SYNTHESIS OF LESSONS FROM INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATIONS OF UNDP IN EUROPE AND THE COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES

SYNTHESIS OF LESSONS FROM INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATIONS OF UNDP IN EUROPE AND THE COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FOREWORD

I am pleased to present a comprehensive synthesis of the independent country programme evaluations (ICPEs) of UNDP programmes in Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, which reflects on the findings and lessons on UNDP performance in the region.

During 2019-2020, IEO undertook evaluations of UNDP country programmes in 13 countries and 1 territory covered by the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (RBEC) that examined UNDP's work at the country level during the five-year country programme cycle. This cohort of evaluations, which constitutes nearly 78 percent of UNDP programme countries in the region, offered a unique opportunity to reflect collectively on UNDP's work in the region, drawing on a set of common features of the work, contextual and operational challenges, and drivers of performance.

The product — which is organized along the lines of UNDP's six signature solutions as a way to systematize and better understand UNDP's response in line with the Strategic Plan priorities — synthesizes the effectiveness of UNDP, the factors influencing its performance and the likely sustainability of the results.

The synthesis is conceived as a knowledge product, to capture and consolidate the acquired knowledge, lessons, common issues and solutions across the countries in RBEC for further reflection and consideration on the strategic directions, priorities and approaches for UNDP's future engagement, and promote learning with an aim to improve UNDP performance and effectiveness. The work also serves to further strengthen the use of evaluation findings and learning in RBEC by identifying trends and capturing the evaluative knowledge and lessons learned from these evaluations.

The synthesis reinforces the critical role evaluations play in strengthening transparency and accountability and strengthening the feedback loop to enhance organizational performance. This report is one in a series of several ICPE synthesis studies that the IEO plans to produce with a focus on geographic or thematic analysis of trends and results of UNDP work at country level.

The synthesis identified several programme- and policy-related lessons, which among others included the benefits of integrated programming, enhancement of participatory planning, system-level capacity development, gender integration and approaches to innovation and partnerships. The issues identified for further consideration point towards integration of results-based management, comprehensive resource mobilization strategies, approaches to piloting and scaling-up of innovations, enhancement of the human rights approach and consolidation of support at local level.

While the focus of this synthesis report is on UNDP's work in RBEC, I am confident the lessons and areas for further consideration identified will resonate well across UNDP and have value to staff and management in other regions and at headquarters as UNDP designs its next strategic plan and programmes for more inclusive and sustainable development results.

Oscar A. Garcia
Director
Independent Evaluation Office, UNDP

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1
BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Independent country programme evaluations (ICPEs) are a key building block of the evaluation portfolio of the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Undertaken within the provisions of the UNDP Evaluation Policy,[1] ICPEs reflect the quantity and quality of UNDP programmatic work in real development contexts. They also demonstrate the evaluative evidence of UNDP's contributions to development results at the country level and the effectiveness of UNDP's strategy in facilitating and leveraging national efforts for achieving development results.

During 2019-2020, IEO undertook evaluations of UNDP country programmes in 13 countries and 1 territory covered by the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (RBEC). The reviewed programme countries and territory can be grouped under three subregions based on their unique challenges and priorities: (a) Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan; (b) South Caucasus and Western Commonwealth of Independent States: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia; and (c) Western Balkans and Turkey: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo,[2] Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey. Each of them went through an ICPE that examined UNDP's work at the country level during their current five-year country programme cycle. These ICPEs provided a set of forward-looking recommendations as input to the planning process for development of the next country programme.

These ICPEs offer a unique opportunity for synthesis, for together they constitute an unusually large number of countries in one region preparing their next country programmes at the same time. Each ICPE presents a wealth of knowledge and evidence of UNDP's work, drawing on a set of common features of the work, contextual and operational challenges, and drivers. The countries evaluated share many common institutional characteristics and patterns of socioeconomic development that shape in similar ways the support they receive from UNDP. The country programmes are managed within the framework of UNDP's regional priorities and strategies and apply many similar management approaches.

The synthesis is organized along the lines of UNDP's six signature solutions as a way to systematize and better understand UNDP's response in line with the Strategic Plan priorities. It provides strategic, timely, region-specific and practical lessons that UNDP management in the RBEC region and elsewhere can learn from and take forward in their development support activities. The synthesis also serves to strengthen the use of evaluation findings and learning in RBEC by identifying trends and capturing the evaluative knowledge and lessons learned from these evaluations.

The audience for this synthesis is primarily UNDP managers and staff in the RBEC region, with an expectation that the lessons also have value to UNDP staff and management in other regions and at headquarters. Considering the broad nature of the lessons, the synthesis may also be of interest to a wider group of external stakeholders and development partners.

1.2 Objectives of the synthesis

The objectives of the synthesis are to consolidate and analyse existing evaluative evidence to:

a. Capture and combine accumulated knowledge, lessons and common issues and solutions across the countries in RBEC for further reflection on the strategic directions, priorities and approaches for UNDP's future engagement.

b. Promote learning and collective reflection about key barriers and facilitators to achieving expected results as well as opportunities and challenges for improving UNDP operations, corporate performance and effectiveness.

---

[1]   http://web.undp.org/evaluation/policy.shtml.
[2]   All references to Kosovo in the report shall be understood in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

1.3 Scope and methodology

The 14 ICPEs form the building blocks for this synthesis.[3] In addition the team reviewed past evaluations of the RBEC regional programme and other multi-country evaluations carried out in the region since 2014, while also consulting external sources and previously conducted interviews to ensure a full understanding of the context, main challenges and other factors affecting UNDP's work and reform initiatives across the region.[4]

The synthesis used rapid evidence assessment methods[5] designed to provide a balanced synthesis of evaluative evidence. The synthesis is based primarily on desk reviews and interviews conducted with the country office staff and stakeholders during the ICPE field missions, along with interviews with Istanbul Regional Hub team leaders undertaken at the conclusion of the field missions. The discussions from these meetings provided sufficient evidence to validate the findings from the desk reviews. A qualitative thematic aggregation-based analysis was used to synthesize findings and capture the lessons in a way that could inform future policy and practice. The synthesis also expanded to quantitative analysis by grouping the countries' and territory's financial data to show the general trends and to triangulate evidence from qualitative analysis and the other sources.

To facilitate a clear and strong comparative analysis to capture factors influencing and affecting UNDP performance and eventually the sustainability of its results, the following questions were used to synthesize coded data:

a. How effective has UNDP been in contributing to the six signature solutions?

b. What worked and what did not work well?

c. What were the key factors that contributed to performance and results?

d. How sustainable are UNDP's contributions to the results?

The synthesis results are region specific, however, and findings are contextualized, where possible, at the subregion level, given the diversity of the subregions and to minimize overgeneralizing across the region. Each of the 14 ICPEs and the synthesis were quality-assured by IEO internal and external peer review processes to ensure standards of quality and rigour.[6]

1.4 Limitations

Most of the ICPEs, which served as the building blocks used for the synthesis, were finalized in early 2020 before the COVID-19 pandemic. Only the Montenegro ICPE includes an assessment of UNDP contributions to the COVID-19 response. As a result, the synthesis had to rely on secondary data and other available reports and analyses of UNDP's response to COVID-19 to contextualize UNDP efforts in the region. This limited the opportunity to take full stock of UNDP's response and related UNDP work in and beyond 2020. Further, as the synthesis does not cover four countries in the RBEC region, it would be difficult to make a fully accurate regional generalization. The synthesis addresses this by breaking down the analysis to the specific subregions in RBEC, where possible.
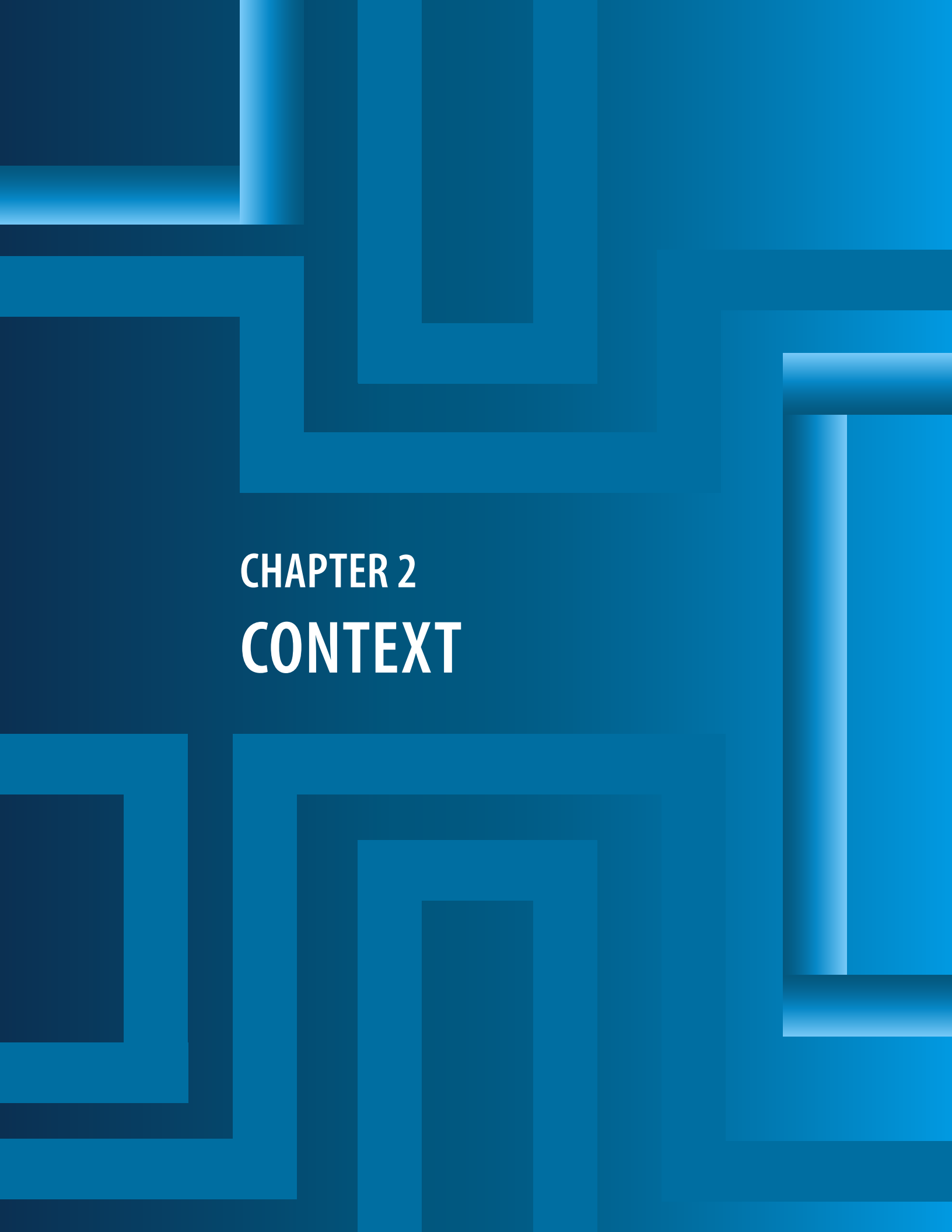
Another limitation was the availability of standardized data on UNDP effectiveness and performance and the likely sustainability of the results. As the available evidence in each country/territory rendered different results, it was decided to synthesize findings along the UNDP signature solutions. However, not all of UNDP's work across the themes is organized around the signature solutions, so the analysis took into account a cross-section of thematic areas contributing to a given signature solution.

