation Report

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1. List of acronyms and abbreviations

| | |
|----------------|--|
| CO | Country Office |
| DG NEAR | Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations |
| EaP | Eastern Partnership |
| EBRD | European Bank for Reconstruction and Development |
| EEAS | European External Action Service |
| EIB | European Investment Bank |
| EC | European Commission |
| EU | European Union |
| EQ | Evaluation Question |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussion |
| KII | Key Informant Interview |
| LA | Local Authority |
| LEADER | Linkages Between Actions for the Development of Rural Economy |
| LEDPs | Local Economic Development Plans |
| MEL | Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning |
| M4EG | Mayors for Economic Growth |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |

2. Executive summary

- I. The M4EG Initiative has been implemented since 2017 in the countries of the Eastern Partnership (EaP): Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Following the experiences during its first phase (2017-2020), the subsequent edition was launched in 2021. In the second phase (2021-2024), the UNDP was selected as the main project coordinator, working alongside the EU in the EaP Region to support mayors and municipalities in their local economic development efforts. The first phase, which attracted 396 municipalities across the region, resulted in more than 250 local economic development plans (LEDPs) being designed.
- II. In the follow-up phase (M4EG Facility), the effort focused on supporting M4EG signatories in accelerating responsive, resilient, and sustainable urban practices that foster economic opportunities and dynamic communities in all the countries except Belarus (which suspended its participation). Moreover, partner municipalities were supported in their response to challenges imposed by the ongoing war in Ukraine (relevant mainly for Ukraine and Moldova). This resulted in 433 municipalities in 5 countries participating in the project.
- III. This evaluation was commissioned by the UNDP and outsourced to an independent consultant, selected through a competitive process. It began in May 2024 and concluded in August 2024. The evaluation was performed in close collaboration with the UNDP team responsible for the M4EG initiative. The aim of this undertaking was to deliver an in-depth assessment of the results achieved by the project until July 2024. Moreover, the evaluation gathered insights allowing for the formulation of recommendations for the remaining part of the project and its next phase. This evaluation covered the project activities from the start of 2nd Phase until end of July 2024 and was conducted in 5 EaP countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. All the project components and expected outputs / outcomes to date were considered in the scope.
- IV. The objectives of evaluation were focused on assessing the capability development of local authorities, and the M4EG's initiative's ability to help generate more opportunities for its members for learning, partnerships, funding and financing. Moreover, they were oriented on identifying the needed conditions and mechanisms through which the Portfolio Journey and other deep demonstrator programmes (Urban Imaginaries, and Response and Renewal) could better and more effectively achieve their outcomes, with a view on the adaptability to rapidly changing project circumstances. In addition, assessing the likelihood of continuation, sustainability and scalability of project outputs and benefits after completion of the project was at heart of the task. The identification of weaknesses in the project design and provision of recommendations as to their improvement complemented this work. Furthermore, the cross-cutting issues, such as effects on women and vulnerable groups, and contribution to SDGs and addressing climate/environment challenges were considered.
- V. The evaluation relied on data collected through desk research, Key Informant Interviews, Focus Group Discussions, participant observation during a field mission (Moldova), surveys, and an analysis of the triangulated data, with a view to answering 28 Evaluation Questions. The target audiences of this evaluation report are the main initiative holders (M4EG project team at the UNDP), the donors (EU and UNDP), partners (authorities of the EaP countries, other organizations, investors, etc.). The findings may also be useful for the stakeholders involved in the initiative (higher education sector, non-profits, and regional implementation units of the initiative and related projects) and end-users (citizens). The findings were based on the analysis and formulated in line with the following criteria:

Relevance

The project proved to be highly relevant and well aligned with the existing needs of the participating municipalities. In many municipalities, they were actively consulted with the local population and involved the relevant partners in the process. The project greatly succeeded in introducing novel methodologies based on systems approaches for municipal development, which

were used in designing and implementing their local development plans. They collaborated closely with the UNDP and EU, where needed. The visibility of the EU as the project donor was ensured to a very good extent. The UNDP, as an implementer, was more known thanks to the very close and regular contacts with the municipal partners, its hyperlocal approach and hands on experience with each municipality.

Coherence

The project was characterized by a high degree of coherence. The visible added value of the regional approach enabled peer-to-peer learning and strengthened the voice of the region in the European arena. The added value of the approach was also visible in offering systemic solutions in response to the needs of municipalities. These needs could not be addressed solely by the M4EG project, but there is a growing interest among municipalities to use other funding sources, including loans and grants, although the absorption capacity varies. Some municipalities are already experienced with the use of diversified funding sources, while others are still lagging behind and not having sufficient capacity to look for loans and opportunities from other funding and investment frameworks. There was a perceived coherence of the project with other regional/national/international frameworks (including the Green Deal), although it was not always clear for the municipal partners how the synergies between the different programmes and frameworks were enabled with the M4EG project.

Effectiveness

The project was overall very effective. All the expected outputs were achieved to a great extent, and in some areas, over-performance was noted. The M4EG project succeeded especially in increasing the capabilities of the participants. The project had the greatest achievements in both “soft” and “hard” areas of intervention, but participants found it challenging to recognize them clearly. Some unexpected results of the project were also visible in the response to the war crises and in empowering local communities. Their representatives pointed to improved participation, governance and dialogue between the community members, and abilities to swiftly adapt to changing circumstances. The key factors enabling the success of the Portfolio Journey were flexibility in implementation, excellent communication between the people involved, a mix of soft and hard project components, access to networks, and experimentation. Inter-country exchange was especially beneficial for the peer-to-peer learning process and role modelling. There were not many areas where the project did not perform well, but there were clearly recognized constraining factors. The implementation experiences of UNDP Country Offices varied greatly, depending on their particular contexts. In some countries, the project noted quick progress, while in others, more time was needed to speed up.

Efficiency

The project was managed in an efficient and coordinated manner. The costs were justified and flexibly adapted to the changing circumstances. The UNDP project implementation strategy and execution were highly efficient and cost-effective. The project significantly contributed to increasing municipal capabilities to access finance, but these varied among the municipalities. The main difference here was the urban-rural divide, where larger municipalities appeared to be more experienced and equipped with more capacities to implement the M4EG project. In smaller rural municipalities, project finance was more challenging as well as personnel resources to work on the project implementation. The project decided to work with all the LPAs, the ones with more experience and expertise as well with smaller LPAs that have less experience. It was crucial to develop the smaller municipalities that often have much less attention from the government and financing possibilities but with the same or even bigger challenges. This represents one of the most effective ways to develop capacities.

Sustainability

There is a shared opinion that the benefits of the project will be sustainable in the long term, although in some municipalities it is less clear how. The project promoted profound changes in both tangible and less tangible results for community development. In many municipalities, infrastructure and service investments brought significant changes to the daily lives of people (for instance, better access to transport, more efficient energy infrastructure). As for the less tangible results, the project altered the ways of working at the local level, towards strengthening participatory governance mechanisms and deployment of new tools, such as Social Listening, which greatly helped to navigate and adapt to the changing circumstances in the M4EG project and beyond. Sustainability may be affected by the main social and political risks, which were indicated: wars, displacement, outmigration, lack of investors, and energy supply shortages. The project visibly strengthened the capacities of the stakeholders, which should allow them to sustain the project benefits in the long term.

Cross-cutting issues

The M4EG project had positive effects on vulnerable and marginalized groups, including women, refugees, internally displaced persons, the unemployed, and ethnic minorities. It was especially challenged by the outbreak of war in Ukraine, as well as between the two participating countries – Armenia and Azerbaijan. The disastrous events led to a massive displacement of millions of people, many of whom fled to other countries in the EaP region. This proved challenging for the original plans of the M4EG project, but it was successfully addressed with adaptation mechanisms. The project has not only been adopted to the changed situation but also pro-actively contributed to crisis response actions by setting up a new component (Output 3) and providing targeted support to war-affected municipalities. Moreover, the project contributed to a very good extent to promoting changes in gender equality through greater engagement of women in its activities. As many displaced people and refugees were women, they were a notable target group of the project. Support to marginalized groups was also provided to a great extent. Moreover, the project contributed to the planned SDGs 8 (decent work and economic growth) and 11 (sustainable cities and communities), but also to all other SDGs to a different extent and depending on the municipality context. It especially stimulated positive environmental and climate effects, while adverse effects were not observed.

VI. The evaluation report concluded with formulating the following **recommendations**:

R1 Continue and expand support for the municipalities participating in the project

The evaluation revealed that municipalities participating in the project (both broad and deep components) were interested in its continuation. It was noted in the entire EaP region that the interest exceeded the available financial and technical support opportunities. Thus, it would be recommended to continue and increase the support available under the M4EG project.

R2 Study in more depth synergies with the EU and non-EU strategic frameworks and projects

The M4EG project beneficiaries identified several projects and programmes, where they saw potential synergies, and in which some municipalities participated or were interested in. It would be thus encouraged to explore this topic in more detail indicating possible synergies, complementarities and overlaps of using funds at the local level.

R3 Promote and enable access to finance from different funding sources and its alignment with the M4EG project

It is crucial to recognize individual capabilities of the municipalities and provide them with necessary training and coaching opportunities to advance their know-how in this area, including the forthcoming investment plans in the next M4EG project phase. Information could be provided on different funding opportunities, and how they could be aligned with their strategies. Likewise, peer-to-peer learning and exchange with more experienced municipalities could be inspiring and enable transfer of relevant practices.

R4 Strengthen networking and improve the visibility of the M4EG as a regional and thematic network

The municipalities in the M4EG project created strong institutional and personal bonds with each other. A step by step evolution into network with multiple nodes became visible, yet too little articulated as such. It could be recommended to have a facilitated reflection and studying of the network lifecycle and dynamics. Likewise, the external visibility of the network could be reinforced.

R5 Nurture reflections and evaluative thinking in the municipalities

At present, in many municipalities, there is an insufficient know-how and skills to monitor the progress of the M4EG implementation. While the municipal representatives generally are able to recognize the changes or benefits the project created in their communities, often they do not notice a differences between project results, outputs, outcomes, achievements and impacts and that the project brought with. It would be recommended to strengthen these capabilities and promote self-evaluation at the local level, which could help in real-time adaptive management and ensuring project sustainability.

R6 Reexamine public procurement rules at all levels and promote relevant practices

The challenges of public procurement were noted in all the countries involved in the M4EG project. These were the legal limitations that were caused by the existing laws and institutional structures, and which proved to be inefficient to enable quick absorption of the project funding and flexibility in the view of crisis situation. It is recommended to study this topic in more depth, including legal analysis, identification and sharing of good practice examples that can be learnt from.

R7 Ensure balance of the “soft” and “hard” project components

Many of the project interviewees emphasised the importance of balanced support for both “soft” and “hard” components in the project. The investment in both increasing capabilities of participants, especially the mayors and municipal staff, and into the infrastructure and services for the local populations, were seen as the key to successful project uptake. Therefore, it is highly recommended to keep this model of working with the municipalities and equip them with necessary skills, know-how and networks to help them in the project planning, implementation and monitoring. Systems approaches were very well received and could be used further.

R8 Improve risk assessment and management strategies in municipalities

Throughout the M4EG project several risks occurred that impacted its implementation, for which no anticipatory planning was in place in municipalities. Most notably, the outbreak of wars in Ukraine, and conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan influenced the project uptake in those and other EaP countries, but also other socio-political challenges. Besides the wars, political and military conflicts, potential future risks can be linked to natural and climate-related hazards and disasters. The broadened challenges, such as possible regional war in the Middle East, can also have an impact on the EaP region. It is thus crucial to strengthen risk management and disaster preparedness in the municipalities, to ensure project sustainability.

R9 Improve the M&E framework of the project

The M4EG project’s current Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework, while relevant, has limitations in capturing the full scope of the project’s achievements. Future phases should include broader impact indicators to measure social, economic, and institutional outcomes, along with improvements in governance and civic engagement. The complexity of reporting was compounded by the involvement of other projects, raising questions of attribution and contribution to the results. To address these challenges, a more sophisticated impact evaluation

framework, along with closer collaboration with other projects and donors, is recommended for a comprehensive assessment of the project's impact.

R10 Improve monitoring of cross-cutting issues in the project

The M4EG project provided a balanced response to the needs of vulnerable and marginalised groups, including women, youth, unemployed, internally displaced, refugees (incl. refugee adults and children) and ethnic minorities. Similarly, the contribution to SDGs and climate/environment effects was detected. However, it was challenging to obtain the exact quantitative data in these areas from the project beneficiaries. Therefore, it could be recommended to monitor it better in the subsequent phase of the project, and to train and engage municipalities for this purpose.

3. Introduction

1. This independent, external evaluation of the Mayors for Economic Growth (M4EG) initiative was commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and is being conducted by an independent consultant (Anna Maria Augustyn) who was not involved into the project delivery and declares no conflict of interest. The evaluator was selected through a competitive process. The evaluation started in May 2024 and concluded in August 2024. It was performed in close collaboration with the UNDP team responsible for the M4EG initiative.
2. The main purpose of this evaluation is to provide the donors, stakeholders and beneficiaries of the initiative with an account concerning the use of funds and results achieved at the time of reporting, and to guide them for the remaining period of the implementation and follow up activities/projects.
3. The target audiences of the evaluation report include the main initiative holders (M4EG project team at the UNDP), the donors (EU), partners (authorities of the EaP countries, other organizations, investors etc.). The findings may be also useful for the stakeholders involved in the initiative (municipalities, higher education sector, non-profits, and regional implementation units of the initiatives) and end-users (citizens). The findings should be communicated in the languages accessible to each of the target audiences.
4. The evaluation examined the progress of M4EG initiative in its second phase, covering activities between January 2021 to Quarter 1 of 2024, and three outcomes of the M4EG Phase 2 in 5 countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The evaluation compared planned outputs of the initiative to actual outputs and assessed the actual results and learnings to determine their contribution to the attainment of the initiative's objectives. The evaluation extracted lessons learnt, diagnosed and analysed issues and formulated a concrete and viable set of recommendations to be implemented until the end of the initiative Phase 2 and its follow-up.
5. The content of this report is structured in line with UNDP requirements. The Executive Summary provides an overview of the objectives, findings and recommendations from the evaluation of the M4EG project. The subsequent sections introduce the reader into more details, including the project highlights and methodology of data collection and analysis. Each evaluation criteria and questions are discussed in detail and findings aligned. The conclusions summarise the main points from the project, including recommendations with a clear indications who and when could address them.

4. Description of the intervention

6. The M4EG initiative is focusing on providing comprehensive support to the emerging local economies of the Eastern Partnership countries (EaP) in meeting their developmental challenges. The first phase of M4EG initiative was launched in 2017 and concluded in 2020. The follow up, second phase, was implemented jointly by the European Union (EU) and the UNDP since 2021 to support Mayors and municipalities of the EaP countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) in becoming active facilitators for sustainable economic growth and job creation.
7. The first phase of the initiative concluded with 396 municipalities across the region committed to its objectives, and more than 250 local economic development plans (LEDPs) designed. The second phase (M4EG Facility), which was the focus of this evaluation, advanced the first phase by building synergies and avoiding duplication with other local economic development (LED) programs already underway in the region. The second phase of M4EG initiative was no longer implemented in Belarus. In total, 433 municipalities in 5 countries participated in the project.
8. During the first phase of the project, an integrated approach to local economic development planning was introduced in the participating EaP municipalities. While several plans resulted from the project, not all of them generated the desired investments for transformation. This gap was expected to be addressed with the second phase of the initiative, including an enlargement of the network (target of 350 local authorities) and disbursement of up to 70-seed-funds/innovation grants. A minimum of 12 local authorities (LAs) were intended as beneficiaries of the advanced support using a portfolio development approach.
9. Three funding facilities were made available to the local authorities in the network: the EU Call for Proposal for pilot projects (ref. 170157, 2021), Annual Portfolio Call (2022-2023), and M4EG Innovation Project Call (2021-2023). The project started in January 2021 and was foreseen to last 48 months (until December 2024). The planned budget of the project amounted to €12,094,364 (€11,800,000 EU contribution and €294,364 UNDP contribution). The initial budget was 10,294,364.00 EUR (EU contribution 10mil) and the rest was an addendum for "M4EG in crisis – RESPONSE & RENEWAL Supporting crisis response, recovery and renewal in Ukrainian and Moldovan local authorities (members of M4EG) through the establishment of an EU Response and Renewal Grant Programme for M4EG members 2022 & 2023".
10. **The Overall Objective of M4EG:** The M4EG supports local authorities in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) region (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine) in accelerating responsive, resilient, and sustainable urban practices that foster economic opportunities and dynamic communities. This focus seeks to support green and inclusive economic development in secondary towns across the EaP countries.
11. The two **Specific Objectives (SO)** of the initiative were:
 - SO1:** Support local authorities in their participation to the M4EG initiative.
 - SO2:** Support the preparation and implementation of municipal projects building on approved LEDPs.

The main objective of the initiative were expected to be achieved through three **components/outputs (O)** and their respective **activities (A)**:

 - O1:** EaP local authorities are supported in their participation to the M4EG initiative:
 - A1.1** Technical assistance to local authorities
 - A1.2** Support the members to exchange knowledge and good practices
 - A1.3** Provide strategic communication within the network

O2: Municipal pilot projects building on existing LEDPs are successfully implemented:

A2.1 Fund criteria development

A2.2 Activating the portfolio

A2.3 Investment insights

O3: Ukraine crisis emergency and refugee response, recovery, and resilience (added in 2022)

A3.1. Ukraine initial crisis response

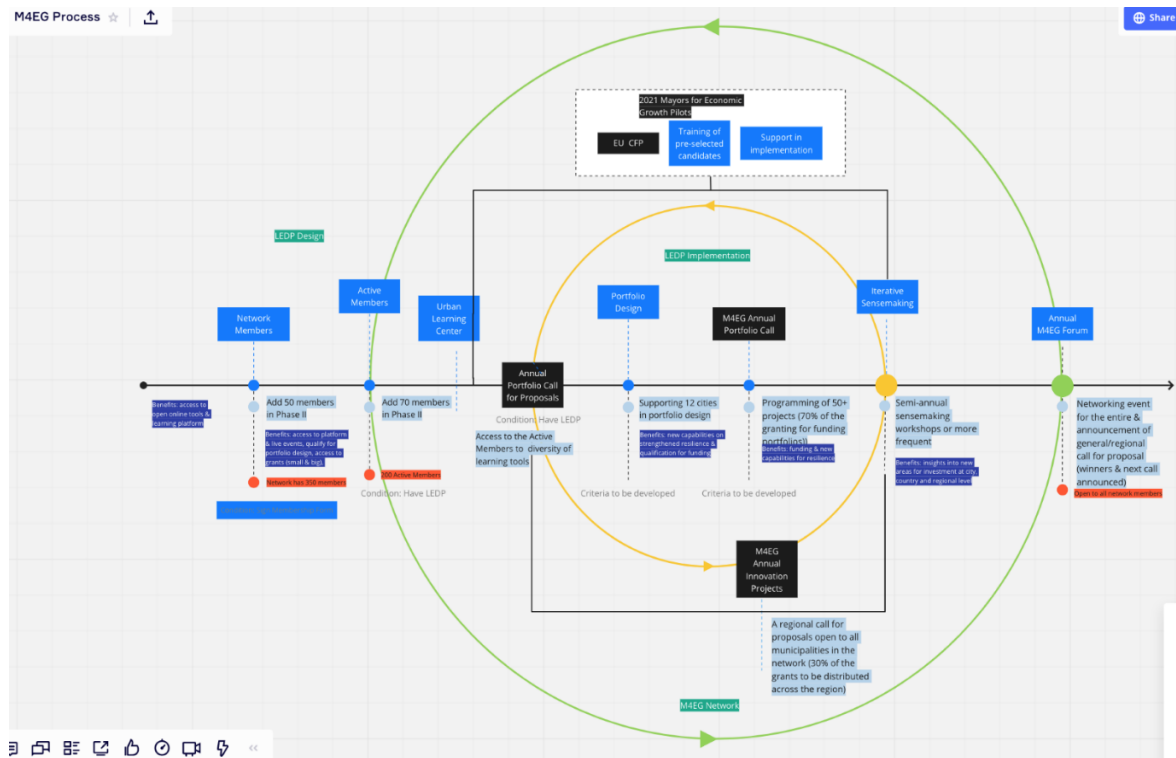
A3.2. Moldova refugee response

A3.3. Response and Renewal Programme

12. The second phase of the initiative built directly on the results and lessons learnt from the first phase. The novelty of the second phase lied in creating the opportunities for LAs to explore how to apply a strategic innovation framework with new tools and methods, such as for instance deep listening, co-creation with diverse groups of stakeholders, innovators, investors, and public servants, and activating portfolios and managing them in a dynamic way. This altogether allowed for an active design of bankable projects to attract private sector and other forms of financing, while simultaneously developing capabilities in local authorities.
13. The UNDP Innovation team of Istanbul Regional Hub served as the Secretariat for the M4EG and provided management support and leadership for the initiative. The activities were implemented in a close collaboration with the network of UNDP partners, including Ove Arup in a consortium with Climate KIC and TalTech, which were responsible for the delivery of the major components of the initiative. The UNDP COs in the EaP countries provided support and expertise in the local programming, to enable efficient and effective cooperation with local authorities and local government associations.
14. The project was oriented on contributing to the UNDP cross-cutting issues, including SDGs, women and vulnerable groups, promoting gender equality and empowerment of women. Poor and physically challenged women, men and other disadvantaged groups (such as ethnic minorities) participated in the project. Specifically, several municipalities benefitting from the M4EG participation had significant rural populations, which were affected by the project. In the unexpected turn, the project had to deal with the challenges triggered by the wars between Russia and Ukraine, and between Armenia and Azerbaijan. These led to increased vulnerability of the populations and mass movements of citizens, i.e. internally displaced persons and refugees. The war crisis and instabilities impacted the entire EaP region. In its essence, the project attempted to leave none of the vulnerable groups behind, and ensure that human rights principles were respected. Furthermore, the project made some visible contributions to the climate and environmental challenges.
15. The M4EG project was designed as a novel approach to tackling development challenges at the municipality level, which were not sufficiently addressed in the first Phase. The innovation was visible in the use of systems thinking and action, and in increasing capabilities of the beneficiaries to tackle their local issues in a systemic manner. The project offered an alternative approach to the conventional Theory of Change (ToC) and intervention logic, and the typical result-oriented management framework. It proved to be challenging for the status quo in several municipalities and introduced profound changes in their ways of working. This included an intense training and learning through the peer-to-peer process jointly with countries in the EaP region. The municipalities were equipped with the new working models and triggered visible changes in their engagement with the local communities and stakeholders, through an increasing use of participatory processes and decision making.
16. In the place of ToC, an iterative and dynamic system approach was taken to the project design and implementation. The goal was to provide systems lens into the complex challenges, rather than linear solutions. The design of portfolios was then carried out with a view on the

connected interventions and developing a framework for increasing capabilities and adaptive management. The figure below presents an overview of the systems approach in M4EG project, including its boundaries. This includes the key components of the project, main events and network members, characterized by a different degree of engagement in the project.

Figure 1 Overview of the systems approach in M4EG project



17. The M4EG project was accompanied by the Monitoring and Evaluation and Results Framework as described in the original proposal, which has largely remained unchanged throughout the project implementation. The current phase was designed following the findings from the Result Oriented Monitoring Report of the Phase I. Looking back at the crucial findings from that exercise, it can be stated that the follow up project successfully addressed the needs identified at that stage, especially empowering local authorities to address key issues linked with strengthening local economic conditions, strengthening the financial support to local authorities, sharing new knowledge, inspiring and adopting good practices across the regions. However, the project had still a limited progress in building trust and cooperation within the government (between ministries) and between the government and the private sector, which were suggested at the inception stage.
18. The Monitoring & Evaluation & Results Framework proposed by the project included identification of the relevant risks and indicators to enable its progress monitoring and evaluation. Most of the project risks indicated materialized throughout its implementation and had a visible influence on its performance. These concerned especially the COVID-19 and its consequences for the municipalities and countries of the EaP region, and the need of the project to adapt to the lockdowns, economic pressures (such as currency and prices' inflation), and availability of people to participate in the project activities. Increased civic tensions and re-emergence of conflict in the EaP region (especially the war in Ukraine), posed challenges to the project implementation, however, did not substantially decrease interest in project

activities. In turn, the project was effectively streamlined and supported with additional funding to manage the response and recovery of the affected communities.

19. The monitoring and evaluation were carried out in accordance with the respective plan, activated in the Corporate information management system – ATLAS and updated at regular intervals to track the key management actions/events. Based on the initial risk analysis, a risk log was activated and regularly updated. The Regional Project Steering Committee was involved in the supervision of this process. The M&E functions were supported with lessons-learned log in a regular manner to ensure continuous organizational learning and adaptation of methodological approach of this project, which was using a mix of systems approaches with a standard UNDP project management framework. The UNDP team, together with partners participated in the regular feedback sessions, enabling timely monitoring of the project progress. Regular sensemaking at the country level and the regional level contributed to the real-time learning on the assets, resources and capabilities generated within the project.

20. The project documentation provided insights on a six-month basis from the activities at the country level and the regional level. Reporting was delivered in line with the Article 3 of the General Conditions (Annex II to the Contribution Agreement) and consisted of the Annual Progress Reports. The results framework contained a list of impact, outcome and output indicators, which were measured at the different stages of the project completion, as follows:

Impact Indicator 1.1: - Increased % employment rate in the EaP countries attributable in part to participation in the initiative (targeting all municipalities)

Impact Indicator 1.2: 15+ women employment rate in the EaP countries (targeting all municipalities)

Outcome Indicator 1.1 Increased number of local authorities whose initiatives, building on systems approaches, are interconnected within each portfolio (targeting the 12 municipalities implementing the portfolio approach)

Outcome indicator 2.1 - Increased % of local authorities staff that have applied good practices from other municipalities (targeting all the local authorities who participate in the initiative)

Output Indicator 1.1: Number of cities having signed up to the initiative

Output Indicator 1.2: Number of LEDPs designed following the M4EG guidelines based on their added value

Output Indicator 1.3: Number of staff trained on innovative learning approaches (portfolio, system thinking)

Output Indicator 1.4 Number of events organised per year aimed at exchanging best practices and networking (such as local business days, thematic workshops, regional conferences, etc.)

Output indicator 1.5: Number of advocacy and outreach initiatives conducted to increase awareness of citizens about EU support to local authorities in selected countries

Output Indicator 2.1 : Number of local authorities that have implemented portfolio methodology

Output Indicator 2.2: Number of small scale local level pilot projects on specific issues (i.e. innovation, gender equality) selected

21. Where available, the indicators were accompanied with the baseline, against which the progress was measured. For all indicators, the project achieved or exceeded the expectations and evidence collected, as well as the methodology used for this purpose, were well-suited. However, due to the multifaceted project areas of intervention and the focus on systems solutions to the local challenges, the real picture of its achievements cannot be fully captured with the limited number of the originally suggested indicators.

22. Moreover, the impact indicators are merely focused on the employment of the local population and women, but there is a methodological risk related to the project attribution vs. contribution and would require a more careful examination, which was beyond the scope of this evaluation task. The project can certainly deliver information about the number of jobs created, however, given the possible population and demographic changes, as well as multiple intervening factors, the measurement of this change would require more attention to details, including cross-check with other projects or investments in the respective areas. Moreover, specifying the employment type can be complex, given the different modalities for hiring workers (including remote and free-lance work). Therefore, it would be recommended to update the impact evaluation framework for the project, with a view to capture this complexity and impacts in other possible areas in which the project demonstrated achievements.

5. Evaluation scope and objectives

23. Evaluation scope

This evaluation covered the project activities from the start of 2nd Phase until end of July 2024 and was conducted in 5 EaP countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The assessment considered all the project components and expected outputs / outcomes.

Figure 2 Overview of the M4EG project geographic and thematic scope



24. Evaluation objectives

The objectives of the evaluation were the following:

- The evaluation focused in particular on capability development of local authorities, and the M4EG's initiative's ability to help generate more opportunities for its members for learning, partnerships, funding and financing.
- Given the adaptive nature of the project, the evaluation focused on identifying the needed conditions and mechanisms through which the Portfolio Journey and other deep demonstrator programmes (Urban Imaginaries, and Response and Renewal) could better and more effectively achieve their outcomes. It also identified the mechanisms that are triggered in different context to produce the outcomes.
- A key feature evaluated was the M4EG's ability, including its adaptability, to address existing and future needs of local authorities.
- Assessing the likelihood of continuation, sustainability and scalability of project outputs and benefits after completion of the project (how the deep-demo municipalities' capacity and internal systems have been changed and modified to support the sustainability of the efforts)
- Identifying gaps/weaknesses in the project design and provide recommendations as to their improvement.
- Identifying project intended or unintended contribution to promote positive changes for women and vulnerable groups.
- Assessing what the role of CO's was throughout the implementation, how it could be further reshaped to increase efficiencies.

25. Evaluation criteria

This evaluation built upon proposed by the UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation¹ as well as the UNDP Evaluation Guidelines². The ToR described the main expectations and conditions for conducting this assignment. The initial review of the project documentation provided an outlook on the available data and existing data gaps. It became visible that the project team has so far invested a visible effort into collection of data related to the progress in the project implementation as well as regular feedback on the different aspects of the project. The availability of data for desk review was abundant and met high quality standards. The evaluation questions prioritized some of the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability)³, and the cross-cutting issues as required by the UN evaluations.

26. Evaluation questions

The evaluation questions were structured according to the OECD DAC Criteria and UN cross-cutting issues:

Relevance

- To what extent has the initiative been appropriately responsive to the needs of local authorities in the Eastern Partnership, and changing partner priorities?
- Has the project succeeded with introducing novel working methodologies in the countries/cities?
- To what extent the project promoted a positive image of the role of the European Union at the local level?

Coherence

- What has been the value added (or not) of a regional project approach?
- As the M4EG has embraced a system thinking lens and approach (portfolio approach/mission-oriented economy and innovation) in supporting municipalities, what is the value add expressed by participating municipalities and partners?
- Which areas are the most relevant and strategic areas for the M4EG to scale up or be more intentional about going forward?
- What was the project's coherence with the other regional, national and international policy / investment frameworks (esp. Green Deal)?

Effectiveness

- What have been the key results and changes attained for the local authorities actively engaging in the initiative?
- Specifically on capabilities: To what extent has the M4EG, including its Urban Learning Center, the Portfolio Journey, Urban Imaginaries Programme, and Response and Renewal programme improved the capabilities of local authorities?
- Have there been any unexpected output and outcome-level results, and others spill-over effects achieved beyond the planned?
- What are the needed conditions and mechanism through which the Portfolio Journey can effectively contribute to the project outcomes? What mechanisms are triggered in different context to produce the outcome (or fail to)?
- In which areas does the project have the greatest achievements? Why and what have been the supporting factors? How can the project build on or expand these achievements?

¹ UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation <https://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914>

² UNDP Evaluation Guidelines https://erc.undp.org/pdf/UNDP_Evaluation_Guidelines.pdf

³ OECD DAC Criteria <https://www.oecd.org/development/evaluation/dacriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

- In which areas does the project have the fewest achievements? What have been the constraining factors and why? How can or could they be overcome?
- How did the inter-country exchange contribute to different aspects of implementation and outcomes?
- What are the learnings from different CO implementation approaches?
- How effective were the M4EG UNDP's knowledge and learning systems?

Efficiency

- To what extent has the UNDP project implementation strategy and execution been efficient and cost-effective?
- To what extent have the M4EG phase 2 increased the active member's opportunities for partnership and funding and financing?

Sustainability

- To what extent are learning practices and tools utilized by the project team to adapt the programming to changing circumstances to deliver on planned results and effects beyond, and how are these learnings shared further?
- Are there any social or political risks that may jeopardize sustainability of project outputs?
- What is the likelihood that the benefits from the project will be maintained for a reasonably long period of time after the project phases out?
- Will the level of stakeholders' ownership and strengthened capacities be sufficient to allow for the project benefits to be sustained?

Cross-cutting issues

- Did any unintended effects emerge for women or vulnerable groups?
- To what extent has the project promoted positive changes in gender equality and the empowerment of women?
- To what extent have poor, indigenous and physically challenged, women, men and other disadvantaged and marginalized groups benefited from the project
- How did the crisis and instabilities (both in-country and cross-border) have impacted the implementation and outcomes?
- How effective was the project's contribution to the respective SDGs?
- Were there any positive / adverse environmental effects resulting from the project?

6. Evaluation approach and methods

27. Evaluation approach

This evaluation relied on the **mixed method approach**. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were utilized for gathering necessary content to evaluate the M4EG initiative. Primary and secondary data sources were considered. A strong emphasis was on understanding the narratives of the project participants. The evaluation was supported with the Evaluation Matrix, which is presented in more detail in the subsequent chapter. The evaluation questions are derived from the ToR and include both project specific as well as the cross-cutting issues of relevance for the UNDP and project beneficiaries. The cross-cutting issues focus on gender, environment and social changes resulting from the project (affecting vulnerable and marginalized groups). Moreover the “do no harm” and avoiding adverse impacts were the important principles of this assignment, in line with the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation⁴.

28. The M4EG initiative applied a very novel approach, using systems thinking and Portfolios, which was challenging the traditional ways of implementing projects and initiatives, based on sectoral and linear modes of intervention. The foundations of the Portfolio approach were explained in the UNDP Portfolio Primer, providing an overview for the strategic organizational shift from projects to portfolios, which is mentioned in the UNDP current strategy.⁵ This highly novel approach replaced also the traditional Theory of Change and Intervention Logic, which was reviewed in this evaluation.
29. There was a visible emphasis on networking, collaboration and learning experiences in solving the complex problems of the involved municipalities in the EaP countries. Therefore, the evaluation used a systemic inquiry to better understand these phenomena in relation with the project, and identifying the clear outputs, indicators, baselines and data for this purpose. The possible implications of the following methodology were a revision of the project delivery model, and reinforcement of the learning within the project team.
30. Moreover, this evaluation focused on examining the cross-cutting issues in the implemented project and evaluation methodology. These were particularly relevant for the gender and marginalized groups. Intersectionality⁶ and leaving none behind⁷ principles were applied. The methods of data collection were especially concentrated on balancing the sample breakdown, according to the gender and societal groups representation, and to the available resources (funds, time, language) for this evaluation. The data collection tools included the questions to disaggregate following these criteria. Similarly, this was applied in the analysis and formulation of the evaluation findings.
31. As the project has been implemented in the context of increasing regional and transnational socio-political vulnerability, it was also important to evaluate the peace and conflict challenges encountered in its implementation and the future outlooks. In particular, the project was extended by an additional component for crisis response (Output 3), which included several important activities with the Response and Renewal Grant Programme being the central part. For these additional activities the project received top-up funding from the donor (EU). These aspects were reflected upon throughout the data collection.
32. Furthermore, the evaluation examined the project’s contribution to the respective SDGs and possible effects on the environment and climate. In this context, it was also particularly

⁴ UNEG (2020): Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation.

⁵ UNDP (2022) Primer: Portfolio Approach. From Projects to Portfolios.

⁶ UN Women (2021): Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit: An Intersectional Approach to Leave No One Behind.

⁷ UNDP (2018): What Does It Mean To Leave No One Behind? A UNDP discussion paper and framework for implementation.

relevant to look at the alignment of the project with the leading national and transnational frameworks, especially the Green Deal priorities selected by the countries. Several project sites (e.g. Kutaisi and Ceadir Lunga) have actively embraced upon these challenges and the evaluation was focused upon them in more detail.

33. Data sources

The evaluation findings are based on the diversified data sources, using **triangulation** for calibrating the conclusions. The following evaluation methods will be used for the data collection:

- **Desk research** (DR) was performed at the initial stage of the evaluation and the information was used as a benchmark in the process. It principally relied on the internal project documents, relevant strategies, project website and media. Additional documents were consulted (for instance, policy strategies), where necessary to gain further insights. The results of desk research were also used as a preliminary background for the development of the guides for the Focus Group Discussions, and Key Informant Interviews.
- **Key Informant Interviews** (KIIs) were conducted with the UNDP project team representatives, project partners, mayors, key personnel of the public administration and the EU representatives. The KII respondents were identified at the project inception phase during the desk research and consultations with the project management team. The KII guide was elaborated, taking into consideration the evaluation questions and criteria. The questions in the guide were adjusted according to the institutional affiliation of the respondents.
- **Focus Group Discussions** (FGDs), were conducted with the project team and partners. The facilitation methods were both virtual and/or face-to-face during field visits. The facilitation methods were both standard questions and participatory, enabling an exchange of know-how and mutual learning. The facilitation method drew on the systemic inquiry and outcome harvesting, with strong focus on learning experience for the participants. A balanced representation of the respondents, including gender/marginalized groups representatives, was considered.
- **Site Visit** (1) was undertaken, in order to get directly familiar with the results of initiative in the respective countries. A visit to Moldova, provided an opportunity to meet the UNDP Country Office, mayors, and municipal staff of several cities.
- **Survey** (OS) in 8 municipalities (Areni, Batumi, Ceadir-Lunga, Gyumri, Khirdalan, Kutaisi, Mykolaiv, and Ternopil) was conducted by the UNDP. The case municipalities were selected with a view on their advanced progress in the project implementation. The survey was addressed to the local populations, benefitting from the project interventions. A general bank of survey questions were translated and then adapted by UNDP Country Offices based on their judgement of the local context, leading to slight differences in the surveys administered in each city. The survey was started prior to the evaluation, to support the reflection process, and then utilized in the evaluation to reflect the voices and narratives of the communities from the portfolio cities.

34. Sample and sampling frame

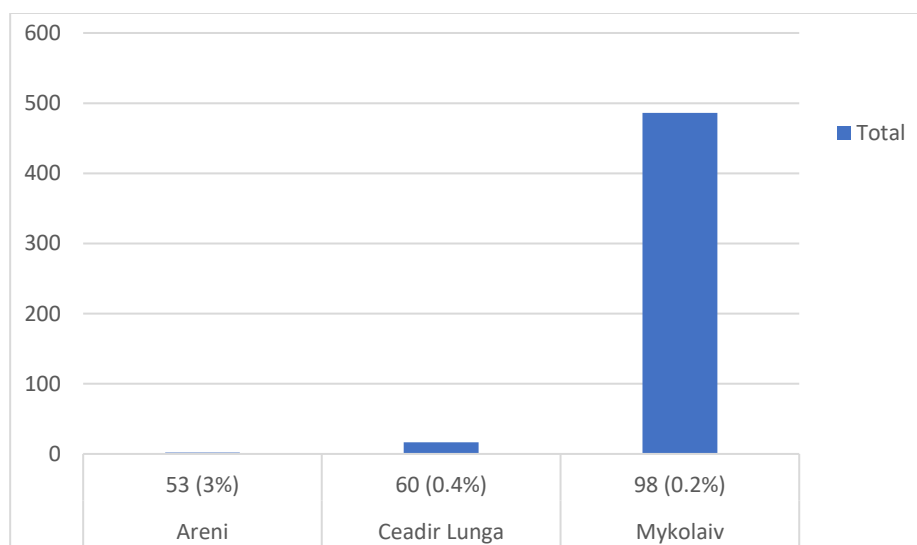
The UNDP provided the evaluator with a list of the project team and partners involved. This included 136 local representatives engaged in the project implementation in the EaP countries, 7 representatives of the UNDP IRH, 5 representatives of the UNDP COs, 8 representatives of DG NEAR and the EU Delegations, 4 implementing partners, and 4 other local partners. 11 FGDs were facilitated with the municipalities (one face-to-face in Moldova, others online). KIIs were addressed to mayors and their municipal staff, UNDP and EU representatives, and main partners. The contributions were sought in the following order, through a purposive sampling strategy:

- **11 FGDs** with the main project implementers (5 from UNDP, 4 from municipalities, 1 from other partners)
- **1 field visit** to Moldova, during which 1 FGD was held, as well as interviews and site visit to the areas affected by the project
- **25 KIIs** with the country teams, among which 5 UNDP Focal Points from COs, representatives from the 5 EU delegations, and mayors
- **1 FGD and 2 KIIs** with the other project partners

In total, 70 respondents participated in the KIIs and FGDs, out of which 28 women and 42 men. Among them, 38 represented municipalities (mayors, deputy mayors and administrative staff), while 32 people recruited from the UNDP, EU and partners' staff.

35. Prior to the evaluation, a survey was conducted by the UNDP with the citizens of 8 communities affected by the project implementation, out of which 3 were selected for the in-depth case studies (Areni, Ceadir-Lunga and Mykolaiv). The sample considered the differing size/type of municipalities and their populations: Areni - 11,784, Ceadir-Lunga: 16,605, and Mykolaiv (for which it was difficult to have precise estimate due to the war and rapid population decline) – currently around 430,000 people. The responses were collected from 211 people in total. The figure below presents an overview of the entire population size in each municipality in relation with the sample size. It can be considered that the results from the smaller population (Areni) were closer to the representative picture than the others, where a marginal fraction of populations provided answers.

Figure 3 Overview of the population sampling in the M4EG 3 case studies



Efforts were made to engage diverse segments of the community and the team acknowledged that the reliance on voluntary self-selection and municipal invitation to gather respondents, left open the risk of selection bias in responses. It was also noted that in each city a small minority of the respondents were themselves the municipal employees (albeit not necessarily those working on the M4EG programme). The survey was looking into the Portfolio Journey and how the different framing and new methodology applied with the 10 portfolio cities have affected them. It was focusing on the angle of "Beyond Growth" – seeing if the system lens has given the cities an opportunity to think beyond the traditional economic growth narrative in their portfolios and see what early signals of change we can see in these cities.

There were two parts of the survey: one for municipality staff and one for the communities. However, when the UNDP and Demos Helsinki started to implement it, they realized that it was too early to have community surveys with all the portfolios. Thus, only the cohort 1 (5 cities that started their journey first (Areni, Ceadir-Lunga, Mykolaiv, Batumi, Kutaisi) aimed to do the community survey and the rest (cohort 2 cities that were still in deep implementation mode) only filled the municipal survey. The municipal staff survey was shared with all staff members who were involved with the portfolios and that number was different in each city case. With the community survey, the team was aiming to cover a part of community that were exposed to the project activities (either through community engagement or lived in the areas, where activities were done). Municipalities reached out to them to collect their answers through the Google form after the COs translated them in local languages, and the aim was to collect 50-100 replies. In result, some of the municipalities were able to collect more than others. Only Areni, Mykolaiv and Ceadir-Lunga mobilised high enough number of participants and thus the focus was shifted on their community answers in the analysis done by Demos Helsinki. In addition, trust issues emerged for local authorities while collecting feedback, as well as some nuances in the translation for open questions. The analysis was done in Google sheets by Demos Helsinki and the results were treated as early signals of community voices for the change they saw, felt and experienced. Collecting feedback by the municipalities, as the project implementing partners, could affect the results compared to a data collection by an independent evaluator.

36. Stakeholder participation

The evaluation ensured participation of both men and women, which were given an equal chance to contribute. However, it has to be emphasised that it was difficult to ensure a balanced representation of mayors by gender in the project as majority of them were male.

37. Ethical considerations

The evaluation considered the measures taken to protect the rights and confidentiality of informants, in line with the UNEG 'Ethical Guidelines for Evaluators' for more information).⁸ Participants were asked their consent about contributing to the evaluation and recording. The detailed data of participants were not made public, however, given the specific target groups, they may be recognizable (i.e. there is only one mayor per municipality).

38. Major limitations of the methodology

The evaluation relied on the vast data, collected with both qualitative and quantitative methods and tools. The main challenge associated with this task was the short time for the forthcoming summer break that could jeopardize timely availability of the respondents, some of whom had very busy schedules. Secondly, due to the rotations of the elected citizens (mayors and their staff), there was a risk that their history of participation in this project could be insufficient to provide long-term overviews of the changes and perspectives for the future. However, this appeared to be rather marginal among the surveyed in this evaluation. Additionally, the sample population addressed through the primary data collection was relatively low, thus it was challenging to provide robust quantitative data to be extrapolated for the analysis.

39. A recent survey was conducted by the UNDP examining the outcomes of the project on the local populations (end users) in the selected municipalities and the result of this were considered in the desk study. Moreover, the survey was addressed to the municipal staff and teams. Municipality staff were surveyed in Areni, Gyumri, Kapan, Mykolaiv and Ternopil where there were 2-15 responses in each city (relatively low numbers, limiting the statistical robustness). Furthermore, the methodological challenges were associated with the

⁸ UNEG, 2020, Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation: <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/2866>

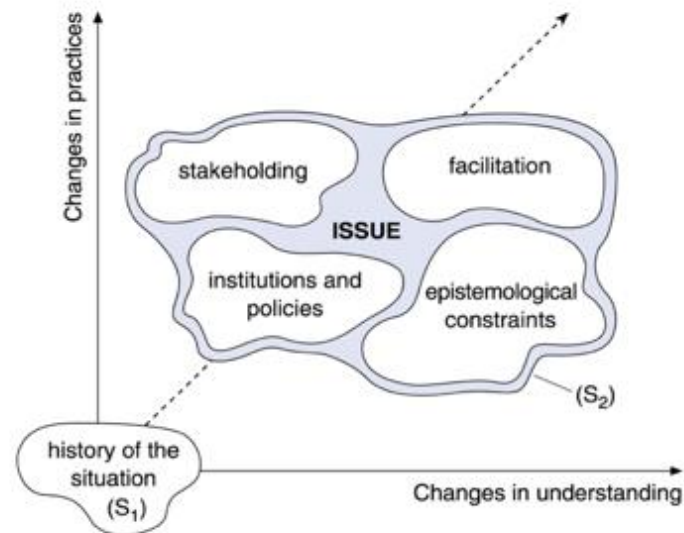
selection of the case studies to deliver deeper insights in the success or unintended outcomes or learnings of the initiatives. The decision for the selection was especially focused on looking at the municipalities which demonstrated a faster progress with the implementation within the M4EG project lifetime. As each region and selected portfolio with the M4EG initiative was unique, the extrapolation of findings could be limited.

40. Moreover, given the current surveys with both citizens and project staff, it was decided to not launch an additional survey for the purposes of this evaluation as this could cause the respondents' fatigue from the frequent assessments. Likewise, the limited digital skills of the respondents, were a significant obstacle for this process. Therefore, the evaluation put more emphasis in reaching out to them directly through interviews and focus group discussions, which provided more opportunities to reflect and learn together.

7. Data analysis

41. Since the project was strongly rooted in the systems approaches, this evaluation used the **systemic inquiry** as an overarching methodological approach. The essence of this evaluation method, originating in systems science, is recognizing the importance of social learning process, which aims at addressing a complex situation of interest. In this case, the challenge is the economic development of municipalities participating in the M4EG initiative. The systemic inquiry was focusing on examining the various changes that result from the intervention: changes in understandings and in practices. Moreover, the trajectories of changes and enabling / constraining factors of transformation were examined. The visualization below presents an approximated overview of the relation between changes in practice and understanding using the systems angle and enablers/constraints in solving the issue, which were applied in a similar fashion in this evaluation.

Figure 4 Relation between changes in practice and understanding



Source: Based on Ison, 2014⁹

42. In addition, the evaluation put a strong emphasis on examining the learning process and its outcomes. It assumes that the M4EG participants represent multiple perspectives and negotiate shared understanding of the complex problem they intend to solve. The underlying foundation of this approach is understanding that none of them cannot solve the problem alone, but only through the interactions and collaborations with each other. To this end, the Portfolio Journey implemented in the M4EG initiative offers a concerted response addressing the intertwined development challenges and perspectives of the multiple actors engaged. The core activity aimed at systems change is thus activating the social and peer-to-peer learning processes, which in this evaluation will be examined as follows:

- **Single loop learning:** are we doing things right?
- **Double loop learning:** are we doing the right things?
- **Triple loop learning:** what is right?

⁹ Ison R. (2014), Training in systems thinking, Humboldt University of Berlin

43. In the evaluation process, attention was paid to understanding of the participants' narratives, which were highly embedded in their local context. The main challenge here was the translation of the complex evaluation language into the understandings of beneficiaries. For instance, during the interviews and focus group discussions it became apparent that respondents (especially from the municipalities) were not sufficiently clear about the differences between the project outputs, outcomes, achievements, benefits and changes in the long term. This was challenging for delivering evidence on the specific requirements as listed in the ToR.

8. Findings

Relevance

EQ1 *To what extent has the initiative been appropriately responsive to the needs of local authorities in the Eastern Partnership, and changing partner priorities?*

45. The M4EG initiative was strongly oriented on recognizing the needs of local authorities and their priorities, including those emerging with the crisis circumstances. The overall project delivery was thus organized into three main components: (1) BROAD EaP M4EG signatory municipalities¹⁰ are supported in their participation to the M4EG initiative; (2) DEEP Municipal pilot projects building on existing LEDPs that are successfully implemented; and (3) Ukraine Crisis Emergency and Refugee Response, Recovery, and Resilience.
46. The participating municipalities are characterized by a high diversity in terms of their socio-economic conditions. Therefore, in the project, a strong emphasis was put on studying their particular contexts and ways to respond, while designing the interventions. According to the interviewees (mayors and municipal teams), the approaches taken to assessing the municipalities' needs varied from case to case. In some of them, wide consultations were organized with the local populations and their representatives, using the tools promoted by the M4EG project or similar. In others, the process was managed by an expert team, as suited. In result, each participating municipality was able to design their desired model of intervention to benefit from the M4EG project, and many were actively using participatory and co-design approaches as promoted with the Portfolios and Urban Imaginaries.
47. Based on the interviews, there is a shared agreement, that in each municipality the project adapted to the existing needs and accordingly the project delivery approaches were chosen locally. In several municipalities, which were affected by the unexpected risks (especially the war in Ukraine, Armenia and Azerbaijan), the rapidly emerging new challenges and local needs had to shift the focus of the project operations towards crisis response. This was particularly visible with regard to the challenge of supporting the internally displaced persons in Ukraine and refugees from Ukraine, which affected the EaP region.
48. For instance, more than 1 mln refugees from Ukraine arrived in Moldova, a country with 2.5 million inhabitants and lacking even basic facilities to accommodate such a large foreign population. Therefore, the project was actively reoriented on supporting refugees from Ukraine in this country in the immediate response to the crisis. High-level decisions were also taken by the EU and UNDP coordination team on using the EU funding to deal with this emergency and top up the project with additional budget. Later on, the M4EG project was also streamlined towards providing long-term adaptation to the needs of the affected populations, such as integration of refugees in Moldova. In Ukraine, changing economic capacities due to the significant losses in number of inhabitants became also a serious concern for the participating municipalities, e.g. in Nizhyn, where lack of workforce creates visible challenges for the local economy and provision of services.

Finding 1: *The M4EG Initiative was very well aligned with the existing needs of the participating municipalities.*

EQ2 *Has the project succeeded with introducing novel working methodologies in the countries/cities?*

49. The project introduced a range of highly innovative working methods, which are largely rooted in systems thinking. Besides participation in the Portfolios and Urban Imaginaries, beneficiaries became exposed to a variety of approaches aiming at increasing their

¹⁰ Signatory municipalities, are the one that joined the M4EG network after completing the applying form and the signatory survey.

participation and strengthening the ownership of the project results. Most interviewees (mayors, municipality staff) agreed that these approaches were highly novel in their context, while in a few cases they helped to build on or consolidate existing similar approaches (e.g. in Lviv, Mykolaiv, Urva).