---

[3]   Any reference made to the RBEC region refers to the 13 countries and 1 territory, not the whole region, unless otherwise noted.

[4]   Reports, studies and analyses, and UNDP's programme documentation from 2014 to date. See Annex 3 for a full list of documents consulted.

[5]   See Annex 2 for a full description of the methodology.

[6]   http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/1914.

CHAPTER 2
CONTEXT

2.1 The social, economic and environmental context

The countries of Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States have recorded human development progress and significantly improved their institutional and governance capacity over the past two decades. All countries have achieved middle-income status and eradicated extreme poverty during this period. At the same time, the region has witnessed growing disparities in terms of income distribution, gender equity and access to quality and affordable public services.

The 14 countries/territory face similar governance challenges. Many need public management reform; greater recognition and enforcement of the rule of law and access to justice; more participatory democracy; improved compliance with human rights and other international conventions; greater engagement of women and civil society in government policy-setting and decision-making; and greater attention to gender-based violence.

The countries in the region are vulnerable to natural disasters including climate change-related effects such as flooding, drought and other environmental risks, some of which are exacerbated by human activities such as unsustainable water and land management practices and high reliance on fossil fuels.

Geopolitical and ethnic tensions continue to affect the region due to ongoing conflicts and the heritage from past conflicts. This is exacerbated by the geographic position of the region at the juncture between Western Europe, Asia and the Middle East. This position makes the region an important transit area but also a source and destination for human migration.

Like many other countries across the globe, the 14 countries/territory were unprepared for the COVID-19 pandemic, which required difficult responses such as extended lockdowns, slowing or closing-down of economic activities and suspension or loss of jobs. More information on the context and key development indicators of the 14 countries/territory is provided in Annex 1.

2.2 UNDP in the 14 countries/territory

Between 2016 and 2020 UNDP programmes in the 14 countries/territory under review aimed to contribute to sustainable and inclusive growth, universal access to basic services, democratic governance and lowering of the risk of natural disasters, including from climate change. Gender equality and women's empowerment has been a cross-cutting theme across all outcome areas, and there is evidence of explicit support to promote women's empowerment. Efforts were geared to assist countries in mainstreaming and localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Table 1).[7]

Various donors have been supporting implementation of the country programmes across the RBEC region (Figure 1). The region benefited from significant resources from vertical funds (Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, Global Environment Facility [GEF], Green Climate Fund [GCF], Adaptation Fund, etc.) as well as funds from bilateral donors such as the European Union (EU), Finland, Japan, the Russian Federation, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom and United States.

Across the region, with the exception of Belarus, Georgia and Tajikistan, government cost-sharing has been an increasingly important source of funding for UNDP interventions. Subregional variations in this funding exist; average cost-sharing is higher in the Balkans at 30 percent, followed by Central Asia at 19 percent and the South Caucasus at 18 percent.

---

[7]   UNDP PowerBI, March 2021.

TABLE 1. SDG progress by ICPE country/territory[8]

SDGs	Central Asia				South Caucasus and Commonwealth of Independent States				Western Balkans and Turkey					
	Kazakhstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus	Georgia	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	Montenegro	North Macedonia	Serbia	Turkey
Overall score[9]	71.1	69.4	63	71	69.9	72.6	78.8	71.9	73	–	70	71.4	75.2	70
Overall rank	65	78	114	66	76	54	18	58	50	–	72	62	33	70
SDG achieved	1	4, 13	–	–	7, 13	1	1	–	1, 17	–	1	–	1	–
SDG major challenges	2, 3, 10, 16	2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 16	1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 13, 16	2, 6, 9, 10, 16	8, 10, 11	5, 8, 16	–	3, 5, 10	–	–	2, 10, 12, 14	10, 16	–	5, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16

FIGURE 1. Top 15 donors in the 14 ICPE countries/territory (US$ Millions)

Donor	Amount
European Commission	$321.4
Global Environment Facility	$155
The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria	$81.8
UNDP and UNDP funding windows	$71.9
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation	$59.3
Government of Turkey	$58.2
Government of Japan	$50.4
Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina	$49.7
Republic of North Macedonia	$40.1
Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency	$36.4
Government of Armenia	$32.7
Government of Kazakhstan	$32.4
Government of Russian Federation	$30.9
Government of Serbia	$28.9
Government of Switzerland	$25.7

Source: UNDP IEO PowerBI, March 2021

---

8   Source: http//dashboards.sdgindex.org/rankings.
9   The score measures each country's SDG progress. It can be interpreted as the percentage of SDGs that have been achieved, with a score of 100 indicating that all have been achieved.

2.3 UNDP response by signature solutions

UNDP's focus during the current Strategic Plan has been on three development settings: (1) eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions, (2) acceleration of structural transformations, and (3) building resilience to shocks and crises. To achieve this, UNDP has defined six signature solutions within which its efforts have been streamlined:

1. Keeping people out of poverty

2. Governance for peaceful, just and inclusive societies

3. Crisis prevention and increased resilience

4. Environment: nature-based solutions for development

5. Clean, affordable energy

6. Women's empowerment and gender equality.

A review of UNDP spending by signature solutions across the ICPE countries/territory shows that solutions 2 and 1 received the highest percentage expenditure followed by solutions 3, 4, 5 and 6 (Figure 2). Protection of human rights and the empowerment of women, minorities and the poorest and most vulnerable people cuts across all the signature solutions and all areas of UNDP's work.

FIGURE 2. Percentage of expenditures by signature solution, 2018-2020

Signature solution 1 (Poverty)	29%
Signature solution 2 (Governance)	38%
Signature solution 3 (Resilience)	13%
Signature solution 4 (Sustainable planet)	12%
Signature solution 5 (Energy)	7%
Signature solution 6 (Gender)	1%
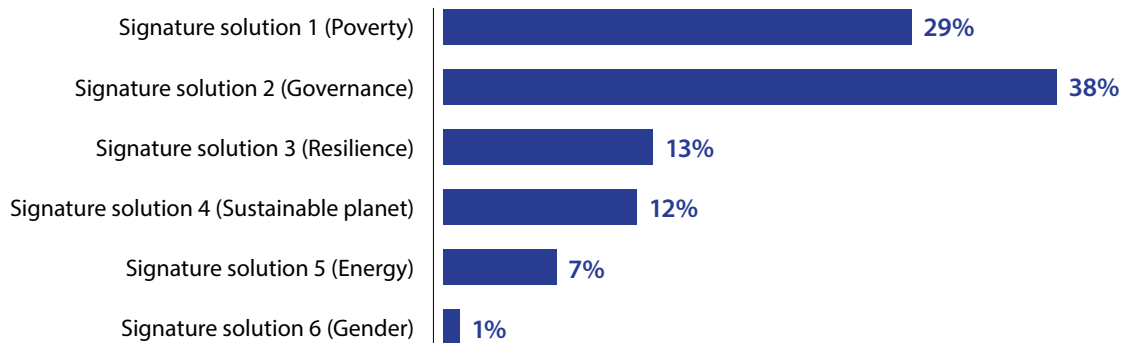
Source: UNDP IEO PowerBI, 16 March 2020

CHAPTER 3
KEY FINDINGS

This section presents the main findings of the synthesis of UNDP's work across the 14 countries/territory. The main findings are organized along the lines of UNDP signature solutions as a way to systematize and better understand UNDP's investment and resulting changes in terms of alleviation of poverty, improved governance and gender equality, and resilience of countries and communities to the environment and climate change impacts.

3.1 Signature solution 1: Keeping people out of poverty

UNDP's work under solution 1 ranges from income-generation activities to addressing determinants of vulnerability such as gender, health, environmental degradation and climate change. It includes building new partnerships to promote sustainable livelihoods and jobs, migration, nature-based solutions and more integrated social protection packages.[10] This section presents the main findings from the assessment of UNDP's contributions to social inclusion and protection, gender, health, sustainable livelihoods and jobs. Migration as a phenomenon is discussed under both solution 1 and solution 3. The assessment of UNDP's work on migration is provided in the section on solution 3. Environment and climate change are presented in the section on solution 4 and gender is addressed both as a cross-cutting issue and under solution 6.

3.1.1 Main challenges in the region

Following the break-up of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, countries across Central Asia, the South Caucasus and the Western Balkans have been undergoing an economic transition from a centralized state-controlled economy to a market-based system, with varying levels of success. All countries have made progress on economic growth in the last decade and have climbed the ladder in terms of income status and human development. (Differences are visible at country level, with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan lagging behind the other countries that are the focus of this analysis.)

The 14 countries/territory addressed in this synthesis managed to eradicate extreme poverty. Yet poverty is still widespread, though the trend on average is downward in most countries.[11] There is more poverty in rural areas than in urban areas, with more extreme disparities noted among minorities, internally displaced persons, long-term unemployed people and people with disabilities. Women and girls in rural areas are particularly vulnerable to social and economic exclusion.

Interrelated challenges faced by the region include high rates of unemployment and precarious employment. In response to these challenges, the 14 countries/territory are moving to improve employment opportunities, especially for vulnerable groups, mainly through economic diversification, labour legislation and social protection guarantees for unemployed people. Available data indicate that unemployment and self-employment remain widespread across the region. These persistent challenges call for continued UNDP support to increasing capacities at both the supply level (government) and the demand level (rights-holders) to bring substantial change.

Another set of challenges facing the region includes depopulation, social exclusion, ineffective governance (affecting access to services and protection schemes) and decline in socioeconomic prospects. Additionally, the region is experiencing considerable brain drain and migration, hampering development prospects in the 14 countries/territory.

The operational context for UNDP's engagement across the thematic areas within this signature solution was rather open. There was general buy-in by the governments for the solutions presented by UNDP.

---

[10]   Annual report of the Administrator for 2019, p. 5.
[11]   World Bank data: https://data.worldbank.org/country/.

3.1.2 UNDP response

UNDP support to thematic areas under solution 1 has been organized in the form of institutional support (e.g., strengthening national capacities to develop and implement policies and practices for employment and social policies, etc.); enhanced use of disaggregated data for evidence-based policy-making, research, advocacy and outreach, from the national to the community level; increased economic competitiveness and enhancement of livelihoods through agricultural development[12] and promotion of tourism opportunities; and development of human capital.

UNDP interventions included area-based and regional programming, focusing on subnational regions where socioeconomic disparities are greatest; direct support and empowerment of the most vulnerable;[13] and modelling and piloting health, education and social protection services to acquire lessons learned for scale-up across social systems in the countries.

3.1.3 Key findings

Across the region, UNDP has been recognized as an important government partner, supporting development of strategic roadmaps and policies.