50. There were also visible spillover mechanisms. In several municipalities activities were undertaken to promote the M4EG approaches in other projects or larger planning efforts at the municipality level. In particular, sensemaking was considered a useful approach with its strong participatory component, which was taken forward in the planning efforts and by engaging the local communities. It helped understand better the needs of local populations. Moreover, respondents in Armenia and Ukraine noted that the project approaches could be used in projects with funding from other donors. However, despite submitting the grant applications, they have not yet succeeded due to the highly novel character of the approaches, which challenge the conventional project delivery models. The respondents understood it as the lack of readiness on the side of specific donors to work with the novel methods.
51. Another important aspect, mentioned in most of the countries, was the investment into the infrastructure, which provided visible improvements in lives of the local populations. During the field mission in Moldova, this was documented in detail. Several investments were presented in Ceadir-Lunga, Copceac and Cimislia municipalities, which included improved energy management systems, bus transport, local business incubation, kindergarden facilities, refugee support center and a theatre promoting local cultural heritage. According to the interviewees from the municipalities, the importance of infrastructure investments the precondition to have a better project outreach in the local communities. It was argued that for the citizens it is important to have tangible project results and improvements in the services as they do not always go into details or understand the project logic. This kind of investments allow to enhance the credibility of local authorities responsible for the project delivery in the eyes of its end-users.

Finding 2: The project has greatly succeeded with introducing novel methodologies based on systems approaches for the municipal development.

EQ3 *To what extent the project promoted a positive image of the role of the European Union at the local level?*

52. As part of the project, a Communication and Visibility plan was developed by the project management team. It was concentrated on the ways to jointly communicate the project goals, objectives, outputs and results to the relevant beneficiaries, partners and stakeholders, as well as to the general public in the EaP countries. Another important goal was to acknowledge the EU role in enhancing economic inclusive growth and job creation in the region by supporting local authorities. A range of communication and dissemination activities was conducted throughout the M4EG implementation to achieve these goals. These included both passive and interactive means of communication and reaching out to the planned target audiences.
53. High-profile and regular public events were organised to draw public attention to the project milestones (announcements of grants projects and intermediate and summary events of the funded projects). Public campaigns allowed to reach out to the beneficiaries directly and raising the awareness. An important tool were also the M4EG website, corporate EU and UNDP websites and social media accounts in the EaP countries, used for disseminating information about the M4EG project and its implementation progress. The review of the project planning and progress documents in this area revealed a very structured approach and clear verifiable performance targets and suitable indicators to support them.
54. According to the interviewees (EU and UNDP staff, mayors and municipal staff), the project contributed greatly to promoting the positive image of the EU at the local level. The

communication activities were performed in line with the respective guidelines and respective of the audience types. Particularly, strong representation of the EU across produced media pieces was proved, including the agreed visual and textual information about the role of the EU as the project donor. For instance, during the field mission in Moldova, it was visible that the information about the EU support was shared and visible in the local communities. They were able to recognize the importance of the EU in contributing financially to the project. The specific contribution was highlighted on the information tables displayed in the project locations (e.g. on buildings and vehicles). Moreover, interviewees in different municipalities across the EaP region were aware of the projects' contributions against the background of other projects and funding mechanisms that were implemented in their communities.

Figure 5 Example of information table containing information about the EU support to the M4EG project in Ceadir-Lunga



55. There was a very clear attribution of the project outputs and outcomes to the M4EG and during the interviews several mayors and municipal staff expressed their gratitude for the project support. No negative feedback was received in this respect. Therefore, it can be considered that the project communication was very successful and positive image of the EU was greatly strengthened. However, some respondents argued that the visibility of the EU was less pronounced than the UNDP, which was interacting with the beneficiaries more frequently and closely throughout the project delivery.

Finding 3: The visibility of the EU was ensured to a very good extent, while the UNDP was more known as the project implementer among the beneficiaries.

Coherence

Q4 What have been the value added (or not) of a regional project approach?

56. All interviewees agreed there was an added value in the regional project approach. Involvement of the EaP countries in a joint initiative was considered especially useful, given similar characteristics, challenges and their progress with the EU accession. On the other hand, it was also noted that working together as a region improved the visibility and voicing of the needs that the EaP countries had, which could have been less pronounced if working separately.
57. Participants benefitted especially from the peer-to-peer learning opportunities, where experiences were shared from one country to another. Transferring good practices and avoiding common mistakes were also considered as valuable. The opportunities were enabled through joint events, in-person and virtual learning and site visits. It was important for them to meet their peers, who shared similar challenges in their communities and inspired each other towards possible solutions. Moreover, it was crucial to understand what were the capacities in each country and municipality, which translated into the acquisition of grant. The budget allocated for the grants stimulated competition between the countries. In result, the number of engaged municipalities per country does not necessarily reflect their total numbers.

Finding 4: The added value of the regional approach enabled peer-to-peer learning and strengthening the voice and visibility of the region.

Q5 *As the M4EG has embraced a system thinking lens and approach (portfolio approach/mission-oriented economy and innovation) in supporting municipalities, what is the value added expressed by participating municipalities and partners?*

58. There was a widespread agreement among the municipal respondents that the systems thinking lens and associated approaches provided an added value for the municipalities (including local authorities and their partners). The interviewees especially emphasized their learning experiences, which happened at many levels: within the project team, at the level of municipalities, and at the regional level (between the participating municipalities from different countries). The novel system-based approaches challenged conventional thinking about the project design and delivery mechanisms and provided opportunities to address the local needs and challenges in a multidimensional way, and through engaging with the citizens in a more participatory way than previously. The standard Intervention Logic / Theory of Change was challenged with a novel, complex and dynamic systems approach, which was considered unique not only in the municipalities, but also in the UNDP operations.
59. Another important feature of the project that was highlighted through the KIs and FGDs was the expert community that was involved with the novel approaches. They supported the municipalities in their quest for the integrated solutions to tackle intertwined challenges. For instance, in Mykolaiv and Batumi, the opportunity to engage with external experts was highly valued. In Mykolaiv it was considered an added value because the expert community was not only theoretical but also provided coaching throughout the project implementation, which was particularly helpful to move on with the project of the industrial park. Struggling with attracting foreign investors and bidding procedures, the M4EG project helped improve the reputation of the city in this respect. It advanced in moving towards the Blue and Green Economy, and aligning it with its development plans. In Batumi, the added value was seen in collaboration with experts, developing new partnerships (e.g. with the Georgian Information and Technology Agency) and engaging with younger people in developing the startup ecosystems, and shifting the previous sole focus of the city on tourism towards new avenues. In Khirdalan, the project added value was in strengthening the reputation of the municipality within the country and other municipalities.

60. The added value was also manifested in the combined solutions to addressing the local needs and challenges. For instance, in Lviv the project allowed for developing an integrated service for adult education, mental health support and career counselling. In several municipalities in Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia, the project added value was in providing the response to the emergencies by offering shelters for the refugees and internally displaced persons, and other forms of assistance.

Finding 5: The added value of the approach was visible in offering systemic solutions in response to the needs of municipalities.

Q6 Which areas are the most relevant and strategic areas for the M4EG to scale up or be more intentional about going forward?

61. Throughout the project implementation, it was observed that access to finance was one of the important issues to be tackled and clear focus was redirected to this in the last year of the 2nd Phase of the M4EG project. Likewise, the interviewed municipalities (mayors and the municipal staff) as well as the UNDP and EU teams shared the views that this is a vital direction the project needs to take in the subsequent phase.
62. The interviews revealed the desire of municipalities to work with the different financial instruments, however the capacity to absorb this varied between the communities. Larger cities involved in the project were more confident to work with more sophisticated financial instruments, while the smaller rural areas were less enthusiastic about this. The latter were, however, capable to absorb the funds in form of grants and they already applied them in projects, for which synergies with M4EG were sought.
63. The interviewees (EU, UNDP and municipalities) also noted a stronger need to align the project with the international agendas and funds that could be accessed for the potential synergies and avoiding overlaps. This concerned especially the various EU funding programmes and financial instruments offered by the EIB and EBRD. Moreover, there is a growing interest in green and climate related investments, thus it could be relevant to look into synergies with the global financial institutions dealing with climate. The project partially addressed this gap already by dwelling into the Green Deal and providing training opportunities through the Urban Learning Centre Platform. Still, more training in this regard was requested by the municipal actors and networking and know-how transfer with more experienced municipalities in other countries.
64. In addition, the interviewees emphasized the growing interest of municipalities in participation in this project. The current coverage could be expanded with further municipalities and topics they are capable to work on, which are suited in their local contexts. Network growth and development, sharing of good practices and bilateral opportunities could add value to the project in the forthcoming round.

Finding 6: There is a growing interest of municipalities to use other funding sources, including loans and grants, however the absorption capacity varies.

Q7 What was the project's coherence with the other regional, national and international policy / investment frameworks (esp. Green Deal)?

65. In several municipalities, the M4EG project was not the only funding source for addressing their needs, and they actively participated in other projects and initiatives, including the EU instruments (e.g. LEADER, Interreg, and the EU4-type of projects). In general, the municipal interviewees saw positively the coherence with other regional, national and international policy/investment frameworks. In each country, the M4EG project was well aligned with their bilateral agreements with the EU. However, when it comes to the details, it was not always

sufficiently clear to the mayors and municipal staff how this alignment was possible through the project.

66. There was a common sense that coherence and synergies were enabled, but sometimes they were less clear about the contribution of different frameworks to the possible project effects. In several municipalities, interviewees emphasised various funding modalities they used, including the EU and non-EU funding sources (e.g. development assistance from South Korea, USA and multilateral financial institutions). Moreover, the respondents (municipalities, UNDP Regional Office, Country Offices and EEAS) shared an opinion that the participation in the M4EG project has advanced the capabilities of participants which translated in acquisition and working with other funding instruments. A dedicated training was also offered on the Green Deal and related priorities and funding opportunities for the M4EG project beneficiaries.
67. Several interviewed municipalities were familiar with the Green Deal and attributed this to the training they received through the M4EG project. For instance, in Georgia, it was piloted in the with Baghdadi municipality, where prior to the M4EG project nobody had worked before on the alignment of municipal development priorities with the EU Green Deal objectives. In result of the training and communication with the UNDP country office, the municipality started to consider in its priorities the Green Deal principles. In follow up, they were included in the municipal planning document.

Finding 7: There was a perceived coherence of the project with other regional / national / international frameworks (incl. the Green Deal), however it was not always clear how the synergies were possible with the M4EG project.

Effectiveness

Q8 What have been the key results and changes attained for the local authorities actively engaging in the initiative?

68. The project succeeded to a large extent in delivering its expected outcomes, which is presentend in the below table.

Figure 6 Overview of project ouputs' performance

| Outputs | Indicators | Targets | Achievement |
|---|--|----------------------------------|---|
| O1 EaP municipalities are adequately supported in their participation to the M4EG initiative | 1.1 Number of cities having signed up to the initiative | 340 | Well exceeded Total: 433 |
| | 1.2 Number of LEDPs designed following the M4EG guidelines based on their added value | 180 | Frozen indicator as agreed by the Steering Committee on 28 February 2023 |
| | 1.3 Number of staff trained on innovative learning approaches (portfolio, system thinking) | 610 (i.e. 89 of which 50% women) | Well exceeds target. So far 1,056 (477 women, 320 men, and 246 refugees, mainly women) learners/municipal staff (non-unique) trained under Urban Imaginaries, Portfolio Journey & LEDP 2.0 piloting, Response & Renewal, Urban Learning Center initiatives. In 2023, 477 trained. In 2024, by July more than 300 trained. |

| | | | |
|--|---|--------------|---|
| | 1.4 Number of events organized per year aimed at exchanging best practices and networking (such as local business days, thematic workshops, regional conferences, etc.) | 13 | Well exceeded Total: 258 |
| | 1.5 Number of advocacy and outreach initiatives conducted to increase awareness of citizens about EU support to local authorities in selected countries | 25 each year | Well exceeded Total: So far, 397 products in 2024. The overall coverage is <i>at least 1,628,681</i> people within the first 6 months of 2024. |
| O2 Municipal pilot projects are successfully implemented (building on existing LEDPs) | 2.1 Number of local authorities that have implemented portfolio methodology | 8 | Exceed Total: 11 |
| | 2.2 Number of small-scale local level pilot projects on specific issues (i.e. innovation, gender equality) selected | 40 | Exceeded Total: 63 |
| O3 Ukraine crisis emergency and refugee response, recovery and resilience | 3.1 # of LAs have strengthened capabilities to address the crisis and enhanced resilience to respond, in the short-term, to related socio-economic issues, including introducing a system thinking approach to response and recovery. | 60 | Well exceeded Total: 120 In Ukraine, 49 LAs in 2022, and 39 in 2023. In Moldova, 14 LAs in 2022, and 18 in 2023. |
| | 3.2 # of IDPs and Refugees directly (& indirectly) supported | 3,000 | Well exceeded Total: 43,751 In 2022: 15,835 IDPs directly supported in Ukraine. 3,776 refugees supported in Moldova. In 2023: 19,007 IDPs directly supported in Ukraine, and 3,808 refugees in Moldova. 2024: At least 1325 IDPs were directly supported under the RRP in Ukraine. |

69. The project documents (as of June 2023 latest) highlighted substantial progress, with 49 unique seed-funds/grants ranging from EUR 15,000 to EUR 225,000 awarded to municipalities. Hands-on learning and design journeys were run in parallel to enhance initial ideas and project designs. By mid 2023 the Urban Learning Center (ULC) finalized three key resources (Deliverables) for the capacity development: (1) "Foundations for Future Readiness" – training course, targeting municipal officials and policymakers on green transition, smarter cities, and managing complex problems; (2) "Pathways for Sustainable Growth" (P4EG) - a package with a new generation of local economic development plans, focusing on the green transition and economic growth within planetary boundaries, including a MOOC, and (3) A "Community Listening Guide" to tap into the needs and concerns of local residents, visitors, and city identity, to inform services, plans, and policies at the local governance level. Recently, in 2024, new courses were launched: (4) Green and Just Transition (May 2024), and (5) Smarter and

Inclusive Cities (July 2024). Besides, significant results were attained in response to the war-triggered crises in several countries.

70. Most of the interviewees representing local authorities (mayors, municipal staff) shared opinions that M4EG project brought in positive results for their municipalities, and even beyond, thanks to their participation in the capacity development activities and particular investments. These were considered as either tangible and less tangible ones. Among the tangible results, the project provided clear and visible solutions to the local populations, such as infrastructure and services. As for the less tangible results, learning was emphasised as the core result well as improved visibility and reputation of the municipalities inside and outside that should be helpful with attracting visitors, investors and even the central governments of the EaP countries.
71. The survey results indicated visible improvements in the community image as perceived by its residents. In Ceadir Lunga, 72% of respondents agreed that municipal activities had improved relations between municipality and residents, while 95% of respondents saw an increased involvement of city hall in the community over the course of the project period. 73% reported increased trust in the municipality compared to before the project started and underlined that the municipality had been effective or very effective in achieving positive outcomes through the project activities. Overall, they felt their municipality became a better place to live. Similar observations were made in Areni and Mykolaiv.
72. Some of the interviewees noted systemic changes that happened in their municipalities, which were triggered by the application of system approaches and increased participation of the local community in the project design and delivery. New ways of looking at projects and challenges in the municipalities were recognised, understanding complexity and interconnections between the problems to be solved. Simultaneously, for several respondents behavioural changes happened at an individual level, which they attributed to deeper reflections about their work and embracing a more systems and ecological approach in their work and lifestyle. They considered this overall process as highly evolutionary and enriching their knowledge and skills to benefit the development efforts in their local communities. For instance, in Armenia, the FGD participants noted that the municipal staff became more emotionally stable thanks to their participation in the project. They felt more empowered and able to voice their own proposals to develop the municipality, which they had not been confident to do so before.
73. The increase in community cohesion and sense of belongingness was reported in the surveys. For instance, in Areni, 60% of respondents felt greater sense of being an important part of the community compared with before the project started. 89% emphasised that the municipality's activities over the project duration had made a positive contribution to the level of engagement in the community, while 85% noted that they had personally increased their participation in community activities or events over the project period. 60% agreed that the project activities contributed to improving relations between community members and 58% agreed that project activities helped them to connect and communicate with people they wouldn't otherwise.
74. In Mykolaiv positive outcomes were observed with regard to improvement of their living place. 68% of respondents noted they were optimistic about the direction of the community, with all respondents directly attributing this to project activities. 87% said that project activities have contributed to creating more opportunities in the city compared with two years ago, when the project started. 68% stated that the project has made a positive contribution to their work satisfaction

Finding 8: The project achieved all the Expected Outputs to a great extent, overperforming in most indicators.

Q9 *Specifically on capabilities: To what extent has the M4EG, including its Urban Learning Center, the Portfolio Journey, Urban Imaginaries Programme, and Response and Renewal programme improved the capabilities of local authorities?*

75. Participants of the Urban Learning Center, the Portfolio Journey, Urban Imaginaries Programme, and Response and Renewal programme benefitted from the series of trainings, coaching sessions and access to resources. These approaches were strongly focused on unravelling own capabilities of municipalities and letting them take own decisions on their developmental trajectories. This was especially possible through the use of systems thinking and doing in practice. The rollout of the approaches was helped with the facilitation by the project partners (Arup, Chora, and TalTech), specialising in systems approaches, and the peer-to-peer learning experience.
76. The municipal interviewees who participated in the capability development activities, noted a visible progress in acquiring new knowledge related to systems approaches, assessment of community needs, project design and delivery, project financing, EU funding and green investments opportunities. They also emphasised less tangible learnings, which resulted in improvement of social skills, use of virtual work space and gaining confidence in their work. Another crucial element of this process was getting the municipalities to rethink the roles they played vis-a-vis other stakeholders (such as non-profits and private sector at the local level). Their roles were shifted towards orchestration in their ecosystems and engaging stakeholders, both internally as well as on the outside, into participatory decision making. In this context, their capabilities evolved towards improving their networking skills.
77. For instance, in Khirdalan it was noted that the learning process and collaboration in deep demos positively affected the local communities. Thanks to social listening, residents of municipalities were able to voice their concerns and engage in the designing project activities, and contribute to the decision making. This was very new for many of them. In Khirdalan, a local job fair was organised which proved to be very helpful and more tailored to the local needs than what has been normally organised by the ministry or a dedicated agency. The municipal team was very clear on the needs of the local population and was able to adapt to meet them, thus making this event a success. The feedback was also collected, which helped to enhance learning experiences.
78. Another important feature of the capability improvement was a shift in the ways local authorities plan the interventions in their municipalities. The emphasis was shifted from the usual strategic tools (such as transition plans, consultations, development plans, feasibility studies, SWOT analyses etc.) towards exploring the resources they at the time had in their systems and activation of funding sources. With this in mind, the M4EG project was able to converge the concrete projects activated them. In this sense, there was less systems thinking approach, but more systems action approach.
79. In the Portfolio Journey, facilitators from Chora worked with two cohorts of cities. With the initial cities, it took about three to four months to launch the approaches, from the starting point, meaning from the point they had decided what is the problem they wanted to address by activating the approach. Both cohorts implemented their 'actual projects' after the initial design processes. However, working with the first cohort helped to accelerate the design process of the second cohort and thus the initial design phase was a bit faster with the second cohort. Within two months, they were able to start designing activities that they could start implementing. This shows how rapidly the progress was made. However, the progress was different for various municipalities. As argued by the municipal interviewees, some of them had more difficulties to embark on this journey, mainly due to lacking capacities of the staff and sometimes the reluctance of local authorities to work with the novel methods that challenged the status quo.

80. Still, some very positive examples were highlighted by the interviewees in the context of capabilities improvement. A prominent case in this context was Ceadir-Lunga, where the mayor was originally very sceptic about systems approaches and the Portfolio Journey. However, as the time progressed, his understanding and motivation for the participation in the project increased and yielded exceptional results in terms, succeeding especially in development of sustainable energy management system and improving energy efficiency at the local level as well as other improvements in the local community. The key to the success in this context, according to the interviewees, was not only the training but also intensive discussions, face-to-face interaction and improving understanding of what is needed through iterations of the portfolio. As the power was originally very centralised, with the time the mayor decided to build upon his network of experts and increasingly capable team. Moreover, the authorities benefitted greatly with the exchange with peers from Kutaisi, which played sort of role models for the activities the municipality focused upon.
81. The improvement of capabilities was facilitated both online and through face-to-face interactions. It was observed by the facilitators that some municipalities had a rather high level of capabilities already prior to the project and were experienced in various strategic planning and project management approaches. These were especially larger cities. However, some other municipalities were very small and had very limited capabilities. Thus, the entire group of municipalities was very heterogeneous and required more tailored and one-to-one coaching effort in order to get the project moving forward. The increase in capabilities was monitored with the dedicated feedback tools and in a systematic manner. First and second order feedback loops could be observed in the reflexivity narratives used in this process. The third order was still less pronounced as the participants were not yet progressed in the capacities to evaluate their own methodological approaches and running the inquiry by themselves (i.e. evaluative thinking).
82. With the second cohort of portfolio cities significant amount of work was done on-site. The interviewees considered it more useful in this context, because many participants from the municipalities had limited digital skills, which hindered their activities during the online sessions in zoom. Using advanced digital tools such as Miro board was less feasible in the case of smaller and rural municipalities, especially, also due to the internet connectivity issues. In Areni, the proxy facilitation was used, since the lead facilitators from Chora were not present at the workshop, but they had delivered a prior training to the UNDP colleagues who run the workshops with the municipality on-site. This proved to be a successful approach, hence the cascading capacity development approach. The respondents argued that it in this case was also much easier for the participants to interact rather than on the screen.
83. For the local citizens surveyed, the capabilities were visible in their improved city resources and connectivity and ability to formulate partnerships. For instance, in Mykolaiv 91% of respondents reported forming new partnerships due to project. 89% said that the project activities had improved access to human resources throughout the city. 97% said that the project had expanded the knowledge resources available in the municipality. Likewise, in Areni 79% of survey respondents believed that the project had helped them form new partnerships. 81% agreed that the project had improved human resources in the city, while 79% said the project had improved the knowledge base in the city. In Ceadir-Lunga 60% of respondents stated that the project had increased local knowledge around green energy and energy efficiency. 92% agreed that the project had led to improved infrastructure, while 90% stated that they received some level of personal benefit from this improvement. 70% of respondents were more satisfied with access to goods and services now compared with before the project began.

Finding 9: The M4EG project succeeded in increasing capabilities of the participants.

Q10 *Have there been any unexpected output and outcome-level results, and others spill-over effects achieved beyond the planned?*

84. The interviewees were to some extent aware of the spillover results from the project. They noted the importance of both tangible and less tangible spill-over effects from the project. Among them, the most unexpected results came from the crisis management in the context of war and conflict that shook the EaP region. These results could be linked to the accurate response when facing the challenges, engaging the project team and the entire communities of beneficiaries participating in the project. After the wars started, they managed successfully to address the major humanitarian crises (war in Ukraine, and conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan) and provide much needed solutions to accommodate displaced people as well as offer them integration opportunities in new places.
85. The spillover effects were clearly visible in the support offered to the refugees and internally displaced persons and the communities which offered them a shelter during this difficult time. Besides the provision of much needed accommodation, these were for instance takeaways trainings (language, job skills), psychological counselling helping to overcoming the trauma and leading to empowerment, and increased connectivity with the host communities participating in the M4EG project.
86. Other unexpected results were visible in empowerment of the communities. For instance, in Azerbaijan, interviewees highlighted as a surprise of the Urban Imaginaries, that a small village in the North of the country was selected and achieved exceptional results, despite its marginalized and disadvantaged status. The partnership established by the local community and municipality resulted in a good practice. In the case of Urva municipality, the team worked with a very small village municipality about of only around 5,000 residents. The mobilisation of the local community and hard work that they did was considered one of the biggest unexpected results, especially vis a vis larger and stronger municipalities participating in the project.
87. In Moldova, the unexpected result was the understanding of camaraderie and common goal that was brought about into the mayors' network. When the project was started off, it was never intended to build network, but it evolved naturally in this direction: a club of mayors that feel privileged to be part of the M4EG initiative. Moreover, they started trusting each other more, talking with each other more when the opportunities were offered for the exchange. They became more open to cooperation, because so far so long, there have been so many motives why they did not cooperate, most of the political background of a local public administration. This unexpected output was that the catalyst for a new type of behavior amongst mayors in Moldova.
88. In Georgia, the team introduced an AI tool in municipal management, in the context of space making, which is Urbanist AI. It helps redesign the public spaces in a participatory way. This enables municipal representatives should to sit down together with local communities and think about what they would like to redesign in their space and what functions it should have. That was one of the things offered the broader network of municipalities participating in the M4EG project in Georgia.

Finding 10: *The main unexpected results from the project were visible in the response to the war crises and in empowering local communities.*

Q11 *What are the needed conditions and mechanism through which the Portfolio Journey can effectively contribute to the project outcomes? What mechanisms are triggered in different context to produce the outcome (or fail to)?*

89. The Portfolio Journey was implemented in several municipalities across the EaP region and all of the interviewees from the municipalities using this approach were enthusiastic about its

uptake. It was noted that the systems approach was useful to tackle the intertwined challenges the municipalities had to deal with. Among the key mechanisms that enabled contribution of the Portfolio Journey to the M4EG project outcomes, flexibility was most commonly viewed as the condition guaranteeing the success. The flexible approach taken in the M4EG project as a whole and at the municipality level was especially fruitful as it allowed to adapt to the changing circumstances, especially those triggered by the wars.