UNDP has cooperated with national and subnational governments across the RBEC region, which has led to a range of outputs with catalytic potential in the processes of design and implementation of national and community development plans and funds, promotion of collaboration within and between communities, and institutional capacity development. As a result of UNDP's engagement in Georgia, for example, a national Rural Development Strategy and Action Plan 2017-2020 was developed in consultation with all regions. It aims to address structural and systemic challenges that hamper rural development and to promote efficient delivery of rural services. In some countries, e.g. in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, UNDP used its convening power to maximize the potential for private companies to support government efforts to provide various services, such as promoting the phase-out of incandescent lamps and inefficient household appliances in Kazakhstan.

When it comes to social policies and institution building, UNDP's contribution was significant and brought important results in some countries. For instance, UNDP's support to Montenegro's social protection system enhanced the accountability and transparency of social benefits allocation brought by the Integrated Social Welfare Information System (ISWIS) e-governance system (Box 1). In Central Asia, support

---

> **BOX 1:** Integrated social welfare information system (ISWIS) in Montenegro

UNDP Montenegro supported the country's government in developing a complex information system for processing, approval, record-keeping, payments, audit and monitoring of the social welfare system, the national ISWIS, commonly referred to as the E-Social Card. The ISWIS business intelligence module generates all socio-demographic variables of social welfare beneficiaries and their family members to ensure that social welfare appropriately targets the most vulnerable, enabling a transparent, fair and accountable social welfare system. The system also enables real-time data for aiding evidence-based social policy planning. The system already brings significant efficiency gains, reducing the burden on both clients and the social welfare system. This helps reduce exclusion error and improve coverage for beneficiaries.

During the COVID-19 crisis, the ISWIS operated three sets of government emergency COVID-19 response social measures, with UNDP support. This ensured successful processing of over 84,000 individual social cash transfers monthly for 57,000 poor and vulnerable people between March and September 2020.

---

[12] The support is provided through trainings and support to micro-loans and grants, vocational and non-formal education, start-ups and diversification of economic activity as well as some investment in public/private partnerships, among other initiatives, including value chains in some countries.

[13] For example, small and medium-size enterprise development in rural and remote areas, and job creation for women, youth and, in particular, persons with disabilities.

was directed to strengthening government response to HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, producing important national measures and response mechanisms, with sustainability potential. Such support was directed to government efforts to address challenges facing the most vulnerable people through investments in health care facilities, procurement of better medical equipment and drugs, and strengthening access to health care, and to a lesser extent, social services. Improvements were especially evident in the response to tuberculosis, including improved capacities for early diagnosis and treatment of patients, particularly in Turkmenistan, where patients benefited from improved quality of tests and easier access to drugs. In addition, contributions to legislative development have contributed to development (and in many cases adoption) of laws and bylaws across the social policy domain, particularly in Central Asia.

UNDP has been successful in experimenting with market-based support mechanisms in some of its tourism, green jobs, energy and environment projects, as well as vocational education and training. However, scale-up and sustainability of such interventions is weak.

UNDP succeeded in building partnerships and strengthening incentives and conditions for initiatives to access financial institutions for secure and affordable finance. Such approaches were introduced in the biodiversity, urban infrastructure and (more recently) renewable energy sectors across all the 14 countries/territory. Results have been positive at the level of target groups or businesses, resulting in interesting and innovative models for small and medium-size enterprises that integrate environmentally friendly solutions. However, sustainability of such results depends largely on the ability of the supported enterprises and entrepreneurs to sustain their businesses and be resilient to external economic shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, the ICPE for Belarus expressed concern about the sustainability of interventions to support incubators that promote small businesses. Similarly, the ICPEs for Montenegro and for Kosovo noted challenges for sustainability of supported businesses due to external factors.

As part of its support to educational capacities, UNDP aided the modernization of the vocational education and training (VET) systems, ensuring that trainings and systems were more responsive to labour market needs. Such systematic support was visible in Azerbaijan and Georgia, though less so in other countries across the region, mainly due to lack of openings for UNDP to offer this type of support. In these two countries, work focused on strengthening the capacity of vocational education centres to provide students with knowledge and skills for a successful transition to the labour market.

The ICPE for Azerbaijan found that UNDP's efforts helped raise awareness of VET for its relevance to private sector development and diversification. In North Macedonia UNDP invested significantly in strengthening active labour market measures and VET. Similarly, in Kosovo, UNDP supported establishment of a computerized unemployment registration and management system as well as labour market surveys and skills needs analyses. Such support strengthened systems and raised the employability of the young people benefiting from such services. However, the ICPE found that the VET and adult education systems are not dynamic and responsive enough to close the gap between labour market supply and demand. It noted the need for further support from the Government and UNDP in this sector.

UNDP's work on strengthening social services and systems for vulnerable groups resulted in the development of e-services, improving access and building knowledge on service models, such as for people with disabilities and victims of domestic violence. However, gaps remain in capacity absorption and upscaling, and there is fragmentation of services.

Achievement of results in this area was challenged by limited government capacities and systems in terms of interdepartmental or intersectoral work to address multidimensional needs of the most vulnerable people and government prioritization of other sectors or areas of intervention. This was reflected in the amount of co-financing and support to programming and implementation of projects.

At the institutional level, absorption capacity and system weaknesses (e.g. lack of professional social service providers, slow and incremental reforms, limited budgets) have played a strong role as well. Such challenges are more evident at subnational level across the RBEC region, where there is limited availability and low quality of social welfare services as well as a scarcity of trained social workers and other social service providers. Such challenges were noted in Central Asia and the Caucasus, where such factors are cited as impediments to uptake and sustainability of models.

In Turkey, success was apparent in the development of viable social services for the most vulnerable people among refugees and the local population, though there was a clear need to continue strengthening such services to achieve full sustainability. In the South Caucasus, the transformative power of local activities has been quite limited because of their small scale and fragmentation across projects and locations. Similarly, in Central Asia UNDP interventions for strengthening social service systems were mostly limited to modeling or piloting social services, or short-term and small-scale initiatives to empower vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities and women, to take more active roles in society or pursue additional vocational education and training. These efforts have brought significant benefits for individuals participating in pilot initiatives.

However, in rare cases have they brought system-level changes across the sector, for reasons such as limited absorption capacity, budget deficiencies and other financing priorities of host governments. In the Western Balkans, notably in Montenegro, more system-level changes occurred because of UNDP's support to social services and its close cooperation with the relevant ministry. As a result, such services have been piloted and scaled up. The reason for UNDP's successful engagement on these issues in Montenegro is that demand for support came from the Government, in light of the country's EU aspirations.

UNDP support has boosted local development planning, filling an important gap in the provision of community services, sometimes at lower than market rates. This has resulted in improved participatory development planning. However, the ICPEs noted that such support brought catalytic results to targeted communities with limited (or no) potential for country-wide scale-up.

The most consistent focus was on support to local policy and capacity development initiatives for development planning. UNDP encouraged communities to participate in developing needs-based plans (in Armenia and Georgia) and community development plans or similar funding opportunities (in Azerbaijan and Tajikistan). The goal was to promote improved access and use of resources and provide services at more affordable rates. While local development plans in most cases have sustainability potential in the short to medium term, the long-term financial sustainability of the funds is yet to be proven, and synergy with local governance processes and systems needs to be further explored. In addition, local solutions are in most cases confined to target communities without attention to scale or the potential to apply successful approaches country wide. Reasons for this include the difficulty of ensuring funding for such a large-scale endeavour, stale reform processes and political interests with regard to decentralization. These all lead to fragmentation of support efforts and focus on a handful of communities with limited budgets.

Piloting of local services and efforts of UNDP have in most cases brought positive results to beneficiaries of the targeted support, despite the fact that their potential for scaling up and sustainability is mostly low.

One of the characteristics of supporting poverty alleviation through local socioeconomic and livelihoods interventions is the need to pilot and innovate. It is hard to raise funds for such initiatives in middle-income and upper-middle-income countries due to a lack of scale-up potential.

This is a dilemma for UNDP: Without innovation and piloting it is hard to understand what approach or methodology has potential, but donor funding comes with the caveat that the support needs to be upstream and scaled up to be aligned with donor priorities. On the whole, the transformative power

of piloting local services and initiatives (e.g. support schemes for small and medium-scale enterprises and social, health and VET services) has been quite limited because of the small scale and fragmentation across projects and locations. While such activities have brought important results for beneficiaries of the piloted service or activity, the ICPEs show that most of these initiatives did not bring the needed transformation at scale.

A positive aspect of most of such activities is that they have targeted vulnerable and excluded groups in remote and rural areas. This creates opportunities for greater focus and synergies, especially around employment and VET. Also, the grass-roots nature of this work creates opportunities for more integrated local development interventions and solutions, driven by area-based approaches that combine governance and economic development measures. However, analysis of UNDP's engagement shows the overall lack of consistent planning and strategies for piloting, which results in a rather erratic piloting process, without clear intervention logic. For instance, the ICPE for Turkey recognized positive results in terms of livelihood support to the Syrian population, in particular regarding issues such as piloting short-term vocational training services. However, the assessment noted mixed outcomes in terms of sustainability.

UNDP's support to women, youth and people with disabilities and its contribution to enhancing employment opportunities for these groups brought positive results in terms of an increase in income and access to employment or livelihoods. This improved living conditions and empowered these individuals and groups to take a more active role. However, such efforts remain fragmented and without strong catalytic potential.

UNDP's support to enhancing employment and business opportunities, in particular for the most vulnerable people, has been consistently implemented across the RBEC region, although in a rather fragmented and erratic fashion. This was mainly due to funding shortages but also to the organic nature of such interventions, which are at times hard to promote in the upper-middle-income context, due to demand for upstream UNDP support. UNDP supported the empowerment of women, youth, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups to take a more active role in communities and in their own income-generation activities. Analysis of UNDP interventions and ICPE reports shows the results of such efforts.

For instance, UNDP in Georgia strongly supported women through training courses in agricultural and non-agricultural professions, with a 68 percent employment rate for participants, according to data presented in the ICPE. UNDP also supported the work of the Association of Women Farmers – which it helped establish in 2013 and which became a nationwide organization in 2015 – along with agricultural cooperatives. Other South Caucasus countries also benefited from UNDP's efforts in this arena, raising the number of women entrepreneurs while improving livelihoods. In Central Asia, intensive efforts were also invested in Tajikistan (Box 2), while similar efforts are noted in Turkey and in most Western Balkans countries. However, the ICPEs consistently report that wider catalytic results are random and not systematic. This is due to the issue raised regarding UNDP's piloting approach, whereby the lack of consistent longer term funding limits UNDP to short-term, project-based initiatives and lacks a clear, longer term strategy of engagement.

> **BOX 2.** Livelihood improvement in Tajikistan

A project to improve rural livelihoods in nine districts of Tajikistan provided people with access to micro-loans and helped to improve women's business skills and promote entrepreneurship among women and youth. Such investments resulted in increased business opportunities and jobs, improving the livelihoods of over 3,000 women and their families. Such results were critical for empowerment of women, though further scaling up of such models has not been fully achieved.

3.2 Signature solution 2: Governance for peaceful, just and inclusive societies

UNDP work on governance is anchored in SDG 16 and the fundamental role that governance and the rule of law play in peaceful, just and inclusive societies. This section focuses on analysing UNDP's support to help national and local institutions become more inclusive, accountable and responsive; enhance core government functions and public service delivery; include vulnerable and marginalized populations in governance systems (both as recipients of services and as agents of change); and strengthen human rights systems.

3.2.1 Main challenges in the region

Countries across the RBEC region have been undergoing tectonic political changes following the break-up of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, along with the political changes shaping modern Turkey. In some countries (e.g., Azerbaijan, Belarus, Tajikistan, Turkey and Turkmenistan) political power is still concentrated at the top, and it is challenging to consolidate a system of checks and balances between the branches of government. In other countries, such as Armenia, Georgia and most Western Balkan countries, power is more diffused among political actors.

All countries in the region face challenges in establishing transparent and accountable institutions since politics based on patron-client relations constrain public sector institutions in delivering services to citizens. Corruption and lack of transparency are widespread, along with weak rule of law and public service systems. The result is that weak accountability in the public sector undermines trust in State institutions and leads to weak policy implementation. Eventually, such challenges obstruct equal and equitable access to services by rights-holders.

Across the region, civil society organizations have been strengthening and citizen participation in legislative and decision-making processes has been gradually improving. However, in some countries (e.g. Azerbaijan, Belarus, Turkey, Turkmenistan) civil society groups encounter shrinking operational space and intimidation, and they face serious challenges in developing their full potential.

To varying degrees, national governments across the region protect and promote vulnerable groups and human rights in general. All countries have declared their commitment to human rights and have taken steps to adopt and ratify the majority of international human rights standards. However, many countries have yet to fully integrate and align their national legislative and institutional frameworks with international human rights standards. Vulnerable groups such as persons with disability, HIV or tuberculosis as well as migrant workers encounter specific challenges in terms of accessing services, due to weak protection and service systems.

3.2.2 UNDP response

UNDP's response to these challenges has been comprehensive. It has benefited strongly from UNDP's strategic assistance to governments in meeting their commitments to reforming the rule of law and governance sectors.

Across all thematic and governance levels, UNDP has continuously provided technical assistance in the form of capacity building, advisory services, analytical support and sharing of best international practices with government partners and stakeholders. Across the region, the bulk of UNDP's support has focused on reforms aimed at improving the balance of power among the legislative, judicial and executive branches, and strengthening the capacities of governments to formulate, implement and monitor policies in a participatory and gender-sensitive manner through public administration and civil service reforms. Within its support to the reform of public administration, UNDP provided training and capacity-development support as well as analytical contributions in areas such as project management, service delivery, integrity, anti-corruption and public finance reform.

UNDP puts special focus on e-governance, an area that is becoming its signature solution across the region. Within this stream of support, UNDP has been supporting governments to improve open government data through the provision of policy advice on the sustainable and long-term development of e-government platforms and development of e-services. In some countries, UNDP also supported the decentralization of government competencies

and financial resources or assisted local governments to understand and embrace public administration reform principles and new approaches, particularly in terms of service delivery. In the area of gender and human rights, UNDP supported the ratification or implementation of international conventions, as well as promotion and capacity development of independent institutions and civil society. More than a third (38 percent) of UNDP funds were spent on this signature solution in the ICPE countries covered by this analysis (Figure 2, pg. 8).

3.2.3 Key findings

UNDP has made relevant contributions to e-government services and improvement of public and civil services.

Across the 14 countries/territory, UNDP has positioned itself as a government partner in developing e-governance systems and e-services. UNDP's capacity-building approach was wide-ranging and mostly needs based, going beyond individual skills to target institutional change, leadership, empowerment and public participation. Most capacity-building activities across the region were upstream and linked to broader reforms within sectors, and tackled the capacity needs of State and non-State actors across the spectrum of UNDP's target groups and beneficiaries. Such interventions included support to the improvement of digital structures, Internet accessibility (Tajikistan), development of e-services (ranging from basic informational services to full-fledged public services for citizens), and linkage of government databases to create interoperable systems able to utilize multiple data sources to improve efficient service provision (Montenegro, Uzbekistan).

At the same time, UNDP invested significant efforts in institutional development and capacity building of civil and public services to ensure more efficient, transparent and accountable systems. Such support contributed strongly to improving the efficiency of the professionals within the public sector and the judiciary as well as to transparency and accessibility of services. E-services have created efficiencies that benefit citizens. For example, system interoperability has improved the delivery of public services such as birth registration, significantly reducing paperwork and allowing people to receive several services in one place. Improvements of e-services were recorded in Georgia, Kazakhstan, Montenegro, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and to a limited extent in Belarus.

For instance, in Montenegro and Uzbekistan, applications for primary school and kindergarten have been digitized and made available through a dedicated portal. In Georgia, UNDP contributed to the conversion of more than 400 public services into digital format, and e-governance services were introduced in 13 public service halls and 50 community centres (Box 3). Such system improvements contribute to citizen trust in the public administration and justice sector. The ICPE for Serbia found that UNDP support to the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption chapter in the Serbian Parliament, and its work on open data and e-government in general, contributed to greater transparency and better prevention and detection of corruption.

> **BOX 3.** E-services in Georgia

As part of its efforts to enhance service delivery in Georgia, UNDP partnered with the Data Exchange Agency to improve online services and their accessibility. Between 2016 and 2019, more than 400 public services were converted into digital format and made available online, and 31 e-governance services were introduced in 13 public service halls and 50 community centres. The use of e-governance platforms increased 20 times between 2012 and 2019.

Review of the UNDP Georgia website shows that the Unified Portal of Electronic Services (my.gov.ge) has been one of the most visited governmental websites. During 2020 it recorded 30,000 daily visits, and the usage of services available on the website increased by 40 percent.

In some countries, particularly in the Western Balkans (Montenegro and North Macedonia), support was also provided to local governments to enhance their administrative capacities in delivering effective policies and public services. UNDP´s support included technical assistance in amending and upgrading local institutional frameworks and improving e-governance mechanisms, tools and services, with underlying capacity development. In Tajikistan, UNDP implemented comprehensive support through infrastructure and systems improvements, increasing access to public services in several targeted regions and communities.

UNDP's support to public administration reform has been limited relative to the vast needs across the sector, considering the horizontal nature of public administration engagement.

Due to the incremental nature of public administration reform, it is still early to find evidence of direct outcomes of UNDP's capacity-building support, as confirmed by a review of the ICPEs. It made clear that the uptake of organizational change and changing mindsets — particularly within the area of public administration reform, public financial management and local governance — requires long-term, structured engagement with clear focus and depth of interventions.

UNDP has struggled to achieve this in some countries. The main factors affecting the results throughout the region include changing political commitment to reforms, changing priorities and turnover of public administration staff. These factors affect the sustainability of inputs, structures and initiatives supported by UNDP. In some countries, such as Tajikistan, the challenge was compounded by a lack of solid information technology and Internet infrastructure.

Engagement in the human rights arena has been rather fragmented, often lacking strong advocacy and voice. It has reflected a very narrow operational space for engagement due to the limited commitment to human rights of some national governments.

RBEC countries face different human rights realities, yet one consistent challenge is the full, coherent protection of human rights through changing social norms. This is visible in countries facing increasing authoritarian rule across all three subregions. UNDP played a role in promoting the protection of human rights among vulnerable groups and the principle of leaving no one behind across the region. However, in some countries, such as Azerbaijan, Belarus, Turkey and Turkmenistan, UNDP's support was somewhat muted due to the closing space for advocacy on human rights. UNDP supported the institutional strengthening of national stakeholders across several areas, including on reporting to human rights bodies and adoption of international conventions on human rights, as well as oversight (e.g. support to the ombudsperson's office) and access to justice. UNDP's work to support the promotion of human rights did not progress as expected in these countries, due to limited national commitment at top levels and cultural resistance, which diminished the effectiveness of UNDP's interventions.

For instance, in Turkmenistan, UNDP supported the establishment of the ombudsperson's office and strengthening of policy frameworks and mechanisms in response to Universal Periodic Review recommendations. However, sustainability remains fragile due to political challenges. In other countries, such as Azerbaijan and Turkey, UNDP's role as an independent voice was fragmented and at times weak, which diminished the potential of maximizing results in this sphere. The ICPE for Belarus noted that UNDP could not implement planned human rights projects due to factors beyond its control. In Armenia, the ICPE noted that UNDP's efforts to promote human rights would require more sustained engagement. In the Western Balkans, UNDP's work on human rights was rather implicit, such as by integrating human rights and the principle of leave no one behind into upstream and capacity-development activities.

In Serbia the ICPE noted that no direct intervention tackled human rights, though interventions in support of sexual minorities were included in the social inclusion portfolio. On the other hand,

important results were achieved in Georgia, where UNDP supported the Inter-Agency Council on Human Rights, as well as capacity strengthening of human rights institutions. Across the entire RBEC region, but notably in Central Asia, UNDP strongly promoted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. UNDP also complemented efforts of other United Nations organizations to promote the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).

UNDP's support to participatory decision-making processes varied across countries. It focused mainly on the supply side (creation of participation mechanisms) rather than the demand side (supporting participation by civil society and citizens). This resulted in weak engagement of civil society.

UNDP's upstream engagement and strong positioning with governments assisted it in promoting the need to establish participatory decision-making mechanisms. However, UNDP did not engage fully or consistently with civil society or citizens to promote the participatory decision-making principles or empowering these actors to take a more active role. Differences exist though. In the Western Balkans, the regional ReLOAD project worked on improving local governance mechanisms through more systematic engagement of civil society in decision-making processes (among other things). Across the South Caucasus and also other subregions, UNDP used its convener role to bring together various actors, including civil society, around issues such as the SDGs and development.

UNDP's engagement on the rule of law varied depending on the subregion and the demand by national institutions for UNDP support in this sector.

In many countries UNDP support focused on justice sector reform, particularly of the court system, such as through contributions to improving the efficiency and transparency of court systems by support to e-services (Montenegro, Uzbekistan). The ICPEs note the positive effects of such contributions in terms of improving court accessibility, transparency and efficiency, particularly for the most vulnerable groups (e.g. women and people with disabilities). UNDP's interventions also included advocating for and supporting preparation of legislation (Tajikistan) and investing in capacity development of justice sector institutions.

UNDP also supported the work of independent institutions, such as ombudsperson's offices and human rights commissions, across the region. However, the depth and breadth of such efforts were conditioned by the context and human rights background in the various countries. The effectiveness and sustainability of UNDP's work is challenged by its fragmented and unconsolidated nature in this field in most countries. This is mainly due to lack of continuous financing to support such efforts. Political context across the region is another aggravating circumstance; government priorities often change, and it can be difficult to maintain the commitment of justice sector institutions.

3.3 Signature solution 3: Crisis prevention and increased resilience

This section presents the main findings relating to UNDP's work on conflict prevention and peace-building; early warning systems and climate/disaster information; mainstreaming climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction (DRR) in national and local development plans; and jobs and livelihoods within the recovery and resilience framework of support.