90. Another important condition enabling the achievement of the outcomes was the communication between the people and organizations in the project. From the interviews, it was visible that there was a clear and regular exchange between the EU and UNDP counterparts, including the Country Offices. The latter were also closely in touch with their municipalities and other partners involved in the project. The M4EG nurtured the culture of openness and collaboration, and accessibility of contact persons whenever needed.
91. A further condition contributing to the achievement of outcomes was the clear focus on addressing the actual needs of the communities. In many cases, the municipalities engaged their local citizens and partners into the process of project development, and designing the solutions with the use of either M4EG project component. Social Listening was also noted in this context as a supportive instrument towards gathering an in-depth insights about the needs of the communities for the intervention design and adapting at the implementation stages.
92. The mix of “soft” and “hard” (esp. infrastructure) interventions in the M4EG project was considered as the crucial condition guaranteeing its success for the participating mayors and municipalities. The interviewees noted that this was well received by the municipalities and provided incentives to motivate them to participate. They were especially grateful for receiving the financial means to manage their particular challenges and adapt to the changing circumstances. Likewise, the training provided them with new perspectives and tools to design and implement the local interventions in a more efficient way, and to find inspirations in other countries and municipalities participating in the project.
93. Many interviewees praised the support of the UNDP Istanbul Office and Country Offices. The success in achieving the outcomes was attributed to the knowledge and skills of the team as well as their availability to respond the queries from the beneficiaries. The UNDP team was viewed as very well connected and credible in the eyes of the mayors and municipal actors. Both virtual and face-to-face interactions occurred in these contexts. The latter were especially needed in more difficult moments and when important decisions were to be made, or the mayors were to be convinced. In some instances, also the EU delegations provided an extra support. For instance, in Azerbaijan the EU delegation was particularly visible in the initial stage of the project as the UNDP representation was limited at the time.
94. Furthermore, a safe space to experiment (demo projects, testing solutions on a small scale) was viewed as crucial to progress towards the expected outcomes. In some municipalities the novel solutions were first tested and validated on a smaller scale, and eventually implemented with a greater scope. For instance, in Armenia (Charentsavan) the municipal representative highlighted the uniqueness of the project in the way it allowed to fail, but also test and experiment. They focused on the tourism development, which required more time to yield expected results and not everything worked well upfront, but with the time they were able to improve the design of the intervention.

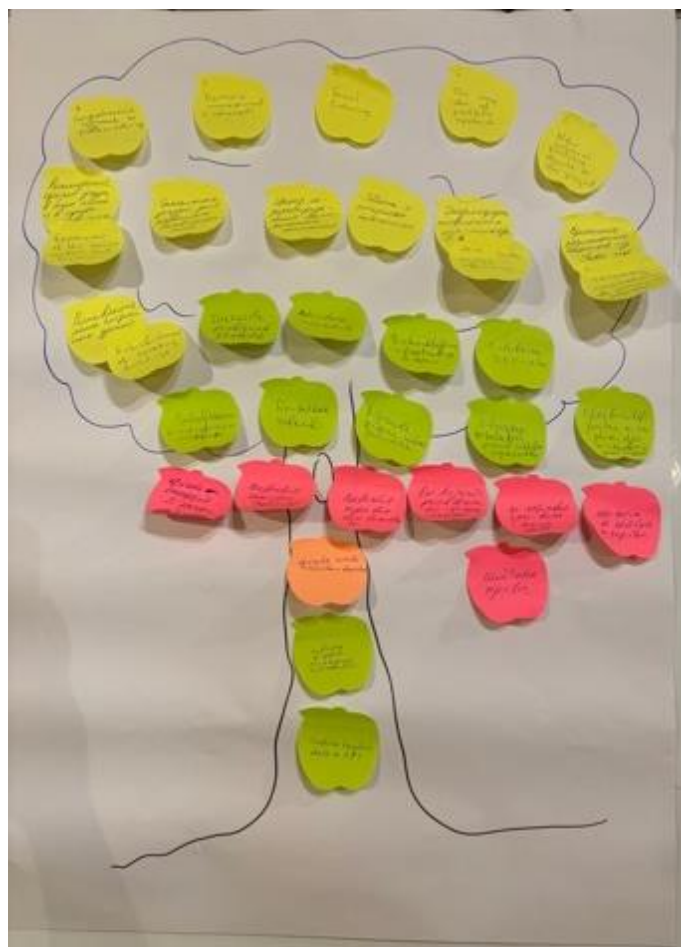
Finding 11: The key factors enabling success of the Portfolio Journey were flexibility in implementation, excellent communication between the people involved, a mix of soft and hard project components, access to networks and experimentation.

Q12 *In which areas does the project have the greatest achievements? Why and what have been the supporting factors? How can the project build on or expand these achievements?*

95. Respondents shared a general feeling that project brought about high achievements in their communities. However, they were less clear about their scope or magnitude. In general they viewed certain solutions that project offered in their context as beneficial. These were either related to the infrastructure or services that resulted from the project. Other achievements were linked to the “soft” and less tangible effects, such as learning, empowerment, and the general sense of ownership of the project results.
96. For instance, in Armenia, the tangible outputs were seen in the development of cultural sites and tourism trails, but also intangible like increased citizen engagement and staff empowerment. In Ukraine, the emphasis was more on managing the war response. In Nizhyn, the greatest achievement was considered the creation of 20 new jobs in the manufacturing (garments, bags) and improving the communal entrepreneurship, despite the ongoing challenges. In Lviv, the municipality was able to develop integrated service for adult education, mental health support, and career counselling. In Moldova, a dedicated FGD in a form of workshop with the mayors and municipal representatives revealed narratives of the project achievements, which are presented in detail below (direct quotes). It became visible that the perceptions of mayors and municipal staff ranged from the generic praise of the project methodology (e.g. “innovative approach”, “the very idea of portfolio approach”, “social listening”) to more specific changes they observed (e.g. “refurbishment of existing buildings”, “temporary accommodation for Ukrainian refugees”, “enhancing waste infrastructure”).

Figure 7 Overview of the narratives on achievements of the M4EG project in Moldova

increasing trust towards the LPA, support and assistance to integrate people, social safety for refugees, children’s health, quality education for children, the zone has changed for the better, we have solved the mold problem, the comfort of children from the LPA, the comfort of refugee children, energy, efficiency and ecology, opportunities not to leave the LPA, educating citizens on waste sorting, increasing the comfort of citizens, together to reduce pollution, urban revitalization, keeping things clean in the city, waste collection, enhancing waste infrastructure, innovative approach, waste a global problem, refurbishment of existing buildings, restoring public infrastructure, temporary accommodation for Ukrainian refugees, shelter for Ukrainian refugees, multi-center energy efficiency, energy efficiency of the city, new external partners thanks to the project, the very idea of portfolio approach, care for older generation, center of redistribution of aid, quality services for citizens, expansion of the service sector and tourism, exploring tourism services, social listening, dynamic management (improved), comprehensive approach to problem solving



97. Some further insights could be provided on the performance of each investment in each municipality, in the different areas of the interventions, however this was not yet sufficiently measured within the project or subject to a systematic self-evaluation at local level. Only for some municipalities, quantitative data could be obtained on the specific results that were achieved in their area. For instance, in Ceadir-Lunga, this measurements were made on energy efficiency improvement. The municipality documented their savings as 214 867,6 lei (approx 43, 100 eur), and references were also given for each year of the active use of the new energy savings system for the street lighting and kindergarden.

98. The supporting factors for the project implementation were seen similarly across the countries. The interviewees highlighted especially the flexibility and adaptivity of the project implementation. This was especially visible with the changing circumstances and needs to adjust the project delivery and budget lines in the context of COVID-19 and military conflicts. Other important factors were the nurturing learning community and general good flow of knowledge and communication between the different people involved in the project. These exchanges happened both horizontally (between peers like mayors, or UNDP staff) and vertically (between different entities involved in the project).
99. The general culture of social listening and participation, which was promoted with the project, was also important for the achievements. It was incentivised within the project participants and between the municipalities and their citizens (end-users). Furthermore, the interviewees highlighted the unique mode of intervention of the project, which was implemented without an intervention of the central governments. This way, the distance between the UNDP and beneficiaries was very short and enabled faster communication and decision making, which contributed to the success for the project.
100. As for the continuation, it was recommended by the municipal representatives to maintain the current mode of project operations and further support the communities in raising their capacities to the next levels. This includes more advanced trainings on, for instance, how to advance the green transition and climate change mitigation and adaptation at the municipality level. More communities could be also involved into the project and benefit from the advanced support it offered to the selected ones. The project has also potential to be expanded in a multitude of thematic areas, but most notably with capability development, which translates into education and shifting the mindset towards social listening, methodologies of measuring of economic growth, and evaluating the performance of the interventions. The networking and collaboration aspects could be also improved by investing in a self-reflection and guided exercises, to enable a better understanding of network development and its lifecycle.

Finding 12: The project had greatest achievements in both “soft” and “hard” areas of intervention, but participants found it challenging to recognize them clearly.

Q13 *In which areas does the project have the fewest achievements? What have been the constraining factors and why? How can or could they be overcome?*

101. Many respondents had difficulties with pointing to the specific areas, which had fewest achievements in the project. This suggests that the project is viewed as very successful one. However, they were able to recognise certain barriers of the project enabling environment that hindered achieving the results. They mainly related to the external circumstances, which were largely beyond the direct scope of influence of the M4EG project, besides its ability to adapt and leverage resources existing in the communities. The following barriers were highlighted:

- War and related displacement (loss of citizens in the Ukrainian municipalities)
- Administrative, especially the bidding procedures and construction permits at the local level (all countries)
- Difficulties in attracting investors and service providers in Ukraine
- Depopulation in the rural and marginalized areas participating in the project
- Developmental gaps between the rural and urban municipalities (all countries)
- Limited progress in administrative reforms
- Interventions needed from the national level
- Political instability, such as elections (incl. local and central government)
- Low level of digital literacy in many municipalities

- Difficult technical jargon of systems thinking in English and local languages
- Outbreak of COVID-19 and related restrictions

102. For instance, in Nizhyn the problems were seen in the difficult geographical location, as the city is situated near the borders with Russia and Belarus. This limited the interest of investors and businesses to support the region. With the outbreak of war, many people left the municipality and economic problems deepened. The municipality decided to invest into creating more jobs, increasing tax income to the budget. The progress in this area was still very limited at the time of evaluation. Some additional investments were made from the municipal budget to pay salaries to the employees of the manufacture, renovation of the building and purchase of equipment. However, there is a need to secure more external support to continue this work.

103. In Moldova, there were certain risks related to project disbursements in one municipality, where the mayor was charged with fraud and consequently jailed. Even though, this was not a fraud directly linked to the M4EG project, this affected the funding disbursement in this municipality, and EUR 60,000 had to be returned to the project financing unit at the request of UNDP, as a risk prevention measure. Once the deputy mayor took over the post, the project could continue and proceed with the expenditure, and ultimately be successfully implemented/finalized. In this case, the UNDP risk mitigation procedures were helpful to manage the crisis situation.

104. In Areni in Armenia, the difficulties were faced by the municipal staff because teamwork and working methods were something new, in which they had little previous this experience. Facing the issues in teamwork was, however, seen as the key to progress with the project. Among others, the issues emerged when dealing with the resource constraints and division of tasks. It was noted that the municipality staff sometimes had to combine the work in M4EG project with their regular daily duties. During the FGD, it was noted that this could be mitigated with the support of an external expert that could be paid to do the work the municipality staff member usually does alongside its daily in duties.

105. Other challenges in the project implementation were linked with the procedural issues and necessary approvals from the central level institutions. For instance, in Armenia (Charentsavan), when the project began, there was a risk of not getting a construction permit because it belonged to the responsibilities of the Ministry of Education and Culture. This consumed significant time and discussion concerning the cultural heritage items of cultural heritage and without the collaboration with the central level institution it would be difficult to even start.

Finding 13: There were not many areas recognised in which the project did not perform well, however there were clearly recognised constraining factors.

Q14 *How did the inter-country exchange contribute to different aspects of implementation and outcomes?*

106. The municipalities from each country participated actively in the exchange between each other. The interviewed mayors and municipal actors highlighted several positive aspects of the contacts they had with their counterparts in the EaP region. They especially emphasised learning about similar challenges and solutions applied in given territories, political and administrative settings. Peer-to-peer learning was an important and highly valued element of the project, which contributed greatly to the know-how transfer and seeking solutions of the similar problems that were already proved in other context.

107. Moreover, several municipalities were viewed as role models for the others, which aimed at “catching up” with their solutions and advancements in the project delivery. For example, this was observed between Kutaisi and Ceadir Lunga, where the mayor admitted to be clearly inspired by his Georgian peer. In addition, participants benefitted from the exchange with several other countries and municipalities, which were not directly involved into the project, but whose experience was shared at times during conferences and bilateral exchanges (e.g. Poland, Romania, Spain, Germany).

Finding 14: Intercountry exchange was especially beneficial for the peer-to-peer learning process and role modelling.

Q15 *What are the learnings from difference of the COs implementation approaches?*

108. The M4EG project was implemented through five UNDP Country Offices in the EaP region using a generally standardised approach, which differed slightly in each country. Even though in particular countries there were some modifications of the activities and roles, given the conflicts and emerging crises that had been happening across the region, all of them had an equal and valid role in the project implementation and benefitted from the learning experiences. The capacities of each office were also different at the inception stage, yet they were gradually increasing as the implementation progressed. Moreover, the UNDP started to use the approaches at a more strategic level, beyond the original M4EG project and EaP region.

109. On the administrative side, the oversight of the project was managed in the DG NEAR and UNDP Regional Office in Istanbul, which operated in different decision making modalities than it would be in the case of the single-country project. This meant that the role of country offices and EEAS was less focused on the administrative and accounting elements of the project, while more effort was devoted to its content development and enhanced the project delivery.

110. According to the interviewees from COs, each EAP country has its own kind of realities. They had totally different need scenarios, relationship structures, and even background of mayors and the city hall remuneration scheme. The UNDP COs project coordinators were thus focused on the strengths and what each individual country's context brought about. It was also important to listen to the beneficiaries, not only mayors, and to choose the right implementation approach in each country and municipality. What was similar is that they were interested in utilizing mostly funds for the infrastructure projects as citizens clearly wanted infrastructure in EaP countries. The end users in most municipalities were more interested in “hard” than “soft” assistance.

111. Interviewees from the COs shared an opinion that introducing this new methodology and innovative tools for public administration and municipalities were largely successful. However, getting them somehow understanding how it was different and why it was important to think out from the box, was challenging in some contexts. The Country Offices invested significant effort into communication and development of the working relationships with the mayors and their staff, and, where needed, they were also supported by the EU delegations in these efforts. This was even more challenging as the working methods were not only new for the mayors and their staff, but also for some of the UNDP team. They were learning by doing. Thus, it was a collective effort in building the project's team capacities and working with the project delivery models that were less known before.

112. Depending on the country, there was a different progress in terms of project results as observed by the UNDP COs. For instance, in Armenia, the interviewees stated that even though not all results had been yet achieved, there were visible shifts in how the municipalities worked on adoption of the innovative methodologies from the M4EG project. They succeeded in attracting all the Armenian regions, however the project was too limited to provide a

dedicated support to everybody interested. Moreover, the low digital literacy was noted as of the main obstacles in the uptake of the methodologies, since many courses were implemented online.

113. In many Armenian municipalities the staff was not yet ready to actively use the digital platforms and tools available with the project. This barrier was underestimated by the team prior to the implementation, but in the course of the project more face-to-face and offline capacity development activities were offered. Moreover, there were delivery delays on the side of the technical providers of the trainings, thus the project implementation (broad and deep) speed was also negatively affected. More time was also needed to introduce changes at the organization and individual level (mentality, way of working) of people employed in the municipalities. This experience was also different between the municipalities, so an individual approach had to be taken.
114. In Azerbaijan, the M4EG was the very first project implemented by UNDP working directly with municipalities and similar scale projects were absent in the country prior to this project. At the beginning only 19 municipalities were involved but as of March 2022, the increase of the number of signatories rapidly increased to 55 municipalities (out of over 1,600 total in the country). A national coordination between municipalities, municipal associations, Municipality Center of the Ministry of Justice of Azerbaijan, and also the Presidential Administration was established. The municipal structure in Azerbaijan is highly fragmented and currently efforts are underway to merge some municipalities into larger ones. There is a strong central power, which holds much of the control and local authorities are the bottom of the hierarchy. This limits their decision making and financial capacities, which was crucial for this project.
115. In Georgia, the COs team noted the context of the Georgian local self-government. The M4EG project's biggest success in the country was to bring innovations, new knowledge, new approaches, and connections with peers in EAP and beyond. It addressed the kind of isolation which local authorities have. Even though, they have been engaged in ad-hoc activities with some partners under twinning projects, they did not have this kind of systemic approach like in M4EG. The team successfully managed to involve all municipalities (64) in the M4EG. A positive factor was also an involvement of the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure which was encouraging municipalities to work with partners, development partners and get this new knowledge and be engaged and active. On the other hand, the CO stressed they were lacking resources to provide opportunities for all municipalities that were interested. Moreover, the procurement rules at the national and local levels were considered very strict and hindering the rollout of the project.
116. Likewise, the challenges were detected in the limited staffing of the UNDP CO working on the project and the outbreak of conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, which delayed the project implementation. At the early stage there was a more intensive involvement of the EU delegation in Azerbaijan that helped to ensure credibility and raise the interest in the project among the municipalities. Another important feature was the control of expenditure by the UNDP and use of its procurement procedures. Municipalities acted as beneficiaries in these cases. This was done primarily to monitor the appropriate expenditure of the project funds to exclude any possibilities of third party influence on this expenditures and was mainly done because municipalities as such in Azerbaijan, they have all outstanding social deductions and taxation that they need to pay to the government.
117. In Moldova, the UNDP staff understood the essence of M4EG as building a relationship within an initiative rather than just a usual project. The key to the successful implementation was the trust between the participating entities. The team worked together with the M4EG municipalities that applied for the project on refining their concepts and methodologies, highlighting the choice of options they had. It was a cooperation with hand-in-hand

experimentation and then ideation of project ideas. Moreover, the implementation of the original project plan was challenged with the outbreak of war in Ukraine and massive influx of refugees from this country to Moldova. This was a serious challenge for the small country and many municipalities which hosted the refugees. The team adapted swiftly to the changes and implemented them alongside the original project components. The original objectives and planned outputs were achieved to a high degree.

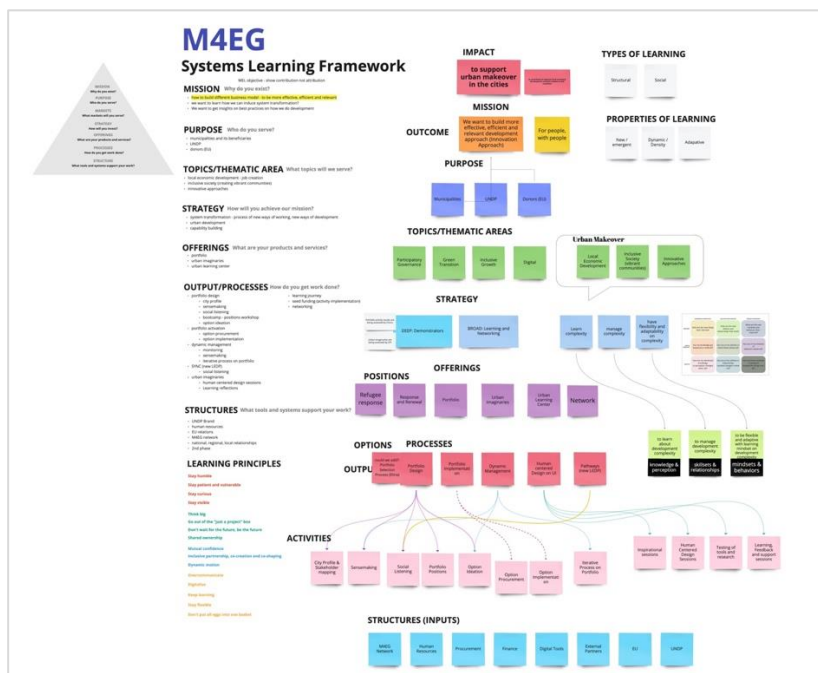
118. In Ukraine, with beginning of the war, there were some significant changes in the national and regional priorities, thus the UNDP swiftly reacted on that. In the final stage of the project, the sustainable recovery of municipalities was considered as one of the top priorities. The Response and Renewal component was more viewed as alignment with the national and regional frameworks addressing the pressing needs of Ukrainian communities, rather than putting an emphasis on the Urban Imaginaries or Portfolios. Still, the key instruments from the original intervention plan were used, such as social listening. The team believed that in this critical situation, with the capacities of municipalities dramatically shrinking, they were able to achieve more than expected. It was argued that the key obstacles were the lacking human resources, with people leaving their communities, and men conscripted for the army. Moreover, less resources were available for investments in innovative and development projects.

Finding 15: The experiences of UNDP Country Offices varied greatly, depending on their particular contexts.

Q16 How effective were the M4EG UNDP's knowledge and learning systems?

119. The M4EG project strongly emphasized the importance of learning process, providing regular training for UNDP participants and offering an engaging learning experience for municipalities and partners. Learning news and feedback on the progress was collected via a dedicated dashboard. In many municipalities, this experience was very new, however there were a few exemptions. For instance, in Azerbaijan, the project built on training experiences from previous USAID and Slow Food projects, but this time on a much larger scale in M4EG project. This expansion allowed for improved approaches and new opportunities, such as applying for geographic denomination certificates for food products.

Figure 8 M4EG Systems Learning Framework



120. A dedicated staff (Learning Analyst) was hired by the UNDP to support the learning process throughout the project implementation. The Learning Analyst worked closely with the Strategic Designer and supported the overall portfolio design, and was responsible for the regular sensemaking sessions at the country and regional level, generation of investment insights and learnings at the country and regional level. A set of quantitative indicators was integrated with the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system of the project. Quantitative indicators were complemented with the qualitative methods, such as pulse checks and close to real-time feedback loops among stakeholders to monitor perceptions and knowledge, capabilities, and possible behavior change. This has been carried out through facilitated learning sessions and a dedicated survey. The team adequately used MEL principles as suggested by the Chora Foundation throughout the process.
121. Municipalities that are part of the deep demonstrators especially had a regular learning and reflection sessions throughout the engagement of the program including sensemaking, community listening, dynamic management and coaching sessions. More than 90 learning and reflection sessions were conducted throughout deep demonstrator journey. The outcome of iterative learning sessions were shown during the Batumi Urban Forum's reflection session with municipalities from the deep demonstrators (with the exception of Armenia's presence, since they could not travel), 38% of these deep demonstrator municipalities have identified that they have discovered and working with the new and innovative partners and solutions as the result of these learning sessions. In particular, economic opportunities, community cohesion and green transition were the top 3 identified topics that they have emphasized the value of learning process within the deep demonstrators. Among 33 deep demo municipalities, which participated in the learning exercise, 15 indicated systems thinking as the key new skill and knowledge, used for engagement in the deep demonstrators.
122. Overall, participants from the UNDP received regular training on different aspects of the project. Likewise, municipalities and partners were able to benefit from the intense and engaging learning experience. Diversified methods of work were applied, including both face-to-face events (workshops, conferences, study visits) and virtual (teleconferences, online learning platform). In total, 1,056 people were trained (including 429 women, 320 men, and 246 refugees, mainly women) learners/municipal staff (non-unique) trained under Urban Imaginaries, Portfolio Journey & LEDP 2.0 piloting, Response & Renewal, Urban Learning Center initiatives. In 2023, 477 people were trained, and in 2024, by July more than 300.

Finding 16: The M4EG UNDP's knowledge and learning systems were considered effective and regularly monitored.

Efficiency

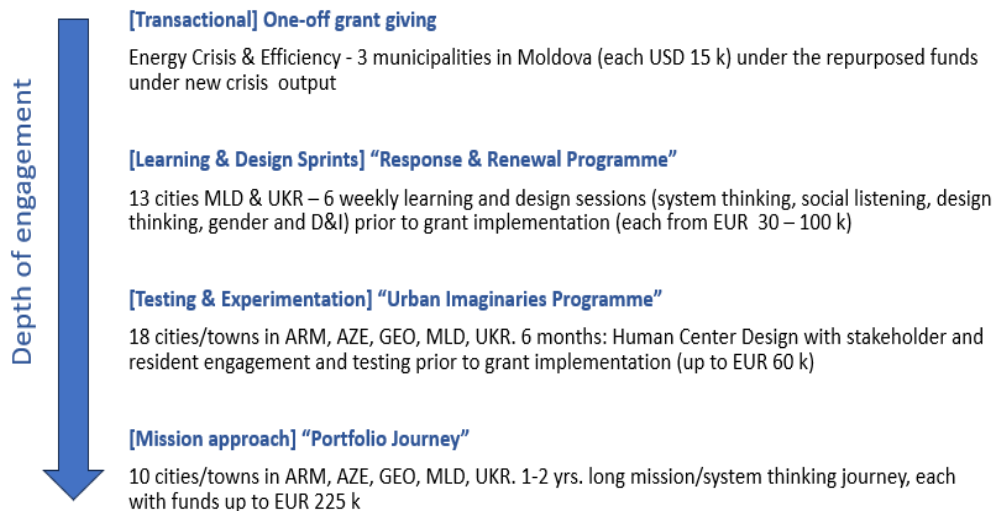
Q17 *To what extent has the UNDP project implementation strategy and execution been efficient and cost-effective?*

123. According to the project documentation, the M4EG implementation strategy progressed as planned, although some delays in expenditure were observed at both central project management and municipal levels. As of the mid-2023 project progress report, it succeeded with engaging over 400 local authorities in the EaP region as members and 46 local authorities progressing with implementation of the seed- funds/grants under one of the programmes of the M4EG. As of June 2023, a total of 49 unique seed-funds/grants were approved, ranges from EUR 15,000 to EUR 225,000 per municipality.
124. Approximately EUR 7 million were spent for the project delivery at that time. In total, over 320 staff were engaged in the learning programmes and initiatives (including the Urban

Learning Center). In addition, the project succeeded with response to the crisis in Ukraine and Moldova, where over 100 municipalities were supported, while 120,000 internally displaced persons and refugees benefitted directly from the aid. The support was offered in dealing with crisis management, response and resilience measures. Additional 20 local authorities in Ukraine were progressing with implementing grants related to the new realities. More than 540,000 people were reached in the Eastern Partnership region and beyond through media outreach and more than 150 communication products. Over 8,000 people participated on recorded workshops and events.