3.3.1 Main challenges in the region

The RBEC region faces diverse human development concerns relating to crisis prevention and recovery, including disaster reduction. The region is prone to natural disasters, though the degree of risk varies. It includes floods and landslides (Central Asia, the Caucasus and parts of the Western Balkans), forest fires (Western Balkans), droughts (Central Asia, the

Caucasus and the Western Balkans), and major earthquakes (Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Western Balkans).

In addition, the region is burdened by the legacy of conflict and division among countries, characterized by frozen conflicts and territorial disputes that often hinder socioeconomic development, stability and security for people on all sides. The region is also affected by outward and transit migration flows, which deplete human capital, while at the same time bring challenges of inflows of migrants and their resilience. Turkey faced a significant inflow of migrants due to the Syrian conflict, which led the European Council and Turkey to sign the EU–Turkey Statement in March 2016. Based on it, Turkey has hosted more than 3.6 million registered displaced Syrians and around 370,000 registered refugees from other countries.[14] UNDP's country response has been heavily shaped by these circumstances. In addition, North Macedonia and Serbia hosted more than one million refugees and migrants in transit in 2015 and early 2016.

3.3.2 UNDP response

This signature solution attracts just 13 percent of UNDP funding across the region. UNDP invested in supporting national and subnational institutions and instruments, combined with implementation of small-scale projects in disaster-prone communities to enhance DRR/disaster risk management systems, though with varying levels of engagement — strong across the South Caucasus; in Central Asia, more in Tajikistan and less in Uzbekistan. To respond to social cohesion and conflict resolution needs, UNDP employs a range of measures to open spaces for dialogue, build confidence, encourage interaction and establish understanding among different groups.

3.3.3 Key findings

The limited funding for this signature solution affects the depth and breadth of UNDP's engagement.

Analysis of UNDP work across the region shows that only relatively small-scale DRR actions are implemented, despite huge needs and diverse risks. Peacebuilding activities are scarce; only a few projects directly address such topics. Various programmes implemented to support livelihoods and economic development integrate resilience and human capital dimensions. This contributes to prevention of brain drain, though consistent evidence about results is not readily available.

UNDP's long-term upstream engagement with governments of countries receiving DRR support has raised awareness of the need to develop DRR policies and measures, including early warning systems.

UNDP has made a significant contribution to strengthening disaster risk management, raising awareness among the population and building stakeholder capacities in gender-sensitive preparedness and response to natural and human-induced disasters. For instance, UNDP Armenia's long-term work with the Government resulted in the establishment of a strong DRR response system, with DRR alongside other national priorities in the wider government programme. This included formulation of the National Strategy and Action Plan (2017-2021) for disaster risk management and an electronic tool for monitoring and evaluation of the national strategy and implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction; establishment of an early warning system managed by an inter-governmental task force; and digital solutions for DRR.

Across the region, UNDP provided direct support to help communities develop adaptive capacities and resilience to climate change-induced stress and natural disasters (e.g. in response to floods in Azerbaijan and Bosnia and Herzegovina). This included strengthening forecasting and response mechanisms as well as provision of direct relief assistance, for example in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Box 4).

---

14   https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2487.

> **BOX 4.** UNDP's support to flood relief in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In response to devastating floods that hit Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2014, causing an estimated €2.04 billion in damages, UNDP implemented the largest flood recovery programme in the history of the country. It affected half a million people and directly supported 16,240 people. UNDP interventions led to the rehabilitation of 5,000 devastated homes, enabling some 15,000 people able to return to their homes within 18 months of the event. UNDP also supported improvements to the energy efficiency of homes for victims of landslides; (re)construction of public service infrastructure, including schools, kindergartens, and health care and public administration facilities. Livelihoods-recovery assistance helped restore the flood-affected local economies and safeguarded at-risk jobs, with an estimated 5,000 jobs retained through interventions in 56 small and medium-size enterprises.

On the other hand, in some countries (e.g. Uzbekistan) there was a limited and narrow DRR focus on raising awareness among the population and building capacities of stakeholders in gender-sensitive preparedness and response to natural and human-induced disasters. However, the focus has not yet shifted to DRR and disaster preparedness (prevention and readiness) as recommended in the Sendai Framework; instead it is still in pilots focused on response/reaction to events.

Analysis of UNDP work across the region indicates systemic barriers that impede the effectiveness of DRR efforts. The main challenges include lack of funds for structural changes within the sector, limiting the extent to which policies can be implemented. The ICPEs reviewed for Armenia and Georgia, for example, show that only small improvements have been achieved in government implementation capability, another important factor in success and sustainability. Other limitations include frequent government changes, lack of political will, difficulties in identifying responsible institutions and lack of intersectoral cooperation.

UNDP's engagement in migration response was driven by demand in countries where such support was provided — Turkey in particular, but also North Macedonia and Serbia.

Due to the Syrian conflict, the most critical migration crisis in the region is in Turkey. It is the top refugee-receiving country, hosting approximately 63 percent of all Syrian refugees beginning in 2018.[15]

UNDP has played a significant role in ensuring that refugees/migrants have equitable access to essential basic, social and economic development services.

UNDP in Turkey has organized its interventions within the Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan, a regional humanitarian and development response to the Syria crisis. It is coordinated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and UNDP in close partnership with participating governments. UNDP has taken the lead role in the livelihoods sector, emphasizing provision of basic needs, security and food security, in close partnership with national and local partners in Turkey. UNDP achieved results in the areas of livelihoods, employment and local economic development as well as in municipal service delivery and achievement of social cohesion between local and migrant communities.

The underlying principle of UNDP's work was resilience building. The ICPE for Turkey noted positive outputs and outcomes of UNDP's investments, while mentioning that further support is critical due to the multiple deprivations and challenges faced by both migrant populations and local communities. In North Macedonia and Serbia, UNDP implemented limited humanitarian relief interventions in response to the inflow of migrants through the so-called Balkan route. In other countries, UNDP worked on local resilience and livelihood support, which also addressed prevention of the brain drain.

Peacebuilding and social cohesion received meagre support, insufficient for the needs, particularly given the conflict-prone and post-conflict societies across the region.

---

15   UNHCR data, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/113.

Review of UNDP country and regional operations shows that only a small number of peacebuilding and social cohesion initiatives were implemented, concentrated in the Western Balkans. One example is a regional dialogue for the future project that aimed to promote peaceful coexistence, trust and genuine respect for diversity through opportunities for dialogue among diverse communities. In other regions, only small and fragmented short-term initiatives have been implemented. As noted in the Georgia ICPE, UNDP's assistance on peacebuilding without a political solution had limited effect. The evaluation also noted that "the absence of reliable indicators and evaluative research on the effectiveness of confidence-building initiatives, resulted in availability of only anecdotal evidence on the results achieved by the different projects in terms of enhanced social cohesion and contribution to peace".[16] In recent years, regional and country-specific projects were implemented on prevention of violent extremism, particularly in Central Asia. These projects focused on community resilience and youth empowerment to achieve social cohesion. However, available evaluations do not provide much assessment on the results of these recent initiatives.

3.4 Signature solution 4: Environment — nature-based solutions for development

This section presents the main findings of UNDP's work on nature-based solutions, climate change, emissions reduction and strengthening of the linkages between vertical funds and other support for sustainable livelihoods and rural development.

3.4.1 Main challenges in the region

The region is vulnerable to climate change, particularly Central Asia, the Western Balkans and Turkey. There are challenges in reconciling economic growth with environmental sustainability. Climate change is already exerting pressure on shared natural resources and triggering devastating weather events. Rising temperatures and aridity trigger desertification, land

degradation and falling crop yields, challenges that directly affect livelihoods and development overall. Governments across the 14 countries/territory under analysis are increasingly tackling issues of environmental protection and climate change, along with ratification of relevant international conventions, and integrating measures to counter the negative effects. However, national systems are burdened by a lack of specialization in various sub-sector fields and lack of capacity in the central and subnational institutions in charge of the environment.

3.4.2 UNDP response

Review of the ICPEs shows that UNDP's support across this signature solution included three main groups of activities: Within the area of support for protection of natural resources, UNDP supported communities whose livelihoods depended on natural resources by empowering them to participate in decision-making processes concerning the use of those resources; piloting methods for use of local crop varieties; and working to protect endangered species and crops and promote adaptation and mitigation measures to foster climate-resilient and low-emission development. UNDP supported the governments and partner institutions to monitor environmental indicators for evidence-based decision-making and reporting under environmental conventions.

In the climate change portfolio, UNDP provided technical assistance for improving policy frameworks, monitoring emissions and developing capacities to report to bodies such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. UNDP also invested significant efforts across the region to assist governments in reducing greenhouse gases and chemicals (hydrochlorofluorocarbons, mercury and persistent organic pollutants). UNDP promoted green development and environmental sustainability as an integral part of its work across projects. UNDP benefited strongly from GEF funding ($155 million) across this signature solution. Overall, 12 percent of funds in RBEC were spent on this signature solution (Figure 2, p. 8).

---

16   ICPE Georgia, p. 40.

3.4.3 Key findings

UNDP's support to strengthening environmental and climate change governance has been driven by its strong strategic positioning and technical expertise in the sector.

Across the region, UNDP worked closely with governments to develop policy, legislative and institutional frameworks for the environment and biodiversity conservation. Several key pieces of legislation have been adopted or drafted by governments with technical assistance and advisory support from UNDP. Once approved, these frameworks can serve as a strong foundation for environmental governance and natural resources management. UNDP also offered a helping hand to countries in collecting and systematizing environment-related data and reporting to international bodies, which was praised as useful. UNDP was also complimented for supplying governments with expertise to fulfil international obligations arising from the Paris Agreement and United Nations conventions covering the environment and climate change, particularly for reporting obligations and more general monitoring and data collection on various environmental issues.

UNDP's support to environment and climate change adaptation has varied across Central Asia. Engagement was strong in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan but limited in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, where the response was affected by government priorities and availability of funding.

Comparative analysis shows that Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan now benefit from improvements in the policy environment, enhanced capacity and promotion of innovative solutions and pilots for sustainable use and management of natural resources. So far only sporadic results are visible in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.[17] Across the South Caucasus, UNDP had a strong focus on the environment and climate change, though with a primary emphasis on specific interventions to build pilots accompanied by upstream policy work, for example in Belarus (Box 5). In all 14 countries/territory, the lack of effective mechanisms for extension and outreach hampers the scale-up and replication of lessons across the country.

One identified weakness of support was the tendency for UNDP to substitute for government capacities, which is effective in the short term but not sustainable in the medium to long term. For instance, the Montenegro ICPE noted limited human and technical capacities in government institutions dealing with data collection and processing on greenhouse gas emissions. It also noted the lack of a comprehensive national system for regular reporting and monitoring on climate change actions, climate finance and climate modelling. UNDP's support, through provision of outsourced sector expertise, was critical and effective in the short term, but it threatens longer term results and sustainability due to inadequate investment in institutional capacity.