Figure 9 Budget comparison between the project components

M4EG programmes compared



125. As revealed by the project documents and interviews, the portfolios required more time and experimentation to mature enough to be able to access the additional finance and develop the bankable projects. Against this backdrop, the grant funding opportunities proved to be easier to tap into and were applied in several municipalities (e.g., Polish Aid in Ceadir-Lunga). The readiness to access finance varied across the municipalities, with a visibly higher capacities in the more urbanised and larger communities.
126. Concerning the Ukraine Initial Crisis Response, most of the repurposed funds were delivered in 2022. The work of Community Volunteers beyond this time, although on the lesser scale. The municipal and regional authorities to support crisis coordination were supported including mobilization and distribution humanitarian aid to war-affected local populations and IDPs, including food and non-food items, accommodation of IDPs, and provision of basic services. Further supplies were delivered to IDP shelters also in 2023, i.e. eight generators for IDPs in four regions of Ukraine (Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, and Rivne oblasts) for as well as beds, mattresses, and textile items for IDPs in 5 regions of Ukraine (Sumy, Zaporizhzhia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, and Rivne oblasts). The M4EG also provided rapid response to the flooding disaster caused by the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant Dam destruction. Three affected communities were supported with provision of five generators that were needed and requested by the municipalities, covering the daily drinking water needs of up to 1,000 people.
127. Moreover, in Moldova 14 local authorities with a significant population of refugees were provided with free Wi-Fi access in specific areas. The main goal is to procure, deliver, and install Wi-Fi hotspots, accompanied with access to customized landing pages for each

location. In 2023, a total of 68 individuals – 61 women and 7 men – successfully completed the Romanian language courses held in Balti and Comrat as well as trainings increasing their job market accessibility. Refugees from Ukraine constituted 80% of the training attendees, while 20% were members of the host communities. Socialisation events were organised, such as the soccer match for younger people, and cultural activities. As Moldova was particularly affected by the energy crisis (power supply shortages), support was also provided to Geamăna, Taraclia and Sireți municipalities in form of solar power panels, biomass boilers, and replacement of windows and doors for public institutions. This led to reducing the energy costs and overall improvement of the energy efficiency, as well as saving of resources towards addressing other critical needs (e.g. healthcare, education, social support for refugees and host communities). The grant dedicated to this amounted to \$15,000 for each locality.

***Finding 17:** The UNDP project implementation strategy and execution were highly efficient and cost-effective.*

Q18 *To what extent have the M4EG phase 2 increased the active member's opportunities for partnership and funding and financing?*

128. The experience varied from place to place. Some municipalities had a prior track record in working with other donors and projects, while for others this was a rather marginal or new experience. Participants of the KIIs and FGDs (mayors and municipal staff) expressed their positive views on the opportunities of partnership, funding and financing activities that were needed in their municipalities and which can create synergies with the M4EG interventions.
129. The synergies were viewed in several areas, including the EU funded programmes and initiatives. Among these, notably LEADER, dealing with a strategic approach to develop rural areas, proved to be a complementary approach and some municipalities have already participated in this (for instance in rural municipalities in Moldova, Georgia and Armenia). They benefitted greatly from the capacity development coming with it and exchange with more experienced EU Member States. Moreover, similar opportunities were offered with the twinning projects between the EU and EaP countries and cross-border programmes, which especially engaged the neighbourhood countries and municipalities.
130. Furthermore, bilateral development cooperation and projects were utilized by several municipalities and these originated from both EU and non-EU resources. For instance, several communities in Moldova had strong collaborations with their Polish counterparts in the projects financed by the Polish Aid (Polish Challenge Fund), which were complementary to the M4EG. A visible example of this was the solar energy installation in Ceadir-Lunga and participation of the team in the study visit in Poland, where they observed sustainable energy management solutions. Similarly, several municipalities had bilateral cooperations with partners from the neighbour Romania, which was inspiring for them in terms of solving similar problems and geographic proximity. Notwithstanding, use of the same language was helpful to facilitate the connections. In other countries, cooperations and projects were fostered with for instance Germany (GIZ), Denmark (Danish Innovation Facility) South Korea and USA (USAID). In addition, opportunities were seen in the climate funds and multicountry projects, such as the EBRD Green Cities (in which Batumi participated in parallel to the M4EG Project).
131. Several interviewees noted that participation in M4EG project strengthened their self-confidence and readiness to apply for other financial instruments, which were less accessible to date. However, this experience also differed greatly between the municipalities. The disparities between the municipalities were evident within the countries rather than among them, where strong contrast was noted between the rural and larger urban areas. The first ones were still lacking solid economic capital and revenue from the taxes coming from the local population, entrepreneurship and administrative capacities. The latter proved to be already more experienced in working with various funding mechanisms and projects and were

clear on strategic investments with engaging private sector (e.g. in Mikolaiv, Batumi). In these experienced municipalities, readiness for the EU finance instruments was visible, while in others it was emphasized that the capacity for funding absorption (esp. loans) was still very limited.

132. In Georgia, in case of Baghdadi, in the local development plan, the municipality put as a priority eco-friendly winemaking. Following the training in M4EG, they applied for GIZ funding to create a laboratory, which would allow local winemakers to address all the criteria important to have organic wine. In other cases, that was a municipal contribution from municipal budget or in-kind, which was mobilised to top up the funding from the M4EG project. For instance, in case of Batumi, there was a contribution in form of property in prime location in the city center, which normally would be challenging to find given high prices and interest in the real estate market.

Finding 18: The project significantly contributed to increasing municipal capabilities to access the finance, but these varied among the municipalities.

Sustainability

Q19 *To what extent are learning practices and tools utilized by the project team to adapt the programming to changing circumstances to deliver on planned results and effects beyond, and how are these learnings shared further?*

133. The M4EG project applied a wide range of learning practices and tools within its community. The core of the project activities was concentrated on development of training material and delivery of the training sessions, both virtual and face-to-face. Among the most important project components in this context, participants of the interviews and focus groups mentioned the Urban Learning Centre Platform, which provided tailored training on topics of relevance for the project and municipal development. These were for instance, the Foundations for Future Readiness course, which attracted over 130 participants at the moment of launch and the M4EG methodology which attracted over 200 participants. Additionally, in total over 800 participants have registered and taken the courses on the ULC on topics such as Green & Just Transition; Smarter & Inclusive Cities and Community Listening.
134. Another important learning package valued by the people participating in the project was titled “Pathways for Economic Growth” (P4EG), which consisted of 2 main products: (1) Guidance note: a guidance document and template for municipalities to draft their P4EG and a step-by-step process of developing the P4EG Strategy; and (2) MOOC P4EG content: course content to be available on SparkBlue for M4EG members and others and supplemented by in-country workshops. Moreover, the Community Listening Guide (social listening) was highly praised by several interviewed municipal representatives and mayors. It appeared very useful for advancing the needs assessment and designing the interventions at the level of municipalities. In Moldova, it was highlighted that it has been used beyond the actual project and adopted in the broader working approach of the municipality Ceadir-Lunga. Here, the municipality is using Community Listening, by consulting with citizens for developing new projects outside of M4EG to apply for funding with other development partners and to the government. For example on the need of kindergartens to become more energy efficient, they are now scaling the same activities in kindergarten which benefitted from the M4EG support, to 2 or 3 more kindergartens. The municipality is planning to have all of them insulated (6-7 in total).
135. The Community Listening was also important in the context of war in Ukraine. Participants of the City Learning Circle from Ivano-Frankivsk and Kamianets-Podilskyi in Ukraine and UNDP

Ukraine Country Office staff, shared their detailed accounts on a dedicated blog¹¹. They emphasised the importance of social listening as critical in the war context. They noted that listening, coupled with processes of deliberation and co-design with citizens, provided contribution to evolving shared narratives for change. This in turn enabled the creation of urban transformation portfolios that are ‘people powered’. This approach was highly popular for the Ukrainian municipalities as 19 of them applied to take part in the City Learning Circle. Participants of the learning events revealed that this opportunity triggered development of new ideas, some of which started to be implemented (such as, for instance, the Council of Civil Activists in Kamianets-Podilskyi).

136. The UNDP team facilitating this experience and city staff learnt that the circles contributed to the development of relational culture of unity and solidarity, local trust and fighting collective depression. Other important changes observed by the participants were realization of the importance of narratives and desire to deepen analysis to understand hidden and metanarratives in the city, and growing sense of European identity of Ukrainians. The friendly atmosphere and transnational exchange components (e.g. learning from the experiences of -Basque Country) was noted as important to the overall success of this methodology.
137. Other important learning experiences were enabled with organization of the major events, such as for instance annual regional and national events gathering mayors and municipal staff. These provided opportunities for face-to-face interactions and peer-to-peer learning for the participants. Likewise, the project organised several study visits (Azerbaijan – 2 Study Tours: Icherisheher Administration to Barcelona Smart City World Congress, Urva Municipality Study tour to Bosnia & Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro; Georgia 2 (Kutaisi team to Barcelona Smart City Forum, Batumi team to Tbilisi); Moldova 1 (Ceadir-Lunga team to Kutaisi) and 5 within the country and abroad, which were very well received by the EaP municipalities and recognized as an important element of the know-how transfer of relevant and good practices.

Finding 19: Community Listening proved to be a highly valued tool to navigate and adapt to the changing circumstances in the project and beyond.

Q20 *Are there any social or political risks that may jeopardize sustainability of project outputs?*

138. Depending on the country, respondents viewed the potential social and political risks with different likelihood and severity. Most notably, interviewees in Ukraine were concerned with the ongoing war and its impact on the stability of the project results and the overall progress of the project was limited in some areas. There was a widespread feeling that the war triggered other issues, such as the decline in number of citizens in the most affected municipalities (due to outmigration, army mobilization and even deaths). There was a perceived deep instability in this area.
139. For instance, in Ukrainian municipality of Nizhyn which is located near the Border with Russia and Belarus, this risk was highly elevated and translated into the deterioration of the social sector, including accommodation, power supply and inflation on prices of all kinds of products and services. The municipality decided thus to focus on improving its economic situation under the Response and Renewal Programme and investments into provision of jobs for internally displaced persons, especially in the sewing manufacturing. Likewise, the continuing over many years conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan was considered as a potential future problem that could jeopardise the project sustainability and outputs, making many municipalities in these countries less attractive for the inhabitants and investors.
140. In other countries, the risks related to a war were less pronounced, although some potential instability was considered as probable and experiences were made with it during the project,

¹¹ <https://innovation.eurasia.undp.org/community-listening-is-not-a-luxury/>

especially with the influx of refugees and shortages in energy in Moldova. Moreover, in rural municipalities participating in the project in most countries the main challenge was seen in the population decline and especially young people moving to other places and difficulties to attract newcomers. Among other possible risks, the political instability at the central government level was seen as the challenge to deal with. This was especially mentioned in Ukraine and Georgia, where some considerations were made about the ongoing disputes between the political parties and powerful fractions. In Ukraine, the issues were seen in prioritizing the central budget spending on the military defense needs rather than addressing other needs of the population.

Finding 20: The main social and political risks for the project sustainability were linked to the wars, displacement, outmigration, lack of investors and energy supply shortages.

Q21 *What is the likelihood that the benefits from the project will be maintained for a reasonably long period of time after the project phases out?*

141. Most of the municipal interviewees shared an opinion that the benefits from the project will be maintained beyond its lifetime. However, many of them were not exactly clear how. Again, these were seen in both tangible and less tangible benefits. In the first case, these benefits were seen in the practical solutions to the municipal problems realized through investments into the infrastructure and services at the local level. For instance, in Ceadir-Lunga it was mentioned that the infrastructure to manage energy in a more efficient way would not need another upgrade in the coming 10, 15 or maybe even 20 years after it was launched in the municipality.
142. In terms of less tangible benefits, the interviewees believed that profound changes happened in the way they worked and in their local communities, i.e. the behavioral change. In several municipalities visible changes happened in the way the authorities communicated with their citizens and engaged networks of interested people and stakeholders locally. Moreover, the methodologies brought by the project were increasingly used not only to delivery on the M4EG commitments, but also in other needed areas which municipalities had to address normally.
143. Some municipalities worked on specific solutions to guarantee the sustainability of the project results in the long term. For instance, in Ceadir-Lunga, the new project expected is to deal with the energy transition fund. This energy transition fund had not existed prior to the M4EG project, and it is supposed to facilitate local households and citizens' access to funding for greening and energy efficiency. This energy transition fund had not existed prior to the M4EG project, and it is supposed to facilitate local households and citizens' access to funding for greening and energy efficiency initiatives. For developing this project, the municipal team utilized the already existing mechanisms of participatory budgeting in order to implement this additional requirement for funding for green transition projects. The working methodology was largely inspired by the M4EG project.
144. In Armenia, the project sustainability plans include establishing foundations, tourism initiatives, and disseminating local cultural products. The M4EG project experience was critical in recognising that an autonomy in decision making was needed, since the dependence on permits from the centralised institution delayed the project uptake. Thus, for the follow up, the municipalities decided to establish a foundation attached legally to the municipality and provide the higher sustainability and efficiency of the project. The foundation was also viewed as a great solution to ensure more freedom in procurement processes, which hindered the project implementation in the initial stages.

Finding 21: Municipal representatives believe that the project benefits will be sustainable, but only some have clear ideas how this would be possible.

Q22 *Will the level of stakeholders' ownership and strengthened capacities be sufficient to allow for the project benefits to be sustained?*

145. Basing on the interviews with the representatives of municipalities and UNDP, the M4EG project contributed to increasing the level of stakeholders' ownership and strengthened capacities. These will allow for sustaining the project benefits beyond its lifetime. In many participating communities it was visible that the major shift happened towards engaging with the stakeholders, i.e. different local organizations and enterprises interested in the municipal development. The M4EG project equipped the municipalities with a range of novel tools (especially the Social Listening) and helped them to shift their working models towards more participatory. The level of stakeholders' ownership differs between the municipalities. Some were already more experienced in working with participatory methods prior to the M4EG project, and for them it was easier to implement the collaboration between different sectors and their stakes. Overall, this was seen as a positive and strengthened ownership, however it was difficult to measure beyond these declarations as the municipal level stakeholders were not targeted by the evaluation.

Finding 22: *There is a shared opinion that the project strengthened the capacities of the stakeholders which will allow to sustain the project benefits.*

Cross-cutting issues

Q23 *Did any unintended effects emerge for women or vulnerable groups?*

146. In essence, the project was focused on women and vulnerable groups, including refugees and internally displaced persons, ethnic minorities and people struggling with poverty. Some visible unexpected effects emerged for the community of Urva, which is a village in a rural area of Azerbaijan, and which is inhabited by the ethnic minority group Lezgi. The project enabled them to join and participate in the learning process. In Copceac (Moldova), social cohesion activities were carried out for refugees, which also had minorities among them and everybody was invited to participate in the project activities. Children and Roma community were some of the beneficiaries, too. A refugee center was set up and basic service provision offered like social canteen, laundry, social events, job trainings and fairs, which resulted in a better integration of the newcomers in the local community. In Poti (Georgia) Under Urban Imaginaries Poti arranged a multifunction space in the central park. They installed attractions for PWDs children, needs of which were identified through social listening process.

147. In Ukraine, due to the war outbreak, the entire population could be considered as vulnerable and among the unexpected effects, the support throughout the crisis period, including social listening and counselling, was very important for the community empowerment. Interviewees noted here the importance of development efforts in their communities that helped them to maintain motivation and good spirit, despite the dramatic events of the war.

Finding 23: *The project had positive effects on the vulnerable and marginalized groups, including women, refugees, internally displaced persons, unemployed and ethnic minorities.*

Q24 *To what extent has the project promoted positive changes in gender equality and the empowerment of women?*

148. The project promoted gender equality to a great extent. A dedicated gender expert was hired by the UNDP which support the country offices in this area, while the dedicated expertise locally was often lacking. Also, in Ukraine and Moldova the Gender Specialists were contracted to support Response and Renewal Programme municipalities. Moreover, the project actively encouraged participation of women, which was not always easy given the gender balance among the mayors. As a matter of fact, more male than female mayors participated in the project, but this was beyond the scope of its influence since in all of the

countries more men held this kind of post than women. On the other hand, the administrative staff at the municipality level brought more women to the project and built their capacities. In many municipalities, the participants from the communities engaged in the project were high for women (for instance, in Armenia 60% of female participants were observed by the interviewees). In Azerbaijan, in Urva municipality the core work happened with 10 women-led families, which concluded with development of a new local brand of goods. They were going through a tailored training on food safety and on food processing, among others. A new opportunity was opened to them, which helped them to become more viable financially.

Finding 24: The project contributed to a very good extent to promoting changes in gender equality through a greater engagement of women in its activities.

Q26 *To what extent have poor, indigenous and physically challenged, women, men and other disadvantaged and marginalized groups benefited from the project*

149. The M4EG project provided an extensive support to several disadvantaged groups. The largest of them were refugees and internally displaced persons affected by the wars in Ukraine, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The project provided direct response to the Ukraine crisis since March 2022, which happened at several levels. There was an extensive collaboration between various entities at local and national levels, and dedicated financial support within the project that was allocated by the European Commission within the tasks of DG NEAR.
150. By mid 2023, 120 municipalities were supported. In Ukraine, 49 LAs in 2022 and 39 in 2023, while in Moldova 14 LAs in 2022 and 18 in 2023. 43,751 refugees and IDPs received support. 15,835 IDPs directly supported in Ukraine. 3,776 refugees supported in Moldova. In 2023: 19,007 IDPs directly supported in Ukraine, and 3,808 refugees in Moldova. 2024: At least 1325 IDPs were directly supported under the RRP in Ukraine.
151. Procurement of essential supplies like generators, beds, and other needed items for IDP shelters throughout Ukraine was organised within the M4EG project. Likewise, an immediate support following the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam in June 2023 was provided. As the flow of people eased, the project was streamlined towards providing the economic and integration opportunities for the refugees and affected communities. In Moldova, support to Ukrainian refugees and local authorities was also offered. Several social cohesion events, access to information and public services like Wi-Fi hotspots, language and professional training courses have been organized.
152. Indigenous populations that were targeted included rural people and ethnic groups which inhabited many of the participating municipalities. They were actively engaged in contributing to the project as stakeholders and end users. For example they were directly addressed in Moldova (e.g. Roma, Gagauzians) and in Azerbaijan (Lezgins).

Finding 25: The project provided support to the marginalised groups to a great extent.

Q26 *How did the crisis and instabilities (both in-country and cross-border) have impacted the implementation and outcomes?*

153. The project implementation was visibly challenged by the outbreak of war between Russia and Ukraine, as well as conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. This in turn hindered timely delivery of the project original plan and required shifting of focus and attention towards addressing the emergent needs of the humanitarian catastrophe. The Response and Renewal Grant Programme was added to the M4EG project, and addressed to 18 local authorities most affected by the crisis. It became a strategic instrument in supporting the initiatives in both Ukraine and Moldova. The project content had to be refocused on the areas to price a comprehensive response to the crisis, economic opportunities, psychological trauma, inclusion, sustainability, and adaptability. For instance, in Moldova, the project added an

additional focus on refugee response to the original Economic Growth project mandate, strengthening local authorities' capabilities in crisis management. This in turn affected timely delivery of the original delivery plans, yet the planned investments were implemented with a large degree of success in the longer term.

154. The project dealt with the crisis using an adaptive and agile approach of the portfolios under implementation. The UNDP together with Chora designed a Dynamic Management Framework to support the implementation. This consisted of monthly Learning Logs, Sensemaking and Community Engagement activities. Moreover, in the view of the municipal interviewees and UNDP staff, one of the valuable methods of work applied in the M4EG project, social listening, proved to be a very efficient adaptation mechanism in this war situation. This was especially revealed in Ukraine, with the help of the City Learning Circle, where the focus was on exploring the deep narratives of citizens dealing with the crisis situation and developing tailored adaptive solutions.

Finding 26: The project implementation was visibly impacted by the crises, but optimal crisis response and adaptive mechanisms were in place.

Q27 How effective was the project's contribution to the respective SDGs?

155. The project planning documents assumed that it will contribute to the **SDG8:** Decent work and economic growth, **SDG11:** Sustainable cities. This was reconfirmed by several interviewees (country offices, project management team). In addition, several other SDGs were pointed to in this context by the interviewees. (8 SDGs in Armenia), and even contributions to all SDGs were noted (e.g. in Ukraine). They saw all the SDGs as somewhat related to the complex intervention areas of the project, which compliment or built upon each other. During the forum in Lviv, Local Voluntary Review (LVR) of SDG implementation as the first ever city to do so in Ukraine was presented, and ahead of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in New York in July every year. The development of the review was supported by the M4EG project, as well as its translation, design and dissemination through global channels.

Finding 27: The project contributed not only to the originally planned SDGs 8 and 11, but also to all others to a different extent and depending on the municipality context.

Q28 Were there any positive / adverse environmental effects resulting from the project?

156. Both project documentation and interviews stressed that no adverse effects on the environment were observed in relation with the project. These were either neutral and positive. The project was to some extent aligned with the green and climate related policies, such as the Green Deal. There were no major climate risks in the project related to the infrastructure investments that formed its components.
157. In most of the municipalities, the types of infrastructure components did not require advanced environment impact assessment procedures, therefore it can be concluded that the adverse impacts on the environment and climate were absent with this project. Moreover, several interviewees highlighted the progress in embracing green and climate change thinking in their daily practice that came together with the M4EG project. There was a growing interest in seeking green solutions and acquiring a more in-depth training on these topics in the municipalities. Some of them were already implemented in the project at a more advanced level, for instance in the EcoSmart City Portfolio in Kutaisi, energy transformation in Ceadir Lunga, Deep Blue Transition in Mykolaiv, transition from the traditional bulbs into LED in Tavil. Interviewees were able to recognise the climatic and environmental challenges in their communities and how important they are for their overall local economic development.
158. Besides, the project put a strong emphasis on capacity development of municipalities in dealing with climate change. As part of the Urban Learning Centre, The Foundation Course

provided eight brief modules introducing the green and just transition including the EU's Green Deal. The course was prepared by Arup, Climate KIC, TalTech, and UNDP. It was translated to six languages uploaded to the online SparkBlue platform in separate language courses. The Course was launched in July 2023, reaching 130 people of audience. It was followed up by in-country workshops (starting with Armenia in August 2023. In addition, Green and Just Transition course was launched under ULC in April 2024, followed by offline workshops in Armenia (29 participants) and Georgia (40 participants), and P4EG course that was launched in February.

159. The interviewees did not explicitly link the natural disasters and climate-related risks to the sustainability of the project outputs. The EaP countries are, however, highly prone to those risks which can be largely beyond the human control. For instance, Armenia and Moldova had a track record of earthquakes in the past. Despite some awareness on the climate change induced challenges that already impacted the communities, the awareness of risks and potential management of these in the light of sustaining project outputs was still very marginally tackled.
160. As for the survey results with the local population, it was observed that significant share of the citizens felt better informed about the green and climate solutions. In Ceadir Lunga, 60% of respondents stated that the project had increased local knowledge around green energy and energy efficiency. Positive overall changes in environmental practices across the city were reported by a deciding majority, 87% of respondents, while 77% saw either a somewhat or significant commitment from the city hall to environmental action. 85% of respondents said that the project activities positively influenced their own commitment to environmental values. In Areni, this was a little less pronounced, but still majority of the respondents (66%) saw an improvement in the municipality's commitment to environmental action compared with before the project began. Likewise, 66% agreed that the project activities contributed to increasing their own commitment to environmental action, and 87% noticed improvements in community environmental action.

Finding 28: The project stimulated positive environmental and climate effects, while adverse effects were not observed.

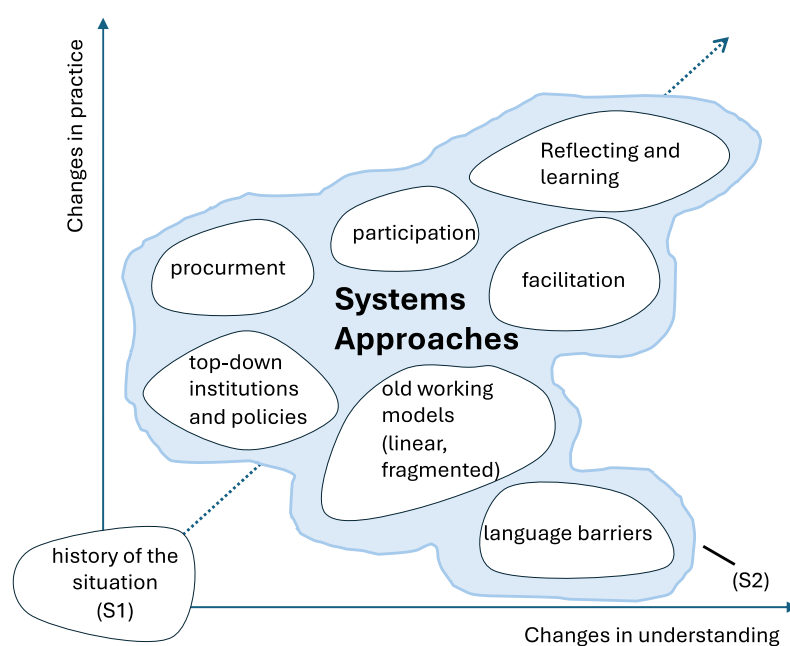
9. Conclusions

161. The M4EG Initiative has been highly successful and relevant in addressing the needs of participating municipalities. Key findings highlight the project's alignment with municipal requirements, the effective introduction of novel methodologies, and a strong and positive visibility of the EU and UNDP. A significant progress in the second Phase was achieved. Overall, the M4EG Initiative has demonstrated strong relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability, with significant positive outcomes across various dimensions and stakeholder groups. All of the planned project outputs were reached, and their indicators of success were largely exceeded.
162. The coherence of the project was evident through the added value of a regional approach, which enabled peer-to-peer learning and strengthened the region's voice. Systemic solutions were effectively provided, although there was some ambiguity regarding synergies with other frameworks. Municipalities showed a growing interest in alternative funding sources, despite varying absorption capacities.
163. In terms of effectiveness, the M4EG project achieved and often exceeded its expected outputs, significantly increasing participant capabilities. Notable unexpected outcomes included robust responses to war crises and the empowerment of local communities. Success was attributed to flexible implementation, excellent communication, diverse project components, network access, and a culture of experimentation. Both "soft" and "hard"

intervention areas saw significant achievements, although these were sometimes difficult for participants to recognize clearly. Inter-country exchanges proved particularly beneficial for peer learning and role modelling, though experiences varied across UNDP Country Offices.

164. The project supported EaP municipalities in their participation in the M4EG initiative, reaching 433 cities and 258 events, and 397 advocacy and outreach initiatives – well above the plan. The total number of trained staff was much higher than expected, ie. 1,056 people were trained out of 610 that were planned. This included 429 women, 320 men, and 246 refugees (mainly women). In 2023, 477 people were trained. Municipal pilot projects were also successfully implemented (building on existing LEDPs) – 9 in total, and 49 as demo projects. More 800 individuals were registered for the training courses at the virtual platform hosted by the M4EG project.
165. The efficiency of the UNDP's implementation strategy was noteworthy, being both cost-effective and impactful. The project notably enhanced municipal capabilities to secure funding, though results varied among municipalities. The evaluation revealed that flexibility in implementation and allocating budget was highly valued, given the needs to adapt to the unexpected circumstances, triggered by the wars, displacement and related challenges in the EaP countries.
166. Sustainability prospects were bolstered by the effective use of Community Listening, allowing adaptation to changing circumstances. However, social and political risks such as wars, displacement, outmigration, lack of investors, and energy shortages were identified as potential threats. While municipal representatives were optimistic about sustaining project benefits in the long term, concrete strategies were not always clear. The project's capacity-building efforts are expected to aid in maintaining these benefits.
167. Cross-cutting issues were effectively addressed, with the project benefiting vulnerable and marginalized groups, including women, refugees, internally displaced persons, the unemployed, and ethnic minorities. It promoted gender equality and provided substantial support to marginalized communities. Despite being impacted by crises, the project demonstrated strong crisis response and adaptive mechanisms. It also contributed to various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) beyond the initially planned SDGs 8 and 11, based on municipal contexts, and stimulated positive environmental and climate effects without adverse impacts.
168. The project greatly succeeded in introducing the novel working methodologies, based on systems thinking, especially the Portfolio Journey and Urban Imaginaries, accompanied with a variety of tools. Among them, Social Listening and Deep Demos were praised as especially effective tools, enabling adaptive management and learning from failures before introducing changes on the large scales.
169. The systems approach, even though encountering visible challenges, such as initial resistance of mayors and municipal representatives, language constraints, old working models, top-down institutional and political set-ups, and procurement, clearly evolved in time thanks the skilled facilitation, nurturing participation, reflecting and learning culture throughout the process. With the time passing, many hurdles were overcome in several municipalities, leading to visible changes in understanding and practice. The figure below summarises the key system elements and their evolution on the axes of time, understanding and practice.

Figure 10 Changes in practice and understanding with systems approaches in M4EG



170. The evolving systems practice brought about many positive results in the affected municipalities, which were presented in detail in this evaluation. It has to be noted that both “tangible” and “less tangible” results could be observed by those who contributed to this evaluation study. The “tangible” aspects were seen especially in the infrastructure and services that were developed in response to the local needs in the participating municipalities. As for the “less tangible” results, the project improved learning, communication, assessment of needs, and participatory governance at the local level. In several communities, spillover effects were visible with them embracing new working models beyond the M4EG project.
171. In an unexpected turn, the Ukraine crisis emergency and refugee response, recovery and resilience component were added to the project. This allowed to address urgent needs of the communities in coping with the impact of war, especially the massive movement of populations – internally displaced persons and refugees. The crisis support well exceeded the original target indicators of the project (60 LAs), with providing assistance to the total 120 LAs. In Ukraine, 49 LAs in 2022, and 39 in 2023 benefitted from the RRP project component. Likewise, in Moldova, 14 LAs in 2022, and 18 in 2023 were involved into this scheme. The support was given to both refugees and internally displaced persons. In 2022, 15,835 IDPs were directly supported in Ukraine, while 3,776 refugees were supported in Moldova. With the time, the needs for this type of aid began to shrink, thus in 2023, 19,007 IDPs were directly supported in Ukraine, and 3,808 refugees in Moldova. Consequently, in 2024 the number declined to at least 1325 IDPs that received aid under the RRP in Ukraine. Thanks the RRP, the LAs strengthened their capabilities to address the crisis and enhanced resilience to respond, in the short-term, to related socio-economic issues, including introducing a system thinking approach to response and recovery. Specific measures were in place to provide not only a shelter, but also enable the social cohesion and integration of newcomers into the host communities.
172. In terms of cross-cutting issues, the project brought visible progress in empowering women, vulnerable and marginalized societal groups. Predominantly, beneficiaries of the Ukraine crisis response and renewal component were women, elderly and children. In addition, special scheme to support women was visible in a rural municipality in Azerbaijan, where women-led families developed locally branded products. Moreover, in several municipalities

ethnic minorities benefitted directly from the participation in the project (e.g. Roma, Gagauzians). The project has also a visible contribution to the expected SDGs 8 and 11, as well as to some extent to others, depending on the municipality and country peculiarities. In addition, there has been a positive effect on the climate and environmental areas, even though they were less explicitly targeted by the interventions.

10. Recommendations

177. **R1 Continue and expand support for the municipalities to participate in the project**

The evaluation revealed that municipalities participating in the project (both broad and deep components) were interested in its continuation. It was noted in the entire EaP region that the interest exceeded the available financial and technical support opportunities. Thus, it would be recommended to continue and increase the support available under the scheme. Continuity is vital for the more experienced municipalities, which will enable to strengthen their capabilities further. They are potential role models and success cases that can be also explored by less experienced municipalities, interested in engaging deeper with the M4EG project in the future.

Findings: 1,2,3,4,5

How: Training, coaching, peer-to-peer exchange, funding provision

Who: UNDP, DG NEAR, EEAS, project partners

When: Throughout the third Phase of the M4EG project

178. **R2 Study in more depth synergies with the EU and non-EU strategic frameworks and projects**

The evidence collected during the interviews and focus groups suggested that M4EG beneficiaries were somewhat familiar with the strategic frameworks, especially related to the Green Deal. They also noted several projects and programmes, where they saw potential synergies, and in which some municipalities participated. These were the well known EU instruments such as for instance LEADER and Interreg and several EU4-projects implemented with the support of EEAS in the EaP countries. Besides, some of them were already experienced with bilateral and global frameworks, such as for instance global climate funds. However, for the latter it was noted, that they were more in the management control of centralised government institutions rather than at the municipality level. Still, the synergies were visible at a more declarative level in most of the municipalities rather than backed with a clear and studied evidence from those projects. It would be thus encouraged to explore this topic in a more detail, with indicating possible synergies, complementarities and overlaps of using funds at the local level. It would be helpful to find and promote examples of relevant practices and disseminate the experience with others.

Findings: 6, 7

How: Research and study, knowledge sharing, promotional activities

Who: UNDP, DG NEAR, EEAS, municipalities

When: Inception of the third Phase of the M4EG project

179. **R3 Promote and enable access to finance from different funding sources and its alignment with the M4EG project**

In the current, second Phase of the M4EG project, there has been a visible progress in acquisition of additional funding to implement local economic development plans and addressing the needs of municipalities. It became apparent that participation in the M4EG project increased capabilities of the mayors and municipal staff in development planning and acquiring funds from different sources. However, these capabilities vary greatly between the municipalities. While some of them are more ready to tap into the advanced financial instruments (including loans), other are still more interested in working with grants or subsidies. It is thus crucial to recognize individual capabilities of the municipalities and provide them with necessary training and coaching opportunities to advance their know-how in this area. Information could be provided on different funding opportunities, and how they could be aligned with their strategies. Likewise, peer-to-peer learning and exchange with more experienced municipalities could be inspiring and enable transfer of relevant practices.

Findings: 6, 7, 18

How: Training, coaching, peer-to-peer exchange, cross-institutional agreements, investment pitches/fairs

Who: UNDP, EEAS, DG NEAR, other units of the EC, financial and grantmaking institutions, investors

When: Throughout the third Phase of the M4EG project

180. **R4 Strengthen networking and improve the visibility of the M4EG as a regional and thematic network**

As many interviewees pointed out, the municipalities in the M4EG project created strong institutional and personal bonds with each other. A step by step evolution into network with multiple nodes became visible, yet too little articulated as such. At present, the network is characterised by some common challenges and goals, such as dealing with the security crises, population movements, energy efficiency, tourism development etc. This provides a solid base for developing of working streams, match-making of peers and clustering them to exchange on those topics, also with those who work on them beyond the M4EG project. The networking capability was also highlighted as the key to success in the implementation of the M4EG project in many municipalities, thus it would be useful to nurture this topic further. This could be for instance done with a facilitated reflection and studying of the network lifecycle and dynamics. Likewise, the clear communication, identity and external visibility of the network are crucial for attracting supporters and keeping members motivated to contribute.

Findings: 4, 15

How: Training, clustering, communication and dissemination activities

Who: UNDP, EEAS, DG NEAR, municipalities

When: Throughout the third Phase of the M4EG project

181. **R5 Nurture reflections and evaluative thinking in the municipalities**

During the data collection for this evaluation, it was observed that the municipalities had certain difficulties in describing the results, outputs and outcomes of the M4EG project in their areas. Many interviewees did not notice a visible difference between them, and also were confusing with achievements, benefits, impacts and overall changes that the project brought with. They were more likely to describe them as “tangible” (hard) and “less tangible” (soft) results, that were either more or less visible. It is thus apparent that the M4EG project has not yet progressed significantly with nurturing evaluative thinking and a self-reflection about the project progress at the municipality level. The municipal representatives were less familiar with the technical project jargon. On the other hand, the systems approaches require nurturing reflexive inquiry and the use of learning loops at different levels. These could be further strengthened in the forthcoming round of M4EG project, especially with the more experienced municipalities that made a visible progress in the implementation in their areas. The experience could be facilitated by the UNDP COs and evaluation experts, ideally familiar with both standard and systems evaluation methods. This could be also done in synergy with other projects and funding mechanisms, and evaluation resources could be potentially linked to gain a better picture across the funds and projects, by studying them at the very local level. In the long term, acquiring the evaluative skills is likely to help participants to better target their interventions, understand their outputs, outcomes and impacts and promote achievements to different audiences.

Findings: 12

How: Training, facilitation, commissioning cross-fund evaluations

Who: UNDP, DG NEAR, other units of EC, other project funders

When: Throughout the third Phase of the M4EG project

182. **R6 Reexamine and adjust public procurement rules at all levels**

The challenges of public procurement were noted in all the countries involved in the M4EG project. These were the legal limitations that were caused by the existing laws and institutional structures, and which proved to be inefficient to enable quick absorption of the project funding and flexibility in the view of crisis situation. These were largely beyond the immediate scope of influence of the M4EG project, however adversely affecting its implementation progress. Moreover, certain inflexibility was also observed in direct disbursement of the EU funding by the EEAS interviewees, i.e. the due diligence check that is required when the EC deals with the grant directly vis a vis indirect disbursements, which are more focused on a direct contract with the applicants prior to the award. Therefore, it is recommended to study this topic in more depth, including legal analysis, identification and sharing of good practice examples that can be learnt from. Given the growing interest in the climate, environment and Green Deal within the M4EG community, the green solutions in the procurement could be also studied and encouraged.

Findings: 13

How: Research and study, promote legal changes, know-how sharing and dissemination

Who: UNDP, DG NEAR, EEAS, municipalities, national authorities, legal/procurement experts

When: At the inception of Third Phase of the M4EG project

183.R7 Ensure balance of the “soft” and “hard” project components

Many of the project interviewees emphasised the importance of balanced support for both “soft” and “hard” components in the project. The investment in both increasing capabilities of participants, especially the mayors and municipal staff, and into the infrastructure and services for the local populations, were seen as the key to successful project uptake. Therefore, it is highly recommended to keep this model of working with the municipalities and equip them with necessary skills, know-how and networks to help them in the project planning, implementation and monitoring. During the evaluation it was also visible that infrastructure and services are crucial for the local communities to ensure credibility in their elected mayors, their staff and the EU as the donor. For the subsequent phase, it would be also important to follow up on the infrastructure maintenance and sustainability in the long term, and how it could be managed beyond the EU funding support.

Findings: 11, 17

How: Training, funding for the infrastructure and services

Who: UNDP, EC, other funders

When: Throughout the Third Phase of the M4EG project

184.R8 Improve risk assessment and management strategies in municipalities

Throughout the M4EG project several risks occurred that impacted its implementation. Most notably, the outbreak of wars in Ukraine, Armenia and Azerbaijan influenced the project uptake in those and other EaP countries. As noted by the interviewees, no municipality was really anticipating what would happen. Standalone response to the events, including the sheltering of refugees and internally displaced people, and long-term consequences of these, were not planned in advance. The municipalities were thus supported by the M4EG project in this important mission, and with an additional funding that was allocated by the EC for this emergency. With a view on the future, they still considered the war and political events as a major risks. Other socio-political risks and natural hazards and disasters (e.g. earthquakes and those related to the climate impacts) have also high likelihood to occur in the region. Eventually, these may have an adverse impact on the sustainability of the project results. Therefore, it is crucial to strengthen risk management preparedness and develop capabilities of the communities to assess, monitor and manage the risk, and to increase their adaptive management skills in a more systematic manner.

Findings: 20

How: Train on risk management methods (including DRR), identify and promote good practices

Who: UNDP, municipalities, risk management experts (e.g. UNOOSA, JRC)

When: Throughout the Third Phase of the M4EG project

185. **R9 Improve the M&E framework of the project**

The M4EG project was accompanied with a tailored M&E framework of the project. However, the current impact indicators, while relevant, proved to be limited in scope to fully capture the complexity of the project's achievements. Future phases could include a broader set of indicators that reflect various dimensions of success, including social, economic, and institutional outcomes and impacts. For example, composite of indicators could be added to measure improvements in governance, civic engagement, and local economic diversification. Moreover, reporting on the project progress was challenged with the co-existence of other project and funding schemes, in which the affected municipalities participated. This posed questions of attribution and contribution to the outcomes and impacts. A more sophisticated impact evaluation framework could be thus developed that will include detailed baselines, control groups, and counterfactual scenarios. Additionally, closer collaboration with other projects and donors in the same regions could help provide a more comprehensive understanding of the project's impact. Cross-project learning and multi-donor evaluations could be jointly commissioned in particular municipality cases. Reflections on this will be even more important for the next phase of the project as it plans to increase the focus on access to finance from different sources. Furthermore, the system evaluation approaches could be experimented with and encouraged in parallel to the standard M&E framework methods, with a view to better capture transformational changes induced by the project.

Findings: 8, 12, 16

How: Evaluability assessment, development of an indicator framework, cross-project evaluations

Who: UNDP, DG NEAR, municipalities, evaluators

When: Inception of the Third Phase of the M4EG project

186. **R10 Improve monitoring of cross-cutting issues in the project**

The M4EG project provided a balanced response to the needs of vulnerable and marginalised groups, including women, youth, unemployed, refugees and ethnic minorities. However, it was challenging to obtain the exact quantitative data in these areas from the project beneficiaries, and therefore it could be recommended to monitor it better in the subsequent phase of the project, and to train and engage municipalities for this purpose. Moreover, the contribution to the SDGs could be observed more carefully. Besides the originally planned SDGs, the project contributions were visible in most other areas, which could be monitored in more detail in the future and the resulting know-how to be shared with the respective UN and EC units, dealing with the SDGs agenda, monitoring and evaluation. Likewise, the project could dedicate more attention to the climate and environment monitoring as this is of high interest for the municipalities, especially with a view on the investments into green and climate resilient infrastructure. Researching and sharing of good practices could be also encouraged.

Findings: 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28

How: Training on cross-cutting issues, identification and sharing of good practices, evaluability assessment

Who: UNDP, DG NEAR, EEAS, municipalities, experts (gender, climate, SDGs), evaluators

When: Throughout the Third Phase of the M4EG project

11. Lessons learned

187. **Novelty of the approach:** This evaluation was conducted in the last year of the second Phase of the project. A rich volume of data was collected, especially on the narratives of a large number of key informants and focus group discussants. Evidence was also provided by the surveys in the municipalities, conducted by the UNDP staff and Capstone Workshop. The study revealed both achievements and struggles of the project. The new knowledge was gained on the use of systems approaches in the project implementation, which proved to be successful, although initially encountering resistance from the mayors and municipal actors. The novelty of approaches was often disruptive in the local contexts, challenging the traditional top-down models of decision making and triggering a participatory process, engaging citizens and stakeholders locally.
188. **Evaluation of the systems approach:** The evaluation of the M4EG project incorporated diverse methods, including desk research, interviews, discussions, field observations in Moldova, surveys, and triangulated data analysis, aiming to address 28 specific evaluation questions. The main challenges in the methodology were related to the high heterogeneity of municipality cases, where evidence was sought, and thus it primarily relied on the qualitative analysis. Where quantitative sources were available, these were studied, but they were limited to the secondary sources. The absence of standard Theory of Change and Intervention Logic was also unique for this type of project. Systems approach was introduced in the project implementation, while specific guidance for the project evaluation using systems lenses was absent at the time of the evaluation start. At the same time the evaluation tried to fill in this gap and point to the main directions for similar project evaluations in the future. Still, the main challenge remains to integrate those with the existing evaluation mechanisms, standards and procedures, which may not always be best suited to evaluate this type of dynamic and multifaceted projects.
189. **OECD DAC criteria and UNDP cross-cutting issues:** The evaluation highlighted several key criteria. Under relevance, the project aligned well with local needs, introducing innovative methodologies for municipal development and ensuring strong visibility for the UNDP and EU. Coherence was noted through the project's regional approach, promoting systemic solutions and enabling municipalities to seek diverse funding sources. Effectiveness was marked by achieving and sometimes exceeding expected outputs, notably in participant capability enhancement and community empowerment. Efficiency was achieved through cost-effective management and a strategic implementation by the UNDP, with varying experiences among municipalities. Sustainability showed promise through infrastructure and service investments, despite risks like wars and displacement. Cross-cutting issues addressed the positive impacts on vulnerable groups, notably women and displaced persons, and the project's contribution to SDGs, particularly stimulating positive environmental and climate effects without adverse impacts. While the criteria proved to be useful to report on the progress and performance of the M4EG, there were insufficiently capturing the transformational changes triggered by the M4EG project, which applied highly innovative systems-based approaches in its design and implementation.
190. **Multiple levels of MEL:** As the project is currently in its final stage, this evaluation has not yet been able to prove its long-lasting impacts. Therefore, for the future, it would be recommended to develop a suitable framework to advance the knowledge on the project results at all levels: outputs, outcomes and impacts. The project set up a dedicated MEL system, which proved to be functional and useful. Moreover, given the highly novel system approach applied in this context, it would be envisaged to reinforce the use the monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) throughout the project with the use of more tailored systems

evaluation frameworks. This can be challenging, given the need to adjust to the evaluation policies and guidance of the donor and compliance with the set of established criteria, standards and other guiding principles. Ideally, the standard form of evaluation could be integrated with systems approaches as parallel task throughout the project. Furthermore, this study revealed that reflection and evaluative thinking (self-evaluation) was still less advanced among the mayors and municipal staff. An increased attention could be also paid to improving a robust quantitative data collection in the real time throughout the next Phase of the project implementation.

12. Report annexes

List of resources consulted

Capstone Workshop (2024): Response and Renewal in Ukrainian Cities, Systems Thinking Towards Sustainable Adaptation and Resiliency. School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University

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UNDP (2023): M4EG Portfolio City Survey Results

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M4EG Website <https://eum4eg.com>

M4G Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/m4eg>

M4EG X https://x.com/search?q=m4eg&src=typed_query

List of Individuals participating in the KIIs and FGDs

Participants of KIIs and FGDs - Municipalities

| No | Gender | Name | Country | Municipality | Function |
|----|--------|-----------------------|------------|--------------|----------------|
| 1 | M | Syuzan Margarian | Armenia | Areni | Administration |
| 2 | F | Satenik Balabekyan | Armenia | Charentsavan | Administration |
| 3 | F | Emma Baghdasaryan | Armenia | Gyumri | Administration |
| 4 | F | Zemfira Harutyunyan | Armenia | Areni | Administration |
| 5 | F | Hasmik Ghonyan | Armenia | Kapan | Administration |
| 6 | M | Gor Tadevosyan | Armenia | Kapan | Deputy Mayor |
| 7 | M | Ashot Tserunyan | Armenia | Charentsavan | Administration |
| 8 | M | Norayr Grigoryan | Armenia | Areni | Administration |
| 9 | M | Orkhan Musayev | Azerbaijan | Khirdalan | Mayor |
| 10 | F | Irada Guliyeva | Azerbaijan | Khirdalan | Administration |
| 11 | M | Ahad Kazimov | Azerbaijan | Khirdalan | Administration |
| 12 | F | Fidan Rustamova | Azerbaijan | Khirdalan | Administration |
| 13 | F | Laman Aliyeva | Azerbaijan | Khirdalan | Administration |
| 14 | M | Farkhad Ashurbeyli | Azerbaijan | Urva | Administration |
| 15 | M | Archil Chikovani | Georgia | Batumi | Mayor |
| 16 | F | Marekhi Kankadze | Georgia | Tskaltubo | Administration |
| 17 | M | Irakli Goglichidze | Georgia | Kutaisi | Administration |
| 18 | F | Rusudan Zhzhadze | Georgia | Batumi | Administration |
| 19 | F | Ninaka Tsintsadze | Georgia | Batumi | Administration |
| 20 | M | Irakli Lezhava | Georgia | Poti | Administration |
| 21 | M | Ioseb Khakhaleishvili | Georgia | Kutaisi | Mayor |
| 22 | M | Anatolie Topa | Moldova | Ceadir-Lunga | Mayor |
| 23 | M | Valentin Cara | Moldova | Ceadir-Lunga | Deputy Mayor |
| 24 | M | Oleg Fazli | Moldova | Ceadir-Lunga | Administration |
| 25 | M | Oleg Garizan | Moldova | Copceac | Mayor |
| 26 | M | Anatoli Talmaci | Moldova | Copceac | Deputy Mayor |
| 27 | M | Sergiu Andronachi | Moldova | Cimisila | Mayor |
| 28 | M | Igor Hincu | Moldova | Volintiri | Mayor |
| 29 | F | Ina Hincu | Moldova | Volintiri | Mayor |
| 30 | M | Victor Ambroci | Moldova | Calarasi | Mayor |
| 31 | M | Mihai Frija | Moldova | Carpinieni | Mayor |
| 32 | M | Vitale Prostovan | Moldova | Drochia | Deputy Mayor |
| 33 | M | Alexander Kodola | Ukraine | Nizhyn | Mayor |
| 34 | M | Maksym Terletsky | Ukraine | Lviv | Administration |
| 35 | F | Ilvanna Kholod | Ukraine | Slavuta | Administration |
| 36 | M | Artem Vashchylenko | Ukraine | Mykolaiv | Administration |
| 37 | F | Oleksandra Kirian | Ukraine | Kharkiv | Administration |
| 38 | M | Yuriy Bova | Ukraine | Tristianets | Mayor |

Participants of KIIs and FGDs – UNDP, EC, Partners

| No | Gender | Name | Organization | Function/Country |
|----|--------|------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| 1 | F | Elina Jarvela | UNDP | IRH - Coordinator |
| 2 | F | Tina Stoum | UNDP | IRH - Coordinator |
| 3 | F | Yaera Chung | UNDP | IRH |
| 4 | M | Anton Sydorenko | UNDP | IRH |
| 5 | F | Shreya Krishnan | UNDP | IRH |
| 6 | F | Semira Osmanovic | UNDP | IRH |
| 7 | M | Zhirayr Edilyan | UNDP | CO Armenia |
| 8 | F | Monika Hovhannisyan | UNDP | CO Armenia |
| 9 | M | Javid Mammadov | UNDP | CO Azerbaijan |
| 10 | F | Tinatin Tkeshelashvili | UNDP | CO Georgia |
| 11 | M | Otar Konjaria | UNDP | CO Georgia |
| 12 | M | Valentin Croitoru | UNDP | CO Moldova |
| 13 | M | Mircea Dragomir | UNDP | CO Moldova |

| | | | | |
|----|---|---------------------------|---------|-----------------|
| 14 | F | Zinaida Adam | UNDP | CO Moldova |
| 15 | F | Lucia Cojocaru | UNDP | CO Moldova |
| 16 | M | Mustafa Sait-Ametov | UNDP | CO Ukraine |
| 17 | F | Tamara Kharchenko | UNDP | CO Ukraine |
| 18 | M | Stanislav Pidperygora | UNDP | CO Ukraine |
| 19 | M | Gerald Audaz | EC | DG NEAR – HoU |
| 20 | M | Thibault Charlet | EC | DG NEAR |
| 21 | M | Francois Villard | EC | DG NEAR |
| 22 | F | Tatevik Davtyan | EC | EEAS Armenia |
| 23 | F | Ramila Aslanova | EC | EEAS Azerbaijan |
| 24 | M | Irakli Khamaladze | EC | EEAS Georgia |
| 25 | M | Jan Demidovits-Mekelainen | EC | EEAS Moldova |
| 26 | F | Aurica Butnari | EC | EEAS Moldova |
| 27 | F | Irina Hubarets | EC | EEAS Ukraine |
| 28 | F | Gina Belle | Chora | Project partner |
| 29 | F | Mariela Atanassova | Chora | Project partner |
| 30 | M | Max Russell | Arup | Project partner |
| 31 | M | Pasquale Capizzi | Arup | Project partner |
| 32 | F | Luiza Schuch de Azambuja | TalTech | Project partner |