> **BOX 5.** Supporting new approaches to climate change adaptation in Belarus

UNDP supported the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Protection in Belarus in developing policies and regulatory frameworks in line with international environmental conventions. UNDP also introduced new approaches for Belarus to adapt to climate change and safeguard biodiversity, particularly in degraded wetlands and peatlands. Among the results achieved were establishment of an institutional framework for maintenance of habitat for globally endangered species by restoring wetlands, training forestry organizations on the identification and sustainable use of rare and typical biotopes, and developing a system to register and inventory key habitats of globally threatened species. UNDP also supported the national DNA bank to include samples of 24 endangered species, further aiding the country's efforts on the sustainable use of genetic resources. A special protection regime for 42 habitats was introduced as well. According to the ICPE findings, such efforts helped Belarus to become a regional leader in the management of protected areas and recovery of damaged ecosystems.

---

17   UNDP support to Uzbekistan was mostly in the form of demonstration pilots feeding information to the policy level, but also to institutions such as water management bodies, community groups and local governments, with capacity building. This was affected, however, by the lack of the most needed regulatory frameworks such as the revised Water Code.

This has been a key issue across the region, where the very limited availability of local expertise in environment and climate change issues has led to over-reliance on external experts.

UNDP has made a positive contribution to strengthening national mechanisms for elimination of greenhouse gases, persistent organic pollutants and other types of hazardous waste, assisting in establishing legal and institutional foundations for the elimination of such elements. However, the sustainability of the work to strengthen these mechanisms is threatened by persistent lack of capacity and action by national institutions to organize the transfer of waste to a disposal facility or to sustain approaches and pilots adopted with UNDP support. Similar challenges were noted also in Kazakhstan, Montenegro and Turkmenistan. Government institutions encountered challenges in disposing of the waste, which would have made a real difference in limiting carbon emissions. The factors affecting sustainability of these efforts include political challenges and weak institutional capacities to organize and oversee such processes.

UNDP's support to natural resource management has been important as it addressed resource and capacity challenges of host governments and country priorities and demands in light of international environmental commitments. Particularly useful have been pilots on alternative management of natural resources, as they brought innovative approaches and ways of working on protection of natural resources.

UNDP invested in raising awareness among communities on ways to reduce pressures on the environment and utilize land and forest resources more sustainably across the 14 ICPE countries/territory. UNDP established demonstration pilots and case studies on sustainable pasture management practices, natural resource management and sustainable agriculture. It worked with farmers to build their knowledge and skills on cultivating native crops, which are more resistant to pests and diseases and more resilient to climate change. Such examples can be found across the RBEC region, notably in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Montenegro, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (Box 6).

There has also been an important increase in awareness among targeted beneficiaries about ways to manage their resources. However, UNDP has struggled to scale up such pilots, reflecting the weakness of similar interventions across the economic development sector. Scaling up remains a challenge due to factors including fragmentation of approaches, inadequate budgets, difficulties accessing financial support, lack of commitment by governments to adopt working models and limited absorption capacity of governments.

3.5 Signature solution 5: Clean, affordable energy

This section assesses UNDP's work in support of promotion and capacity building to increase use of renewable energy and sustainable energy interventions.

> **BOX 6. NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN AZERBAIJAN**

UNDP has been actively supporting knowledge sharing and awareness raising among communities about ways to reduce pressures on the environment and natural resources. Through such efforts, UNDP assisted the introduction of sustainable pasture management practices and rotational grazing systems to avoid overgrazing and degradation of summer pastures. Through such practices, about 3,000 hectares of summer pastures were restored, along with the creation of alternative livelihoods (e.g. fishing and beekeeping) for farmers who had given up excessive numbers of livestock. Such support is extremely relevant and important for Azerbaijan, which faces serious challenges in terms of land degradation due to climate change and generally bad soil quality.

3.5.1 Main challenges in the region

Closely related to climate change and the environment are issues linked to energy efficiency and promotion and use of renewable energy across the region. In general, interest is low in using renewable energy and pursuing energy efficiency across the 14 ICPE countries/territory, despite increasing concern about how energy use to sustain economic activities worsens climate change. A number of countries in the RBEC region (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) are rich in oil and gas, which affects their interest in sustainable energy.

3.5.2 UNDP response

UNDP's support was limited to small-scale interventions in some of the countries. For instance, in the Western Balkans, energy was included in the portfolios of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. In the South Caucasus, Armenia, Belarus and Georgia included energy efficiency in their activities, whereas across Central Asia energy was more consistently included across subregion portfolios. Turkey also included energy in its portfolio. Across the countries, the backbone of UNDP support was on energy efficiency in public sector and residential buildings, with pilot projects across different types of buildings in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and all Central Asian countries.

In addition, UNDP invested in developing the regulatory framework for energy efficiency and renewable energy in Armenia. It assisted the implementation of the energy management system requirements in accordance with the law on efficient use of energy in Serbia, along with support to the energy management information system software. In Turkey, the focus was on support to renewable energy innovation and expansion. In Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, UNDP also supported irrigation and energy production in the small hydropower sector, improving the legislative, policy and regulatory environment for small hydropower development.

3.5.3 Key findings

The relatively low interest in and awareness of innovative energy efficiency and renewable energy solutions among governments, businesses and citizens have been reflected in UNDP's rather fragmented response across the region.

The bulk of UNDP assistance was in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. UNDP had a limited involvement in the Western Balkans, focused on supporting and piloting innovative energy efficiency and renewable energy solutions, as part of a wider investment in green businesses and environmental protection. Such interventions have brought positive advances, but their fragmentation and focus on small groups of businesses or individuals limited the catalytic effects of such investment. UNDP managed to take a stronger role only in a small number of countries (e.g. Armenia, Serbia and Tajikistan) in the development of the regulatory framework for energy efficiency and renewable energy. This was partly because energy and renewables are generally not viewed as part of the government's domain, as most innovations and solutions are business driven.

UNDP has contributed to showcasing innovative energy practices, particularly by promoting the idea that investments in green energy can also bring significant economic benefits.

Across most countries where UNDP has engaged in the energy sector, it has supported the development of skills among public sector and industry professionals and piloting of new technologies and business models. Demonstration sites and pilots have been successful in all countries, bringing results to individuals and businesses. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for instance, interventions in the energy efficiency portfolio leveraged $100 million of investments in energy efficiency from other sources.

Good practices in terms of building codes and energy audits were noted across the region, particularly in Belarus, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. However, across all countries, the ICPEs noted the slow pace of raising government awareness and commitment to replicate and scale up such pilots. These are mainly in the private sector as they require sustainable funding, which has been hard for UNDP to mobilize.

Other factors include the absence of overarching laws on energy efficiency and renewable energy in some countries, like Turkmenistan, as well as lack of subsidies in the energy sector, which acts as a disincentive for a stronger push in this direction.

3.6 Signature solution 6: Gender equality

This section looks at UNDP's work on supporting governments to mainstream gender and create frameworks to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.

3.6.1 Main challenges in the region

Despite having declared a commitment to women's empowerment and gender equality, the 14 ICPE countries/territory have made limited efforts to promote and ensure stronger women´s economic and social inclusion and participation. Across the region, gender challenges include legal and cultural barriers, early marriages, lack of economic opportunities and gender-based violence. Gender inequalities persist in pay gaps and the low participation of women in decision-making bodies, though this aspect varies between regions and countries.

A 2017 study by UNDP and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), 'Investing in social care for gender equality and inclusive growth in Europe and Central Asia',[18] found gender disparities in labour across the RBEC region. The study found that "[w]omen do 2.5 times more unpaid care work than men, which greatly limits their opportunities in the labour force and paid work. The unequal distribution of unpaid care work within households is a root cause of gender inequalities in labour market outcomes – such as the gender employment gap, horizontal and vertical gender segregation of jobs, and gender inequalities in wages, earnings, incomes and wealth".[19] The synthesis found that the number of women participating in local politics remains very low due to limited encouragement by political parties, economic factors, cultural resistance, pre-assigned societal roles for men and women, and lack of a support network.

3.6.2 UNDP response

To respond to these multidimensional challenges, UNDP has been integrating projects on empowerment of women across all its portfolios. However, in many countries, UNDP still struggles to define a clear and realistic gender strategy to inform its work. Analysis of the 14 ICPEs and individual UNDP country strategies shows that many programme/project designs still focused simply on inclusion of women in interventions rather than ensuring full exploration of the gender lens to ensure transformative change, in terms of increasing women's participation in decision making and resource management and ensuring leadership and political participation.

The portfolio analysis shows that some thematic interventions, especially on environment and energy, were effectively gender blind across the 14 ICPE countries/territory, with slight country-to-country variations. One of the reasons for this approach is UNDP's limited operating space for advocacy on gender equality issues, due to national contexts and limitations. For instance, across Central Asia, despite countries' declarations of commitment to women's rights and gender equality and formal adoption of gender equality strategies, implementation of measures to protect and empower women is slow and fragmented. Across this region, none of the countries has a law on domestic violence or violence against women. A review of programme expenditure through the lens of the UNDP gender marker shows the majority of projects were GEN1 (some contribution to gender equality) and GEN2 (significant contributions to gender equality), with relatively small gender expenditures except for Kosovo, which shows a slightly higher expenditure. There were very few GEN3 initiatives (gender equality is a principal objective) (Figure 3).

---

18   UNDP and UN Women, 2017, 'Investing in social care for gender equality and inclusive growth in Europe and Central Asia', https://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/dam/rbec/docs/undp-rbec-gender-investing-in-social-care-for-gender-equality-and-inclusive-growth.pdf.
19   Ibid.