15. Evaluation Matrix

| Relevant evaluation criteria | Key questions | Specific sub questions | Data sources | Data-collection methods/tools | Indicators/ success standard | Methods for data analysis |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|--|---|------------------------------|
| Relevance | <p>1.To what extent has the initiative been appropriately responsive to the needs of local authorities in the Eastern Partnership, and changing partner priorities?</p> <p>2.Has the project succeeded with introducing novel working methodologies in the countries/cities?</p> <p>3. To what extent the project promoted a positive image of the role of the European Union at the local level?</p> | <p>1.1. How were the needs assessed?</p> <p>1.2. Which needs were identified?</p> <p>1.3. Which stakeholders were involved into the needs assessment?</p> <p>2.1. What was the added value of the new methodologies?</p> <p>2.2. What was the usefulness of the working methods?</p> <p>3.1. What are the views of beneficiaries on the EU role in the initiative?</p> <p>3.2. How was the EU image promoted?</p> | <p>1. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents</p> <p>2. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents</p> <p>3. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents , blogs, project publications</p> | <p>1. DR, KIIs, FGDs, OS, SVs</p> <p>2. DR, KIIs, FGDs, OS, SVs</p> <p>3. DR, KIIs, FGDs, SVs</p> | <p>1. Types of stakeholders involved, list of needs addressed/ not addressed, scale of addressing the needs (low/high/moderate)</p> <p>2. Assessment by respondents (positive/negative/other), assessment of usefulness degree by respondents</p> <p>3.Communication KPIs, opinions of stakeholders</p> | Qualitative and quantitative |
| Coherence | <p>4. What have been the value added (or not) of a regional project approach?</p> <p>5. As the M4EG has embraced a system thinking lens and approach (portfolio approach/mission-oriented economy and innovation) in supporting municipalities, what is the value added expressed by participating</p> | <p>4.1. What municipalities have been involved in the initiative?</p> <p>4.2. How were the regions involved?</p> <p>4.3. What are the benefits of the regional approach?</p> <p>4.4. Are there any better approaches?</p> <p>5.1. What is the perception of the participants on the</p> | <p>4. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents , initiative website</p> <p>5. Opinions of respondents</p> <p>6. Project documents, opinions of respondents ,</p> <p>7. Relevant documents,</p> | <p>4. DR, KIIs, FGDs, OS, SVs</p> <p>5. KIIs, FGDs, OS, SVs</p> <p>6. DR, KIIs, FGDs, OS, SVs</p> <p>7. DR, KIIs</p> | <p>4. Ability of respondents to identify the added value of the regional approach, comparative assessment of the approach against other approaches</p> <p>5. Assessment of the</p> | Qualitative and quantitative |

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|----------------------|--|---|--|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| | <p>municipalities and partners?</p> <p>6. Which areas are the most relevant and strategic areas for the M4EG to scale up or be more intentional about going forward?</p> <p>7. What was the project's coherence with the other regional, national and international policy / investment frameworks (esp. Green Deal)?</p> | <p>systems /portfolio approach?</p> <p>6.1. In which strategic areas has the M4EG approach proved most successful?</p> <p>6.2. In which areas has the M4EG proved least successful?</p> <p>6.3. In which other strategic areas could there be M4EG applicable?</p> <p>7.1. Are the main priorities/directions of the project corresponding to the priorities of relevant strategies / frameworks (Green Deal)</p> | <p>opinions of respondents ; blogs, project publications</p> | | <p>respondents on the systems/portfolio approach</p> <p>6. Areas in which the M4EG succeeded / failed, other potential strategic areas of intervention</p> <p>7. Degree of correspondence between the project and strategies/frameworks</p> | |
| Effectiveness | <p>8. What have been the key results and changes attained for the local authorities actively engaging in the initiative?</p> <p>9. Specifically on capabilities: To what extent has the M4EG, including its Urban Learning Center, the Portfolio Journey, Urban Imaginaries Programme, and Response and Renewal programme improved the capabilities of local authorities?</p> <p>10. Have there been any</p> | <p>8.1. What has changed in result of the initiative for the local authorities?</p> <p>8.2. To what can these changes be attributed?</p> <p>8.3. How actively were the local authorities involved?</p> <p>9.1. What capabilities of the local authorities improved (by type of the activity)?</p> <p>9.2. Which activities were best/least useful for the improvement of capabilities?</p> | <p>8. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents , initiative website</p> <p>9. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents</p> <p>10. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents , initiative website</p> <p>11. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents</p> <p>12. Initiative documents,</p> | <p>8. DR, KIIs, FGDs, OS, SVs</p> <p>9. DR, KIIs, FGDs, OS, SVs</p> <p>10. DR, KIIs, FGDs, OS, SVs</p> <p>11. DR, KIIs, FGDs, OS, SVs</p> <p>12. DR, KIIs, FGDs, OS, SVs</p> <p>13. DR, KIIs, FGDs, OS, SVs</p> <p>14. DR, KIIs, FGDs, OS, SVs</p> <p>15. DR, KIIs, FGDs, OS, SVs</p> <p>16. DR, KIIs, FGDs, OS, SVs</p> | <p>8. Changes identified by the respondents , severity of changes, sources of changes, scale of the local authorities' involvement</p> <p>9. Scale of capabilities' improvement by type, learning achievements, changes in behaviors, changes in norms, changes in the system</p> | <p>Qualitative and quantitative</p> |

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| | <p>unexpected output and outcome-level results, and others spill-over effects achieved beyond the planned?</p> <p>11. What are the needed conditions and mechanism through which the Portfolio Journey can effectively contribute to the project outcomes? What mechanisms are triggered in different context to produce the outcome (or fail to)?</p> <p>12. In which areas does the project have the greatest achievements? Why and what have been the supporting factors? How can the project build on or expand these achievements?</p> <p>13. In which areas does the project have the fewest achievements? What have been the constraining factors and why? How can or could they be overcome?</p> <p>14. How did the inter-country exchange contribute to different aspects of implementation and outcomes?</p> <p>15. What are the learnings from difference of the</p> | <p>9.3. Has the capacity development affect system changes (if so, which)?</p> <p>10.1. Where the expected outputs and outcomes reached?</p> <p>10.2. What was the scale of achievements of the expected outputs and outcomes?</p> <p>10.3. What additional outputs/outcomes were achieved?</p> <p>11.1. What factors contributed to their achievement?</p> <p>11.2. What did not work in achieving outputs and outcomes?</p> <p>12.1. What are the most prominent results of the initiative?</p> <p>12.2. What are the main success factors?</p> <p>12.3 How can they be capitalized upon?</p> <p>13.1. What are the least successful project areas?</p> <p>13.2 What are the constraining factors for progressing in these areas?</p> <p>13.3 What could be done to improve them?</p> | <p>opinions of respondents</p> <p>13. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents</p> <p>14. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents</p> <p>15. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents</p> <p>16. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents ; blogs, project publications</p> | <p>17. DR, KIIs, FGDs, OS, SVs</p> | <p>10. Achievement degree of the project outputs/outcomes, list of unexpected outputs/outcomes</p> <p>11. list of factors contributing to the success/failure in their achievement</p> <p>12. list of success stories of the initiative, list of failures of the initiative</p> <p>13. list of constraints, list of proposed improvements</p> <p>14. list of areas of intercountry exchange</p> <p>15. list of approaches to implementing the COs</p> <p>16. list of strengths/weaknesses in the knowledge and learning systems</p> | |
|--|---|---|--|------------------------------------|---|--|

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|-------------------|--|--|---|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| | <p>COs implementation approaches?</p> <p>16. How effective were the M4EG UNDP's knowledge and learning systems?</p> | <p>14.1. What was the added value of the intercountry exchange?</p> <p>14.2. In which areas was the intercountry exchange fostered?</p> <p>15.1. What were the different approaches to implementing the project by COs?</p> <p>15.2. What are the lessons learnt from these?</p> <p>16.1. What are the strengths of the M4EG UNDP knowledge and learning systems?</p> <p>16.2. What are the weaknesses of the M4EG knowledge and learning systems?</p> | | | | |
| Efficiency | <p>17. To what extent has the UNDP project implementation strategy and execution been efficient and cost-effective?</p> <p>18. To what extent have the M4EG phase 2 increased the active member's opportunities for partnership and funding and financing?</p> | <p>17.1. What was the progress in the project expenditure?</p> <p>17.2. Was the expenditure appropriately justified?</p> <p>17.3. What was the value for money?</p> <p>18.1. What actions were undertaken to attract additional funding/financing?</p> <p>18.2. What are the sources of additional funding/financing?</p> | <p>17. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents</p> <p>18. Initiative documents, documents of partners/donors, opinions of respondents</p> | <p>17. DR, KIIs, FGDs</p> <p>18. DR, KIIs, FGDs</p> | <p>17. Volume of expenditure to date, progress in time in expenditure, justifications of expenditure</p> <p>18. Number and type of activities oriented on attracting additional funds, volume of additional funds committed,</p> | <p>Qualitative and quantitative</p> |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---|---|--|---|---|------------------------------|
| | | 18.3. What is the volume of additional funding/financing? | | | types of additional funding sources (public, private, other) | |
| Sustainability | <p>19. To what extent are learning practices and tools utilized by the project team to adapt the programming to changing circumstances to deliver on planned results and effects beyond, and how are these learnings shared further?</p> <p>20. Are there any social or political risks that may jeopardize sustainability of project outputs?</p> <p>21. What is the likelihood that the benefits from the project will be maintained for a reasonably long period of time after the project phases out?</p> <p>22. Will the level of stakeholders' ownership and strengthened capacities be sufficient to allow for the project benefits to be sustained?</p> | <p>19.1. What learning tools are applied by the team?</p> <p>19.2. How is learning monitored?</p> <p>19.3. How are learnings shared?</p> <p>19.4. What are the main results of learning?</p> <p>19.5. How has the initiative adapted to the changes?</p> <p>20.1. What are the main social/political risks in the region/countries/municipalities?</p> <p>20.2. How do they affect the project implementation?</p> <p>20.3. What are the mitigation strategies?</p> <p>21.1. What are the expected benefits from the project?</p> <p>21.2. What is the feasibility of their achievement?</p> <p>21.3. What factors enable/constrain their achievement?</p> <p>22.1. What is the perceived by stakeholders level</p> | <p>19. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents , initiative website</p> <p>20. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents , initiative website, other documents with focus on the socio-political issues in the EaP</p> <p>21. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents , initiative website</p> <p>22. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents , initiative website</p> | <p>19. DR, KIIs, FGDs, OS, SVs</p> <p>20. DR, KIIs, FGDs, OS, SVs</p> <p>21. DR, KIIs, FGDs, OS, SVs</p> <p>22. DR, KIIs, FGDs, OS, SVs</p> | <p>19. List of learning tools by type, frequency of application, monitoring results for learning, list of sharing events for learnings, list of adaptation events based on learnings</p> <p>20. List of social/political risks, list of mitigation approaches, list of adaptation events</p> <p>21. List of the expected benefits, perceived assessment of their feasibility, list of enabling/constraining factors</p> <p>22. Assessment of the ownership of the results by stakeholders , list of</p> | Qualitative and quantitative |

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| | | <p>of results ownership?</p> <p>22.2. Which capacities of stakeholders were strengthened?</p> <p>22.3. What else is needed to help sustaining the ownership of the results by stakeholders?</p> | | | <p>capacities that were strengthened, list of stakeholder needs to help in sustaining the ownership of results</p> | |
| Cross-cutting issues | <p>23. Did any unintended effects emerge for women or vulnerable groups?</p> <p>24. To what extent has the project promoted positive changes in gender equality and the empowerment of women?</p> <p>25. To what extent have poor, indigenous and physically challenged, women, men and other disadvantaged and marginalized groups benefited from the project</p> <p>26. How did the crisis and instabilities (both in-country and cross-border) have impacted the implementation and outcomes?</p> <p>27. How effective was the project's contribution to the respective SDGs?</p> | <p>23.1. What were the unintended effects for women and vulnerable groups?</p> <p>23.2. Was the protection of women and vulnerable groups ensured in case of adverse unintended effects?</p> <p>24.1. Were there any activities focused on promoting changed equality in the project?</p> <p>24.2. What were the numbers/ratio of women/men participating in the project?</p> <p>24.3. What is the perceived empowerment of women participating in the project?</p> <p>24.4. Were there any constraints for women' participation in the project?</p> <p>25.1. What were the</p> | <p>23. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents , initiative website</p> <p>24. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents , initiative website</p> <p>25. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents , initiative website</p> <p>26. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents</p> <p>27. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents</p> <p>28. Initiative documents, opinions of respondents</p> | <p>23. DR, KIIs, FGDs, OS, SVs</p> <p>24. DR, KIIs, FGDs, OS, SVs</p> <p>25. DR, KIIs, FGDs, OS, SVs</p> <p>26. DR, KIIs, FGDs</p> <p>28. DR, KIIs, FGDs</p> <p>29. DR, KIIs, FGDs</p> | <p>23. List of unintended effects on women/vulnerable groups</p> <p>24. List of activities promoting gender equality in the project, number of women/men participating in the project, ratio of women/men participating in the project, perceived degree of women' empowerment in the project, list of constraints of women' participation in the project</p> <p>25. List of disadvantaged/marginalized groups,</p> | <p>Qualitative and quantitative</p> |

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| | <p>28. Were there any positive / adverse environmental effects resulting from the project?</p> | <p>disadvantaged/marginalized groups participating in the project?</p> <p>25.2. What were the benefits for the disadvantaged/marginalized groups in the project?</p> <p>25.3. What was the perceived extent of benefits for those groups?</p> <p>26.1. What crises had an influence on the project?</p> <p>26.2. How has the project adapted to these?</p> <p>27.1. To which SDGs has the project contributed to?</p> <p>27.2. What was the scale of this contribution?</p> <p>28.1. Did the project have any positive/negative effects on the environment (climate)?</p> | | | <p>list of benefits for these groups, assessment of the benefits</p> <p>27. list of crises affecting the project, list of adaptation responses</p> <p>28. list of positive/negative effects on the environment</p> | |
|--|--|---|--|--|--|--|

Masterlist of Questions for the KIIs and Focus Groups

Intro

- Information about the evaluation purpose
- Selection of questions depends on the type of respondent
- Consent statement and recording request

Bio the respondent

- Function/role in the M4EG
- Organization and role in the organization
- Location
- Gender
- Length of involvement in the M4EG

Relevance

1. Response of M4EG to the EaP needs
 - 1.2. How were the needs of your country/municipality assessed?
 - 1.3. Which needs were identified?
 - 1.4. Which stakeholders were involved into the assessment?
 - 1.5. Which novel methodology was introduced in your city with M4EG project?
2. Novelty of the approach
 - 2.2. Was this approach new in your country/city?
 - 2.3. Are there any other projects that use a similar approach?
 - 2.4. What is the added value of the novel methodologies?
 - 2.5. How familiar were you with these prior to the project?
3. Promotion of the EU's positive image
 - 3.2. How do you view the role of the EU in M4EG?
 - 3.3. How was the EU promoted?

Coherence

4. The added value of regional approach
 - 4.2. How was your country/CO? involved?
 - 4.3. Can you tell me how your municipality have benefitted from a regional perspective and approach in the M4EG?
 - 4.4. Are there any better approaches?
 - 4.5. How could the initiative improve the regional approach in its next phase?

5. Perception of the systems approaches

5.2. What do you think about the systems/portfolio/urban makeover/livability of the city approach?

5.3. What is the added value of the approach?

6. Strategic areas for the M4EG to scale up

6.2. In which areas was M4EG the most successful?

6.3. In which areas was M4EG least successful?

6.4. In which areas could it be expanded?

7. Coherence with the other frameworks

1.1. Is the project aligned with other regional, national and international policy / investment frameworks (esp. Green Deal)?

1.2. In which ways is it aligned?

Effectiveness

8. Results and changes attained for the local authorities

8.2. What has changed in your municipality in result of M4EG?

8.3. What triggered these changes?

8.4. How actively were you involved?

9. Capabilities' improvement

9.2. In which component of the project were you involved (Urban Learning Center, the Portfolio Journey, Urban Imaginaries Programme, and Response and Renewal programme)?

9.3. What new capabilities (skills, know-how, access to resources etc.) have you acquired?

9.4. Which M4EG activities were more useful for this purpose?

9.5. What changes resulted from the improved capabilities?

10. Unexpected results

10.2. Were the expected outputs/outcomes of M4EG in your municipality achieved?

10.3. Were there any unexpected outputs/outcomes?

11. Enabling environment

11.2. What helped in achieving the M4EG outputs/outcomes?

11.3. What hindered in achieving the M4EG outputs/outcomes?

12. Initiative achievements

- 12.2. Which project achievements are you most proud of?
- 12.3. What are the success factors?
- 12.4. Which project achievements are you least proud of?
- 12.5. What were the constraints?
- 12.6. How have you adapted to the constraints?
- 12.7. Have you applied a risk management strategy?
- 12.8. Which risks have materialized?
- 12.9. Were there any unforeseen risks that occurred?

13. UNDP implementation

- 13.2. What was the progress in the project expenditure?
- 13.3. Was the expenditure appropriately justified?
- 13.4. Was there value for money with this approach?
- 13.5. Which risks did materialize during the project implementation?
- 13.6. Was the risk mitigation strategy appropriate?
- 13.7. How did the M4EG adapt to changing realities?
- 13.8. How flexible was the implementation when encountering unexpected risks or challenges?
- 13.9. Are there any new risks that can occur in the future (which ones)?
- 13.10. In which way can the project help to mitigate the forthcoming risks?

14. Additional funding/financing

- 14.2. What actions were undertaken to attract additional funds?
- 14.3. How did M4EG enable attracting additional funds?
- 14.4. What new have you learnt in this process about attracting funds?

15. Added value of transnational learning

- 15.2. Have you participated in transnational learning within M4EG?
- 15.3. What have you learnt from other countries and which ones?
- 15.4. What were the main benefits of it?
- 15.5. How did you implement the new know-how?
- 15.6. How did it contribute to the implementation and outcomes of the project in your country?

16. Differences in COs implementation approaches

- 16.2. What specific national factors have impacted implementation in your COs?
- 16.3. In which way this could be different than in other EaP countries?
- 16.4. What were the main obstacles in implementation in your country?
- 16.5. What could be changed to improve the implementation in your country?

17. Effectiveness of the M4EG UNDP knowledge and learning systems

- 17.2. Did the learning adequately respond to your needs and capacities?
- 17.3. How effective were the M4EG UNDP knowledge and learning systems, in your view?
- 17.4. How often did you participate in these?
- 17.5. What was the main knowledge you gained?

- 17.6. How useful was this new knowledge?
- 17.7. In which areas was the new knowledge most useful?
- 17.8. Were you able to implement it in the project?
- 17.9. Were you able to implement it beyond the project?
- 17.10. Have you promoted the new knowledge from M4EG in other contexts?
- 17.11. How did you like the learning format?
- 17.12. What other knowledge would you need to benefit the project implementation?
- 17.13. What learning format would you suggest to improve in the learning process?
- 17.14. What knowledge or learning from this process was least useful?
- 17.15. In case you could not implement some of the learnings, what constrained this?

Efficiency

18. Cost-effectiveness

- 18.2. To what extent has the UNDP project implementation strategy and execution been efficient and cost-effective?
- 18.3. Was there any unforeseen expenditure?

19. Project finance

- 19.2. To what extent have the M4EG phase 2 increased the active member's opportunities for partnership and funding and financing?
- 19.3. What additional funding was committed (sources?)?

Sustainability

20. Adaptivity to changing circumstances

- 20.2. What learning tools are applied by the team?
- 20.3. How is learning monitored?
- 20.4. How are learnings shared?
- 20.5. What are the main results of learning?
- 20.6. How has M4EG adapted to changes?

21. Social and political risks

- 21.2. What are the main social/political risks in your country / municipality?
- 21.3. How do they affect M4EG implementation?
- 21.4. What are the mitigation strategies?
- 21.5. How can the M4EG outputs/outcomes be maintained beyond its lifetime?
- 21.6. What could help in maintaining them?
- 21.7. What could constrain this?
- 21.8. Is there any collaboration with other relevant projects / initiatives? (Which ones?)

22. Viability if the project results

- 22.2. How can the M4EG outputs/outcomes be maintained beyond its lifetime?
- 22.3. What could help in maintaining them?
- 22.4. What could constrain this?
- 22.5. Is there any collaboration with other relevant projects / initiatives? (Which ones?)

23. Ownership of the results by stakeholders

- 23.2. How much are you able to influence the M4EG results?
- 23.3. What can be done to improve it?

Cross-cutting issues

24. Women and vulnerable groups

- 24.2. Were there any unintended effects on M4EG on women/vulnerable groups?
- 24.3. Were they protected in case of adverse effects? (How?)

25. Gender equality promotion

- 25.2. How were the changes in gender equality promoted in M4EG?
- 25.3. What is the participation of women in M4EG?
- 25.4. Were they empowered in result of M4EG?
- 25.5. Were there any constraints to women' participation in M4EG?

26. Disadvantaged / marginalized groups

- 26.2. What were the disadvantaged/marginalized groups participating in the project?
- 26.3. What were their benefits from the M4EG?
- 26.4. Were their needs adequately addressed by the M4EG?

27. Responsiveness to crises and instabilities

- 27.2. What in country/cross-border crises and instabilities impacted your country during the M4EG implementation?
- 27.3. What responses did you take within the project?
- 27.4. Were the responses adequate?
- 27.5. How could these be better mitigated in the future?

28. Effectiveness of the project's contribution to the respective SDGs

- 28.2. Which SDGs have the M4EG project contribute to in your country?
- 28.3. In which ways did it contribute?

29. Environmental / climate effects

- 29.2. Were there any positive / negative environmental effects resulting from the project?
- 29.3. In case of negative effects, how were they mitigated?

Pledge of Ethical Conduct



ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATION PLEDGE OF ETHICAL CONDUCT IN EVALUATION



By signing this pledge, I hereby commit to discussing and applying the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation and to adopting the associated ethical behaviours.



INTEGRITY

I will actively adhere to the moral values and professional standards of evaluation practice as outlined in the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation and following the values of the United Nations. Specifically, I will be:

- Honest and truthful in my communication and actions.
- Professional, engaging in credible and trustworthy behaviour, alongside competence, commitment and ongoing reflective practice.
- Independent, impartial and incorruptible.



ACCOUNTABILITY

I will be answerable for all decisions made and actions taken and responsible for honouring commitments, without qualification or exception; I will report potential or actual harms observed. Specifically, I will be:

- Transparent regarding evaluation purpose and actions taken, establishing trust and increasing accountability for performance to the public, particularly those populations affected by the evaluation.
- Responsive as questions or events arise, adapting plans as required and referring to appropriate channels where corruption, fraud, sexual exploitation or abuse or other misconduct or waste of resources is identified.
- Responsible for meeting the evaluation purpose and for actions taken and for ensuring redress and recognition as needed.



RESPECT

I will engage with all stakeholders of an evaluation in a way that honours their dignity, well-being, personal agency and characteristics. Specifically, I will ensure:

- Access to the evaluation process and products by all relevant stakeholders – whether powerless or powerful – with due attention to factors that could impede access such as sex, gender, race, language, country of origin, LGBTQ status, age, background, religion, ethnicity and ability.
- Meaningful participation and equitable treatment of all relevant stakeholders in the evaluation processes, from design to dissemination. This includes engaging various stakeholders, particularly affected people, so they can actively inform the evaluation approach and products rather than being solely a subject of data collection.
- Fair representation of different voices and perspectives in evaluation products (reports, webinars, etc.).



BENEFICENCE

I will strive to do good for people and planet while minimizing harm arising from evaluation as an intervention. Specifically, I will ensure:

- Explicit and ongoing consideration of risks and benefits from evaluation processes.
- Maximum benefits at systemic (including environmental), organizational and programmatic levels.
- No harm. I will not proceed where harm cannot be mitigated.
- Evaluation makes an overall positive contribution to human and natural systems and the mission of the United Nations.

I commit to playing my part in ensuring that evaluations are conducted according to the Charter of the United Nations and the ethical requirements laid down above and contained within the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation. When this is not possible, I will report the situation to my supervisor, designated focal points or channels and will actively seek an appropriate response.

17.05.2024

(Signature and Date)

Terms of Reference for Evaluation of the Mayors for Economic Growth 2021-2024

[Updated March 2024]

Type of Contract: Individual Consultant (Evaluator)
Languages Required: English
Duration: Mid-April 2024 – end July 2024 (approximately 40-50 workdays)
Location: Home based (possible travel)

The EU and UNDP are seeking support to evaluate the second phase of the Mayors for Economic Growth initiative.

1. Background and context

The [Mayors for Economic Growth](#) (M4EG), phase 2 (2021-2024) is a joint EU & UNDP initiative to support Mayors and their teams in the Eastern Partnership region (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine). Through financial and technical resources, networking and learning opportunities, the M4EG seeks to explore new trajectories of growth to make towns and cities resilient and attractive for people and investment. Recognizing there are no quick fixes for complex challenges, the M4EG takes a 'hyperlocal' and whole-of-place approach, working alongside Mayors and their teams to identify the best local fit.

The overall objective of the initiative is to enhance economic inclusive growth and job creation by supporting local authorities in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. The M4EG in its first phase (2017-2020) introduced an integrated approach to local economic development planning. However, these plans have not generated the desired investments for transformation. To achieve this result, the second phase of the program is expected to serve as a platform to enable and learn on transformation – applying a strategic innovation framework – its tools and methods, engaging in deep listening (hearing narratives that exist in society), co-creation with diverse groups of innovators, investors and public servants of bankable projects, activation of portfolios and their dynamic management, actively designing bankable projects to attract private sector and other forms of financing, while simultaneously developing capabilities in local authorities. The program will focus on the medium and long-term needs of local authorities and building their capacities to withstand shocks, as well as diversifying financing to support economic development results in Eastern Partnership countries. In practice, this will mean supporting a green and inclusive recovery of secondary towns, curbing out-migration, while tapping into a diverse set of resources to finance the transformation.

The specific outputs are:

1. EaP municipalities are supported in their participation in the M4EG initiative
2. Municipal pilot projects building on existing Local Economic Development Plans (LEDPs) are successfully implemented
3. Ukraine crisis emergency and refugee response, recovery, and resilience (new in 2022)

Over the past three years, the network has grown to more than 400 local authorities/municipalities, with close to 50 municipalities engaging in deep learning and seed-funds programmes. Considering the diverse and complex national as well as the evolving regional context, the M4EG has sought to be responsive, flexible and adaptive to best support the realities and needs of the M4EG members.

Please see Annex 3, Updated Description of Action for more details on the project’s expected results and indicators. Also see the [M4EG website](#) and reports, including the latest M4EG Mid-year Brief 2023, all [found here on the website](#) (annual 2023 report forthcoming).