FIGURE 3. Country programme expenditures by gender marker, 2015-2020 (US$ Millions)
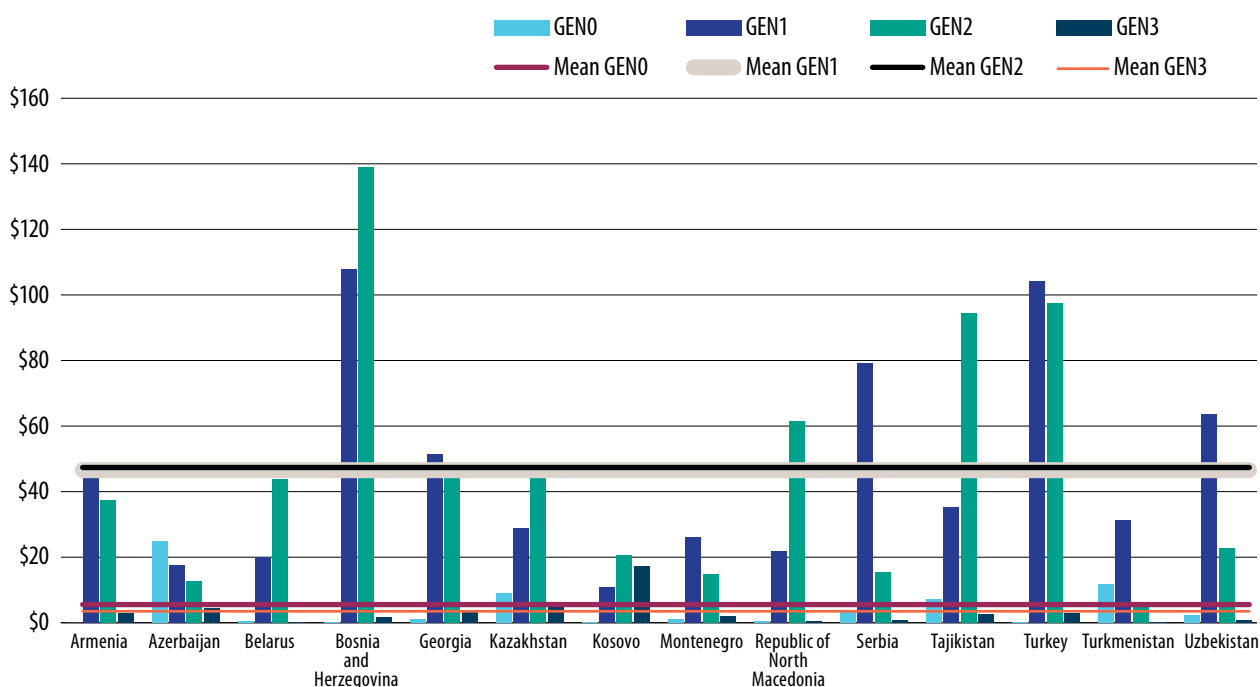
Source: UNDP IEO PowerBI, 16 March 2021

Nevertheless, UNDP's engagement in the gender equality and women's empowerment arena spanned a wide range of interventions. They addressed (among other issues) gender-based violence; migration and human trafficking; inclusive growth; advancement of women's participation in politics and decision-making; improvement of the position of women in the labour market and economic empowerment; promotion of evidence-informed national strategies and partnerships to advance gender equality and women's empowerment; and mainstreaming of gender in public administration and local and urban planning.

3.6.3 Key findings

UNDP's efforts to promote awareness of gender as not only a women's issue but a larger social issue contributed to placing it on the agenda of governments across the region.

In all countries across the region, the issue of gender has reached the agenda of the government and public service providers, particularly within the social welfare sector, albeit to varying degrees. The depth and success of these initiatives depend very much on the country context. In Central Asia, for example, a majority of countries have adopted some legislative improvements. In the Western Balkans deeper integration of gender and women's rights is noted. UNDP's main contribution across this sector has been to aid in establishing the evidence base, supporting legislative changes and policy improvements, and improving services and the foundation for further integration of gender through investment in public administration capacity and service delivery.

UNDP's support to women's political participation materialized in a number of countries, mainly the Western Balkans and South Caucasus and to some extent in Kazakhstan. This brought positive results for women aspiring to take a more active role in politics.

UNDP has invested strongly in training and networking with women politicians, engaging them with women from communities (Armenia, Montenegro). It has used these avenues to advocate for stronger engagement on issues of common interest relating to women's empowerment and rights, but also empowering women to be more proactive within political party structures. Review of the ICPEs shows the positive results of such engagement. It led to women's success in elections in Armenia, for example, where nine women who benefited from UNDP support were elected as local councillors or head of community in June 2019.[20] Across the region, networks and trainings were noted as rare opportunities for women politicians to discuss issues and advocate for women's advancement in politics.

UNDP's work supporting legislative solutions for gender-based violence and social protection, as well as access to protective and social services, has the potential to help women realize their rights. This is especially the case for the most vulnerable women and their families, who face risks of social exclusion and violence.

UNDP worked intensively to advocate for women's rights and address the gender dimension of social welfare systems across the countries. In particular it promoted and (in some countries) piloted social services that target women and other vulnerable groups, such as victims of gender-based violence. Across the 14 ICPE countries/territory, UNDP has advocated for the Istanbul Convention, and in some countries (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan etc.) also supported capacity building of law enforcement, local government, public councils and forensic experts on the Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Istanbul Protocol)[21] and wider governance issues through training workshops.

For instance, UNDP promoted women's rights across the South Caucasus, though with variations. In Armenia and Georgia, UNDP cooperated with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to support the development of several by-laws and regulations relating to women's rights and protection from violence. In Armenia, UNDP assisted the Government to operationalize the 2017 Law on the prevention of gender-based violence in partnership with the Stop Violence Against Women Coalition of Armenia (Box 7). In Georgia, UNDP supported the establishment and functioning of the Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Ending Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence. On the other hand, UNDP's work in Azerbaijan and Belarus addressed gender-based violence only indirectly through support for women's economic empowerment. In Tajikistan, UNDP prepared proposals and recommendations to improve legislation on access to legal protection for victims of domestic violence, some of which made its way into the Law on equal rights of men and women and equal opportunities for their implementation.

> **BOX 7.** Preventing gender-based violence in Armenia

In Armenia, UNDP worked closely with UNFPA in implementation of the Joint Programme on Human Rights. Through it the two agencies supported institutional capacity development in the area of gender-based violence and the fight against the culture of impunity for perpetrators. Joint activities included support to the Government to operationalize the law on the prevention of gender-based violence; training of 400 police officers on issues such as gender equality and gender-based violence; and institutional support to the Human Rights Defender Office. As noted in the ICPE for Armenia, these efforts were effective, though much remains to be done to improve protection from gender-based violence, particularly as Armenia has not adopted the Istanbul Convention.

---

20   https://www.am.undp.org/content/armenia/en/home/projects/women-in-politics---.html.
21   https://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/training8rev1en.pdf.

Similarly, in Uzbekistan, UNDP assisted the drafting of the Law guaranteeing equal rights of men and women and the Law on prevention of domestic violence and harassment, both of which were adopted in September 2019. Across the Western Balkans and in Turkey, UNDP supported governments to mainstream gender into policies and to provide specific services for women, for example to offer protection from gender-based violence through social services, helplines and institutional development of social protection institutions. The ICPEs note that UNDP was appreciated for this support, and that national stakeholders from countries with aspirations to join the EU found it helpful in meeting accession requirements.

In the majority of countries some notable albeit fragmented results were found in promotion of women's economic empowerment, within larger efforts to promote entrepreneurship, green businesses or access to labour markets. However, such activities — capacity building through trainings, small loan/grant schemes or mentoring — engaged only a handful of women entrepreneurs, leading to results with limited scalability potential.

Despite the fact that UNDP's level of focus on women's economic empowerment varied across subregions and countries, these themes still were interwoven across country office portfolios in one way or another. In a majority of countries, there have been at least some activities or projects geared to women's economic empowerment (even if fragmented or small scale), integrated within wider sustainable growth or economic development portfolios. In some countries, like Tajikistan, these interventions brought important results for women in rural or remote areas. However, in Montenegro UNDP's advocacy with the state Investment Development Fund to develop measures in support of women's entrepreneurship and green businesses did not lead to a significant change in the way the Fund approaches women's entrepreneurship.

Such limited, individual results reflect a wider challenge that UNDP encounters when it comes to economic and sustainable development, discussed under signature solution 3. These sectors are largely outside public sector control and depend on market conditions and business potential, so it is hard for UNDP to strategically position itself with the government. This makes scaling-up difficult as it requires stronger and more dispersed local presence and efforts, which in most cases is not possible for UNDP due to resource limitations.

UNDP efforts in DRR and disaster relief have managed to integrate gender and women's needs and rights in most cases. However, other areas of UNDP's environment and energy work mention gender only in a perfunctory manner or do not even do that.

Review of the ICPEs reveals a particularly low level of integration of gender into the environment and climate change portfolio, with rare examples of gender mainstreaming in policies, laws and strategies. For instance, the ICPE for Belarus noted that initiatives in the environment area were mostly gender blind. Similar findings were noted in the ICPE for Montenegro. In Uzbekistan, though, several examples of women's targeted engagement in project activities were noted, often as part of pilot projects within the environment and climate change portfolio.

3.7 UNDP institutional performance

3.7.1 Designing programmes and interventions

Demand-driven programming, along with UNDP's desire to innovate, hinders the depth, strategic focus, coherence and sustainability of interventions.

The picture is mixed regarding the design of UNDP's programme and interventions across the 14 countries/territory. With its broad thematic scope and reach, UNDP engages a wide range of sectors, areas and issues. Its general intervention logic is understandable but often implicit as UNDP struggles to present clear programme theories of change through definition of causal linkages among activities, outputs and desired outcomes. At the intervention

level, results frameworks presented in project documents are generally weak. Common shortcoming are the use of inadequate indicators and targets, focus on inputs and outputs with no clear definition of the broader results that are expected, and lack of aggregation of results by sector or outcome area. At both project and programme level, SDG indicators are often poorly integrated into frameworks, making it difficult to clearly determine UNDP's contribution to the achievement of specific goals.

UNDP's work is increasingly upstream across the region, which contributes to building an enabling environment across sectors targeted by UNDP support and ensuring scalability of interventions.

Upstream policy work contributes to institutional and legislative solutions that, once in force, have the prospect of reaching wider population groups in each country. UNDP supports governments in responding to requirements coming out of the international conventions and the EU acquis (in the Western Balkans and Turkey) by providing direct legislative and policymaking support. This takes place through provision of advice, facilitation of consultation processes and joint elaboration of laws, policies

and strategies, etc. In addition, technical assistance for capacity development in government institutions has been appreciated as a valuable UNDP contribution across the region (Figure 4).

UNDP enriches its upstream work by piloting services and approaches downstream; however, their scalability potential remains a challenge.

UNDP country offices in the region invest significant efforts to innovate and pilot services and approaches across all sectors. For instance, UNDP's flagship investment in the region is in e-governance and e-services, through which it has supported innovative pilots that have achieved critical time and resource efficiencies in public administration and public service provision. UNDP invested in piloting innovative approaches to tackle climate change and greenhouse gas emissions, improving the livelihoods and business opportunities of targeted populations. UNDP has worked also on innovative approaches to raise the skills of young women and girls in information technology and science, technology, engineering and math education more generally, for example in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Tajikistan.