Basic project information is seen in the below table:

| PROJECT INFORMATION | |
|---|---|
| Title of project | Mayors for Economic Growth (aka M4EG Facility) |
| Contract Number: | ENI2020/416-147 |
| Duration of project | 48 months/4 years: 1 Jan 2021- 31 Dec 2024 |
| Target Countries | Eastern Partnership Countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine |
| Target stakeholders/beneficiaries | Local authorities/municipalities in the 5 countries |
| Evaluation period | 1 January 2021-31 March 2024 |
| Implementing Partner | UNDP |
| Total project cost | €12,094,364 |
| European Union | €11,800,000 |
| UNDP | €294,364 |
| Project expenditure at the time of evaluation | €7,106,380.60 (as indicated in 2023 Annual Financial Report) |
| SDG contribution (main) | SDG8: Decent work and economic growth, SDG11: Sustainable cities |
| Regional Programme Europe and CIS (2022-2025) | Outcome 1: #1: Structural transformation accelerated, particularly green, inclusive and digital transitions |
| UNDP Strategic Plan 2022-2025 | Tier 2 Development Outputs: E.2 Innovation capabilities <u>built</u> , and approaches <u>adopted</u> to expand policy options at global, regional, national and sub-national levels Tier 3 Organizational Effectiveness: 1.3 Cutting-edge strategic innovations and digital solutions <u>cultivated</u> for policy and programming |

2. Evaluation purpose, scope and objectives

EU and UNDP are looking for someone to help evaluate key aspects of the M4EG phase 2 to best capture learning, results, and effects to feed into the preparation of a possible phase 3 of the initiative (2025-2028). The overall objective of the evaluation is to capture the programme’s results and effects beyond the standard quantitative indicators and methodologies.

In the face of complex challenges such as diversifying a city economy, moving into a green transition, and fostering responsive and inclusive local institutions, a linear project management approach risks becoming obsolete. The thematic landscape involves a multitude of stakeholders—governments, civil society, international organizations, private sector, academics, media, and local communities—each bringing diverse interests and ability to influence the landscape. Traditional international development projects have increasingly been criticized for employing a linear, 'one-size-fits-all' approach that neglects the intricate web of factors influencing change. The if-then logic of Results Based Management (RBM) tends to operate on the assumption that development is a straightforward, predictable process, leading to interventions that may be ill-suited for complex, fluid situations. This can result in a lack of relevance and sustainability, as solutions may not be rooted in local contexts or adaptable to evolving circumstances. Hence, the project team recognizes a need to look beyond

compliance and oversight driven management and results framework to an adaptive project framework and capability in responding to the diverse and evolving needs of local authorities.

The M4EG has over the past two years tested an adaptive management approach internally with the project team, and externally with the 10 cities under one of the programmes – the Portfolio Journey. The tested framework is inspired by system thinking principles, and consists of guiding principles, RBM log frame complemented with ‘learning questions’, a cloud-based learning site, monthly learning reports, dataset and PowerBi dashboard, and sensemaking workshops ([based on UNDP’s Sensemaking Protocol](#)). For the engagement with city teams, please see this blog for more information as an example: Please see this blog for more information and as an example: <https://innovation.eurasia.undp.org/dynamically-managing-urban-transformation-portfolios-our-m4eg-journey/>

Scope of the evaluation:

- The evaluation will cover activities between January 2021 to Quarter 1 of 2024.
- The evaluation will cover the three outcomes of the M4EG phase 2, in the 5 countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine.

Evaluation objectives:

- The evaluation will focus in particular on capability development of local authorities, and the M4EG’s initiatives’ ability to help generate more opportunities for its members for learning, partnerships, funding and financing.
- Given the adaptive nature of the project, the evaluation will focus on identifying the needed conditions and mechanisms through which the Portfolio Journey can better and more effectively achieve their outcomes. It will also identify the mechanisms that are triggered in different context to produce the outcomes.
- A key feature to be evaluated is the M4EG’s ability, including its adaptability, to address existing and future needs of local authorities.
- Assess the likelihood of continuation, sustainability and scalability of project outputs and benefits after completion of the project.
- Identify gaps/weaknesses in the project design and provide recommendations as to their improvement.
- Identify project intended or unintended contribution to promote positive changes for women and vulnerable groups.

3. Evaluation criteria and key guiding questions

The below evaluation questions provide a frame for the information that the evaluation will generate. To be as realistic as possible (with existing time frame and budgets), the evaluation will prioritize some OECD-DAC evaluation criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability) over others.

Proposed evaluation questions

Relevance

- To what extent has the initiative been appropriately responsive to the needs of local authorities in the Eastern Partnership, and changing partner priorities?
- To what extent the project promoted a positive image of the role of the European Union at the local level?

Coherence

- What have been the value add (or not) of a regional project approach?
- As the M4EG has embraced a system thinking lens and approach (portfolio approach/mission-oriented economy and innovation) in supporting municipalities, what is the value add expressed by participating municipalities and partners?
- Which areas are the most relevant and strategic areas for the M4EG to scale up or be more intentional about going forward?

Effectiveness

- What have been the key results and changes attained for the local authorities actively engaging in the initiative?
- Specifically on capabilities: To what extent has the M4EG, including its Urban Learning Center, the Portfolio Journey, Urban Imaginaries Programme, and Response and Renewal programme improved the capabilities of local authorities?
- Have there been any unexpected output and outcome-level results, and others spill-over effects achieved beyond the planned?
- What are the needed conditions and mechanism through which the Portfolio Journey can effectively contribute to the project outcomes? What mechanisms are triggered in different context to produce the outcome (or fail to)?
- In which areas does the project have the greatest achievements? Why and what have been the supporting factors? How can the project build on or expand these achievements?
- In which areas does the project have the fewest achievements? What have been the constraining factors and why? How can or could they be overcome?
-

Efficiency

- To what extent has the UNDP project implementation strategy and execution been efficient and cost-effective?
- To what extent have the M4EG phase 2 increased the active member's opportunities for partnership and funding and financing?
-

Sustainability

- To what extent are learning practices and tools utilized by the project team to adapt the programming to changing circumstances to deliver on planned results and effects beyond, and how are these learnings shared further?
- Are there any social or political risks that may jeopardize sustainability of project outputs?
- What is the likelihood that the benefits from the project will be maintained for a reasonably long period of time after the project phases out?
- Will the level of stakeholders' ownership and strengthened capacities be sufficient to allow for the project benefits to be sustained?

Cross-cutting issues

- Did any unintended effects emerge for women or vulnerable groups?
- To what extent has the project promoted positive changes in gender equality and the empowerment of women?
- To what extent have poor, indigenous and physically challenged, women, men and other disadvantaged and marginalized groups benefited from the project

4. Methodology

The evaluation should employ a combination of qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods and instruments according to the specific questions proposed in the evaluation design. For applicable evaluation questions, the evaluator is expected to apply realist evaluation methods. This method entails identifying one or more Context-Mechanism-Outcome (CMO) configurations, where contexts are made of resources, opportunities and constraints available to the beneficiaries; mechanisms are choices, reasoning or decisions that individuals take based on the resources available in their context; and outcomes are the product of individuals' behaviour and choices. Rather than offering an overview of all causal factors, this method focuses on specific key mechanisms and their dependence on the context.

The evaluator is also expected to follow a participatory and consultative approach that ensures close engagement with the evaluation managers, implementing partners and different gender partners and beneficiaries. The consultant must use gender-responsive methodologies and tools and ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as other cross-cutting issues are incorporated into the evaluation report.

- **Document review.** This would include a review of all relevant documentation, inter alia
 - Project document (EU's Description of Action).
 - Theory of change, process and methodology for engaging municipalities, and results framework.
 - Annual and Mid Year Project Reports
 - Activity reflection and learning reports, including monthly learning reports for project and portfolio cities
 - Annual workplans (country office and regional level as relevant)
 - Activity/learning and seed programmes designs (i.e. Portfolio Journey, Urban Imaginaries, Response and Renewal grant programme)
 - Highlights of project board meetings
- **Interviews and meetings** with key stakeholders (men and women) such as Mayors, Deputy Mayors, Local Economic Development Officers or similar technical staff, key government counterparts, EU in Brussels and the five relevant Delegations, and other local, national and international (also technical) partners as relevant:
- **Surveys among municipality staff that have actively engaged in any of the grant and capability development programmes** (can be narrative, ethnographic story based, supported with generative AI, to be discussed).
- **Other methods** such as outcome mapping, observational visits, group discussions, etc. as proposed
- **Data review and analysis** of monitoring and other data sources and methods. To ensure maximum validity, reliability of data (quality) and promote use, the evaluation team will ensure triangulation of the various data sources.
- **Gender and human rights lens.** All evaluation products need to address gender, disability, and human right issues.

The evaluation might require 1-2 **field visits**, to be further discussed with the project team. Costs will be covered by the project.

The final methodological approach should be clearly outlined in the inception report and be a collaborative effort between UNDP, the EU and the evaluators.

5. Evaluation products (deliverables)

The TOR should clearly outline the outputs UNDP expects from the evaluation team, with a detailed timeline and schedule for completion of the evaluation products. Where relevant, the TOR should also detail the length of specific products (number of pages). These products could include:

- **Evaluation inception report (10-15 pages).** The inception report should be carried out following and based on preliminary discussions with UNDP after the desk review and should be produced before the evaluation starts (before any formal evaluation interviews, survey distribution or field visits) and prior to the country visit in the case of international evaluators.
- **Evaluation debriefings.** Immediately following an evaluation, UNDP may ask for a preliminary debriefing and findings.
- **Draft evaluation report (within an agreed length).** A length of 40 to 60 pages including executive summary is suggested.
- **Evaluation report audit trail.** The programme unit and key stakeholders in the evaluation should review the draft evaluation report and provide an amalgamated set of comments to the evaluator within an agreed period of time, as outlined in these guidelines. Comments and changes by the evaluator in response to the draft report should be retained by the evaluator to show how they have addressed comments.
- **Final evaluation report.**
- **Two presentations to relevant stakeholders to be defined with Project Team.**
- **Evaluation brief and other knowledge products** or participation in knowledge-sharing events, if relevant to maximise use.

6. Expected competencies for evaluator

The evaluation shall be done by independent evaluator with the following competencies:

Corporate competencies:

- Demonstrates integrity by modeling the UN's values and ethical standards;
- Promotes the vision, mission, and strategic goals of the European Union and UNDP;
- Displays cultural, gender, religion, race, nationality and age sensitivity and adaptability;
- Treats all people fairly without favoritism;
- Fulfills all obligations to gender sensitivity and zero tolerance for sexual harassment.

Functional Competencies:

- Strong client orientation and advisory skills,
- Excellent communication skills and drafting/writing skills in English,
- Strong organizational awareness,
- Ability to meet deadlines and work under pressure,
- Strong interpersonal skills.

Education:

- Advanced (MA) university degree (or equivalent) in evaluation, social sciences, economy, development studies or another relevant field is required.
- Additional education/specialized training in evaluation is an asset.

Experience:

- At least 5 years of experience in monitoring and evaluation, results-based management, development cooperation, policy planning and analysis, advisory support to governments or donor agencies in evaluating development cooperation, or public financial management or private sector engagement, or similar consultancy assignments.

- Previous experience in working with international organizations/working such as the European Union and or the UN is an asset.
- Experience in applying qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods, designing and leading evaluations or similar assignments is required (at least 3 similar assignments)
- Experience in writing of evaluation reports or similar documents in English (at least 3 similar assignments)
- Good understanding of gender equality and human-rights based approach, as well as experience conducting evaluations in these areas are a strong asset.
- Knowledge of system thinking/mission-oriented economy and innovation approaches is a strong asset
- Familiarity with policies implemented by the European Union in the field of local economic development and local self-government, as well as of the EU financing instruments for mobilizing public-private investment in its external action (grants, blending, guarantees) is an asset;
- Experience working in the Eastern Partnership (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan) will be an asset;
- Experience assessing other EU-funded programmes will be an asset.
- Experience working with European and International Financial Institutions will be an asset.

7. Evaluation ethics

This evaluation will be conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the UNEG 'Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation'. The consultant must safeguard the rights and confidentiality of information providers, interviewees, and stakeholders through measures to ensure compliance with legal and other relevant codes governing collection of data and reporting on data. The consultant must also ensure security of collected information before and after the evaluation and protocols to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of sources of information where that is expected. The information knowledge and data gathered in the evaluation process must also be solely used for the evaluation and not for other uses with the express authorization of UNDP and partners.

Pledge of ethical conduct in evaluation. The Evaluator is to read carefully, understand and sign the 'Pledge of Ethical Conduct in Evaluation of the United Nations system'.¹²

8. Implementation arrangements

The Evaluator report to the UNDP Evaluation Manager, who will assure smooth, quality, and independent implementation of the evaluation with needful guidance from UNDP's Senior Management. The Evaluation Manager will be responsible for approval of deliverables. The UNDP IRH Senior Management will take responsibility for the approval of the evaluation report.

The Evaluator will engage with the UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub Innovation Team, and the five Country Offices implementing the regional project, under the supervision of the Regional Project Manager. The regional team will support the Evaluator in the data collection, coordination and outreach to stakeholders as needed.

The Evaluator will also engage with the donor counterpart, the European Commission, DG NEAR, and EU Delegations in country as relevant. The Donor will review the final document and provide input. This will be channeled through the Project Manager.

¹²<http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/2866#:~:text=The%20UNEG%20Ethical%20Guidelines%20for%20Evaluation%20were%20first%20published%20in%202008.&text=This%20document%20aims%20to%20support,day%20to%20day%20evaluation%20practice.>

The evaluation will be conducted independently.

9. Payment schedule

Payment will be made in two instalments:

- 1st instalment presenting 30% of the lump sum after submission of the Inception Report, upon confirmation of UNDP on delivering on this contract obligation in a satisfactory manner;
- 2nd instalment presenting 70% of the lump sum upon confirmation of UNDP on delivering on all contract obligations in a satisfactory manner.

10. Selection of Applicant

Individual consultants will be evaluated based on a cumulative analysis **taking into consideration the combination of the applicants' qualifications and financial proposal.**

The award of the contract should be made to the individual consultant whose offer has been evaluated and determined as:

- a) responsive/compliant/acceptable, and
- b) Having received the highest score out of a pre-determined set of weighted technical (P11 desk reviews and interviews) and financial criteria specific to the solicitation.

Method: Highest total score of weighted technical and financial criteria: UNDP will award a contract to the individual who receives the highest score out of a predetermined weighted, Technical and Financial criterion as follows: 70% Technical criteria, 30% Financial criteria.

Once candidates have been shortlisted, i.e. they have attained a score of at least 70%, based on the requirements in the Terms of Reference (at least 28 points), only then, would they be interviewed for the position.

At the technical stage, candidates must attain at least a score of 70% (at least 49 points) for their financial proposals to be evaluated.

Only the highest ranked candidates who would be found qualified for the job will be considered for the Financial Evaluation.

The final evaluation process is based on a 70:30 weighting, with 30 points being allocated to the financial component. Technical criteria consist of a desk review and an interview:

Technical Criteria - 70% of total evaluation – max. 70 points:

Desk Review- max. 40 points:

- Criteria A: Academic qualifications – max points: 5
- Criteria B: Minimum 5 years of experience in monitoring and evaluation, results-based management, development cooperation, policy planning and analysis, advisory support to governments or donor agencies in evaluating development cooperation, or public financial management or private sector engagement, or similar consultancy assignments. - max points: 10
- Criteria C: Experience in applying qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods, designing and leading evaluations or similar assignments is required (at least 3 similar assignments) – max points: 10
- Criteria D: Experience in writing of evaluation reports or similar documents in English (at least 3 similar assignments) - max points: 5

- Criteria E: Knowledge of system thinking/mission-oriented economy and innovation approaches is a strong asset - max 2
- Criteria F: Familiarity with policies implemented by the European Union in the field of local economic development, as well as of the EU financing instruments for mobilizing public-private investment in its external action (grants, blending, guarantees) is an asset – max 2
- Criteria G: Experience working in the Eastern Partnership (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan) will be an asset – max 2
- Criteria H: Experience assessing other EU-funded programmes will be an asset – max 2
- Criteria J: Experience working with European and International Financial Institutions will be an asset – max 2

Interview- max. 30 points:

- Candidates obtaining minimum 28 points (70% out of 40 points) as a result of the desk review (technical criteria listed above) will be shortlisted and invited for an interview.

Financial Criteria - 30% of total evaluation – max. 30 points

- Candidates obtaining minimum of 21 points (70% out of 30 points) as a result of the interview and with a minimum of 49 points in total from the technical criteria will be considered qualified and requested to provide financial proposal for the assignment.

6. Application procedures

Qualified candidates are requested to apply online via this website. The application should contain:

- **Cover letter** explaining why you are the most suitable candidate for the advertised position and a **brief methodology** on how you will approach and conduct the work. Please paste the letter into the "Resume and Motivation" section of the electronic application.
- **Filled P11** form including past experience in similar projects and contact details of referees (blank form can be downloaded from http://europeandcis.undp.org/files/hrforms/P11_modified_for_SCs_and_ICs.doc; <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-05/P11%20Form.docx>); please upload the P11 instead of your CV.
- **Financial Proposal*** - specifying a **total lump sum amount** for the tasks specified in this announcement. The financial proposal shall include all cost components required to perform the deliverables identified in the TOR with a breakdown of this lump sum amount (number of anticipated working days, travel, per diems and any other possible costs).
- **Incomplete applications will not be considered. Please make sure you have provided all requested materials.**

Please note that the **financial proposal is all-inclusive and shall take into account various expenses incurred by the consultant/contractor during the contract period (e.g. fee, health insurance, vaccination, personal security needs and any other relevant expenses related to the performance of services...). All envisaged **travel costs** must be included in the financial proposal. This includes all travel to join duty station/repatriation travel.*

Payments will be made only upon confirmation of UNDP on delivering on the contract obligations in a satisfactory manner.

*Individual Consultants are responsible for ensuring they have **vaccinations/inoculations** when travelling to certain countries, as designated by the UN Medical Director. Consultants are also required to comply with the UN **security directives** set forth under dss.un.org*

General Terms and conditions as well as other related documents can be found under: <http://on.undp.org/t7fJs>.

*Qualified women and members of minorities are encouraged to apply.
Due to large number of applications we receive, we are able to inform only the successful candidates about the outcome or status of the selection process.*

11. ToR annexes

- Annex 1. Proposed timeline, working day allocation and schedule
- Annex 2. Evaluation Code of Conduct (in separate document)
- Annex 3. Project document including the results framework (in separate document)
- Annex 4. List of stakeholders and main partners
- Annex 5. Outline of inception report
- Annex 6. Evaluation matrix (deliverable to be included in the inception report).
- Annex 7. Outline of evaluation report
- Annex 8. Evaluation Audit Trail Template

Annex 1: Tentative working day allocation and schedule(outcome evaluation)

| ACTIVITY | ESTIMATED # OF DAYS | DATE OF COMPLETION | PLACE | RESPONSIBLE PARTY |
|--|---------------------|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| Phase One: Desk review and inception report | | | | |
| Meeting briefing with UNDP (programme manager and project staff as needed) | 1 day | At the time of contract signing (ideally mid April 2024) | Online | Evaluator PM Evaluation Manager |
| Sharing of the relevant documentation with the evaluator | - | At the time of contract signing | Via email | Project Team |
| Desk review, Evaluation design, methodology and updated workplan including the list of stakeholders to be interviewed | 7 days | Within two weeks of contract signing | Home- based | Evaluator |
| Submission of the inception report (15 pages maximum) | - | Within two weeks of contract signing | | Evaluator |
| Comments and approval of inception report | 1 day- | Within one week of submission of the inception report (beginning of May 2024 the latest) | Online | Evaluation Manager Project Team |
| Phase Two: Data-collection mission | | | | |
| Consultations, in-depth interviews (possible field visit) | 14 days | Within four weeks of contract signing All of May 2024 | Home-based, possible in country | Evaluator - UNDP to organize with local project partners, project staff, local authorities, NGOs, etc. |
| Design and roll out of survey (if applicable) | 3 days | | | |
| Debriefing to UNDP and key stakeholders, incl. the EU | 1 day | End May, beginning of June 2024 | Online | Evaluator |
| Phase Three: Evaluation report writing | | | | |
| Preparation of draft evaluation report (50 pages maximum excluding annexes), executive summary (3-4 pages) | 7 days | End June 2024 | Home- based | Evaluator |
| Draft report submission | - | | | Evaluator |
| Consolidated UNDP and stakeholder comments to the draft report | - | Within two weeks of submission of the draft evaluation report (Mid-July 2024) | Online, via email | Evaluation manager |
| Debriefing with EU & UNDP | 1 day | Within one week of receipt of comments | Online | UNDP, evaluation manager, stakeholder, and evaluation team |
| Finalization of the evaluation report incorporating additions and comments provided by project staff and UNDP country office | 5 days | Within one week of final debriefing End July 2024 ideally | Home- based | Evaluator |
| Submission of the final evaluation report to UNDP (50 pages maximum excluding executive summary and annexes) | - | | Home- based | Evaluator |
| Estimated total days for the evaluation | 40 | | | |

Annex 4. List of stakeholders and main partners

Detailed list of stakeholders and main partners will be shared with the contractor separately. List will consist of a selection of Mayors and municipality teams, EU incl Country Delegations, technical partners, national counterparts and others.

Annex 5. Outline of inception report

1. **Background and context** illustrating the understanding of the project/outcome to be evaluated.
2. **Evaluation objective, purpose and scope.** A clear statement of the objectives of the evaluation and the main aspects or elements of the initiative to be examined.
3. **Evaluation criteria and questions.** The criteria the evaluation will use to assess performance and rationale. The stakeholders to be met and interview questions should be included and agreed as well as a proposed schedule for field site visits.
4. **Evaluability analysis.** Illustrate the evaluability analysis based on formal (clear outputs, indicators, baselines, data) and substantive (identification of problem addressed, theory of change, results framework) and the implication on the proposed methodology.
5. **Cross-cutting issues.** Provide details of how cross-cutting issues will be evaluated, considered and analysed throughout the evaluation. The description should specify how methods for data collection and analysis will integrate gender considerations, ensure that data collected is disaggregated by sex and other relevant categories, and employ a diverse range of data sources and processes to ensure inclusion of diverse stakeholders, including the most vulnerable where appropriate.
6. **Evaluation approach and methodology,** highlighting the conceptual models adopted with a description of data-collection methods,¹ sources and analytical approaches to be employed, including the rationale for their selection (how they will inform the evaluation) and their limitations; data-collection tools, instruments and protocols; and discussion of reliability and validity for the evaluation and the sampling plan, including the rationale and limitations.
7. **Evaluation matrix.** This identifies the key evaluation questions and how they will be answered via the methods selected.
8. A revised **schedule of key milestones,** deliverables and responsibilities including the evaluation phases (data collection, data analysis and reporting).
9. Detailed **resource requirements** tied to evaluation activities and deliverables detailed in the workplan. Include specific assistance required from UNDP such as providing arrangements for visiting particular field offices or sites
10. **Outline of the draft/final report** as detailed in the guidelines and ensuring quality and usability (outlined below). The agreed report outline should meet the quality goals outlined in these guidelines and also meet the quality assessment requirements outlined in section

Annex 6. Evaluation matrix

The evaluation matrix is a tool that evaluators create as map and reference in planning and conducting an evaluation. It also serves as a useful tool for summarizing and visually presenting the evaluation design and methodology for discussions with stakeholders. It details evaluation questions that the evaluation will answer, data sources, data collection, analysis tools or methods appropriate for each data source, and the standard or measure by which each question will be evaluated.

Table. Sample evaluation matrix

| Relevant evaluation criteria | Key questions | Specific sub questions | Data sources | Data-collection methods/tools | Indicators/ success standard | Methods for data analysis |
|------------------------------|---------------|------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |

Annex 7. Outline of evaluation report

Annex 7 provides further information on the standard outline of the evaluation report. In brief the minimum contents of an evaluation report include:

1. **Title and opening pages** with details of the project/programme/outcome and of the evaluation team.
2. **Project and evaluation Information details:** project title, Atlas number, budgets and project dates and other key information.
3. **Table of contents.**
4. **List of acronyms and abbreviations**
5. **Executive summary:** a stand-alone section of maximum four pages including the quality standards and assurance ratings.
6. **Introduction and overview.** What is being evaluated and why?
7. **Description of the intervention being evaluated.** Provides the basis for report users to understand the logic and evaluability analysis result, assess the merits of the evaluation methodology and understand the applicability of the evaluation results.
8. **Evaluation scope and objectives.** The report should provide a clear explanation of the evaluation's scope, primary objectives and main questions.
9. **Evaluation approach and methods.** The evaluation report should describe in detail the selected methodological approaches, methods and analysis.
10. **Data analysis.** The report should describe the procedures used to analyse the data collected to answer the evaluation questions.
11. **Findings and conclusions.** Evaluation findings should be based on an analysis of the data collected and conclusions should be drawn from these findings.
12. **Recommendations.** The report should provide a reasonable number of practical, feasible recommendations directed to the intended users of the report about what actions to take or decisions to make.
13. **Lessons learned.** As appropriate and as requested in the TOR, the report should include discussion of lessons learned from the evaluation of the intervention.
14. **Annexes.**
 - TOR
 - Evaluation mission itinerary, including summary of field visits
 - List of persons interviewed
 - List of documents reviewed
 - Evaluation Question Matrix (evaluation criteria with key questions, indicators, sources of data, and methodology)
 - Questionnaire used and summary of results

Annex 8. Evaluation Audit Trail Template

To the comments received on *(date)* from the Final Evaluation of *(project name)* (UNDP Project #)

The following comments were provided to the draft Evaluation report; they are referenced by institution/organization (do not include the commentator's name) and track change comment number ("#" column):

| Institution/ Organization | # | Para No./ comment location | Comment/Feedback on the draft Evaluation report | Evaluator response and actions taken |
|------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|--|---|
| | | | | |
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