FIGURE 4. Programme government perceptions of how UNDP can best contribute to achievement of the SDGs
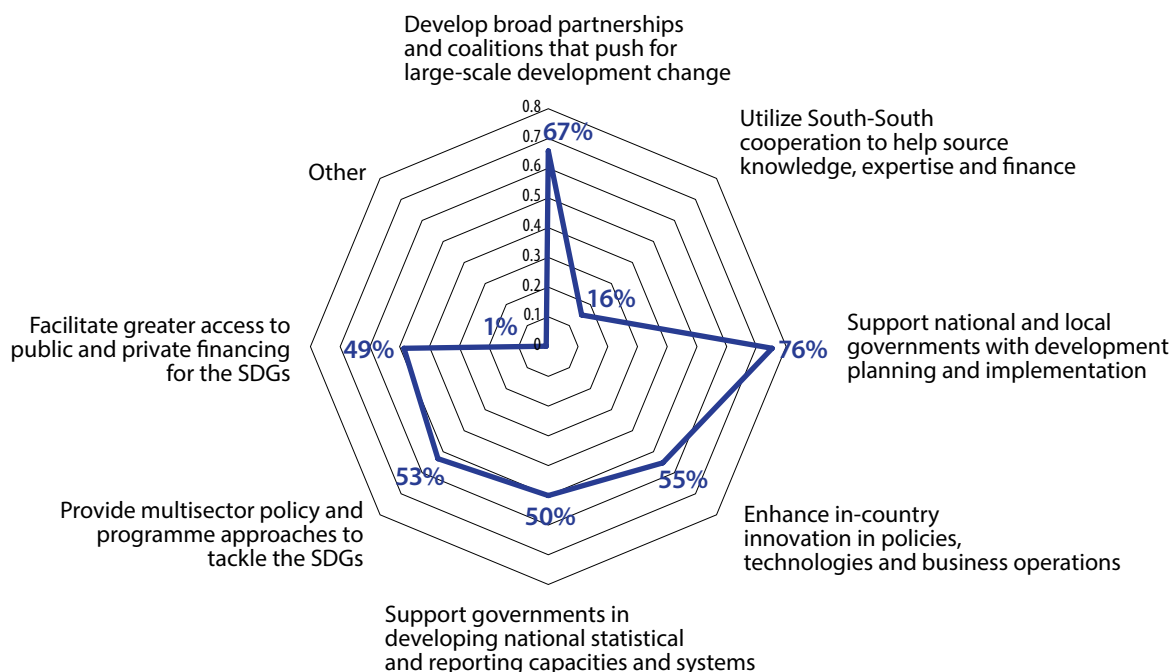
Source: UNDP partnership survey, 2020

In Bosnia and Herzegovina UNDP also modelled innovative approaches to 'Smart City' in Sarajevo,[22] bringing technology and digitalization to citizens as a means to advance public service delivery and encourage a 'smart urban economy', as part of efforts to improve citizens' well-being and quality of life. The aim of the initiative was to bring the concept of 'future cities' closer to residents, businesses and authorities, encouraging them to collectively re-imagine the city beyond apps and e-services. This pilot was presented as an example across the RBEC region. However, the overall scalability potential of most pilots is marred by factors such as ownership and the lack of financial and human resources in central and local governments to sustain these working models.

The demand-driven nature of these initiatives is made possible by UNDP's flexibility and agility to adapt to changing contexts and needs. This helps UNDP respond to government needs but threatens spreading UNDP's capacity too thin.

Across the region, UNDP interventions were implemented in a flexible and agile manner, which facilitated UNDP's adaptability to changing contexts in the countries and regionally. For instance, UNDP's Uzbekistan country programme was swiftly adapted to the changing context following political change at the end of 2016. In addition, UNDP responded to new needs arising from the influx of migrants to Turkey from the Syrian Arab Republic.

The best example of UNDP's prompt response to crises is the support it provided to governments and donors in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. UNDP's immediate response included helping governments to strengthen their health systems, including through procurement of urgently needed health and medical supplies. For instance, the UNDP country office in Montenegro procured €3 million worth of equipment and supplies for the country's health system in spring 2020, despite slight delays due to the volatile market. Analysis of COVID-19 resources in the 14 ICPE countries/territory shows that UNDP's resources for crisis response amounted

to $122 million, the single largest investment by any institution. UNDP's contributions were matched by funds from programme countries and Development Assistance Committee donors (Figure 5).
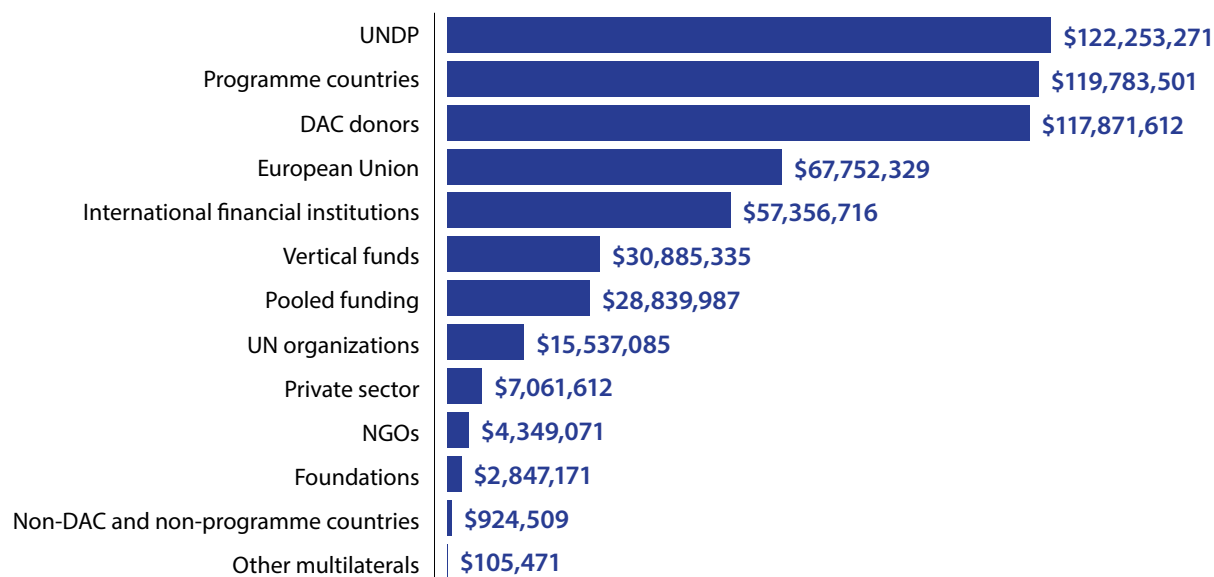
The demand-driven nature of UNDP's work helps in building ownership and increasing the relevance of UNDP assistance to governments in support of their priorities. However, such an approach diminishes longer term planning and efforts to ensure that the pathways of change are robust and clear. In addition, UNDP's responsiveness to constantly changing demands requires perpetual reshuffling of resources. That in turn leads to overstretching of resources and fragmentation of efforts. Eventually, such an approach brings a range of outputs and short-term results, but makes it difficult to understand the overall outcomes of such assistance. These challenges were particularly highlighted across Central Asia and in the Western Balkans.

Results-based programming and monitoring of UNDP interventions is sub-optimal.

Across the region, the review of UNDP country programme objectives and strategies shows they are appropriately broad, allowing necessary responsiveness to government-articulated demands and new or unmet needs of rights-holders. This approach is valuable from the point of relevance and contributes to building ownership of the country programme by stakeholders and partners. However, the insufficiently elaborated theories of change at both country programme and project level prevents delivery of a clear framework for how inputs, outputs and intended programme outcomes lead to the ultimate programme goal. Also, while UNDP's monitoring processes are standardized and there is due diligence in reporting timeliness, the quality of UNDP reports and monitoring systems is compromised due to limitations in data availability, quality and reliability, particularly at the outcome level. ICPEs across the region mentioned difficulties when it comes to reflection and analysis of results at the outcome and impact level, while noting that UNDP is good in reporting on activity and output level.

---

22   See more at: https://www.ba.undp.org/content/bosnia_and_herzegovina/en/home/smart-city-initiative.html.

FIGURE 5. Source of COVID-19 resources (US$ Millions)

UNDP	$122,253,271
Programme countries	$119,783,501
DAC donors	$117,871,612
European Union	$67,752,329
International financial institutions	$57,356,716
Vertical funds	$30,885,335
Pooled funding	$28,839,987
UN organizations	$15,537,085
Private sector	$7,061,612
NGOs	$4,349,071
Foundations	$2,847,171
Non-DAC and non-programme countries	$924,509
Other multilaterals	$105,471

Source: UNDP IEO PowerBI, 16 March 2021
Note: DAC = Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

One of the challenges noted in ICPEs for the South Caucasus region was understaffing in monitoring and evaluation. At the time the ICPE was prepared, country offices in Armenia and Azerbaijan had only one part-time staff member working in this area. In Central Asia and other subregions, the ICPEs showed several downsides of reporting processes, such as lack of substantial analysis, reflection on the outcome level and consideration of external data sources and evidence. The ICPEs also noted that UNDP struggles to provide consistent gender statistics in monitoring and reporting at both project and programme level. In some areas, migration for instance, a key weakness in UNDP support is the lack of proper monitoring for results. This hinders understanding of the impact of migration-related activities.

UNDP does not collect data on such indicators consistently, which impedes understanding of any potential outcomes in this regard. Review of the ICPEs also shows that evaluations conducted by the country offices were found to be generally weak, or absent. Belarus, for example, had conducted no evaluations outside the area of environment and energy, and those were primarily driven by GEF requirements. These deficiencies diminish UNDP's ability to sustain evidence-based planning processes, as lack of outcome-level data prevents full understanding of effective approaches to achieve results that could inform decision-making and planning by both UNDP and the governments.

3.7.2 UNDP's institutional structure

Across the 14 ICPE countries/territory, partners value UNDP teams for their extensive experience, which is considered a driver of UNDP's success, credibility and strategic positioning.

Though UNDP is appreciated for its broad experience, in most cases the country office core teams are small, with a limited number of UNDP staff as the backbone of operations and a large number of people working under service contracts. The main reason for this is the lack of stable medium- to long-term funding. Such a situation makes for agile teams but leads to challenges such as resources that are spread too thin and lack of institutional memory.

The overall gender ratio in country offices across the region is relatively equal, though country variations exist.

UNDP's country programmes are mostly implemented in silos, with few cross-sector synergies or joint interventions. This diminishes UNDP's ability to fulfil its full catalytic potential.

The relevance of UNDP programmes across the 14 countries/territory has been high, reflecting local priorities and the unmet needs of populations. However, UNDP could have further maximized its operations through stronger coherence and synergies within and between programmes. Programmes support upstream capacity development, advocacy and policy dialogue, which are predominantly sector specific and often do not consider actions taken by teams in other sectors. This reduces the potential to ensure a holistic approach to the reforms that UNDP supports, which is needed to ensure the integration of multidimensional needs.

UNDP's financial, procurement and administrative procedures are sound and transparent, providing added value to governments.

Across the RBEC region, UNDP's procurement and administrative procedures have been used for procurement of medical, information technology and other types of equipment and services, including software development and technical expertise. Positive examples were noted across the ICPEs, notably in Kazakhstan, Montenegro, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Findings stressed that such UNDP support has helped reduce the risk of corruption and improved access to services, particularly for the most vulnerable populations. Due diligence and effective procurement systems are found to be important drivers of UNDP's strategic positioning as a partner of the government in reform processes, with increasing government financing of UNDP initiatives. Analysis of available UNDP data shows an average execution rate of 83 percent for the 14 countries/territory, with no significant deviations between planned budgets and expenditures (Figure 6).

Resource limitations encourage UNDP efforts to diversify its sources of resources, including from governments, which are an increasingly important source of funding across the RBEC region.

Because most of the countries in the RBEC region are classified as upper middle income, core funding represents only a fraction of their total country programme budgets. The limited core funding is especially apparent in the Western Balkans. This puts pressure on country offices to fundraise aggressively, including from government sources. Analysis of UNDP's financial data across the region shows increasing dependence on government funding during the country programme period for most of the countries (Figure 7).

FIGURE 6. Total budget and expenditures for ICPE countries/territory, 2015-2020 (US$ Millions)
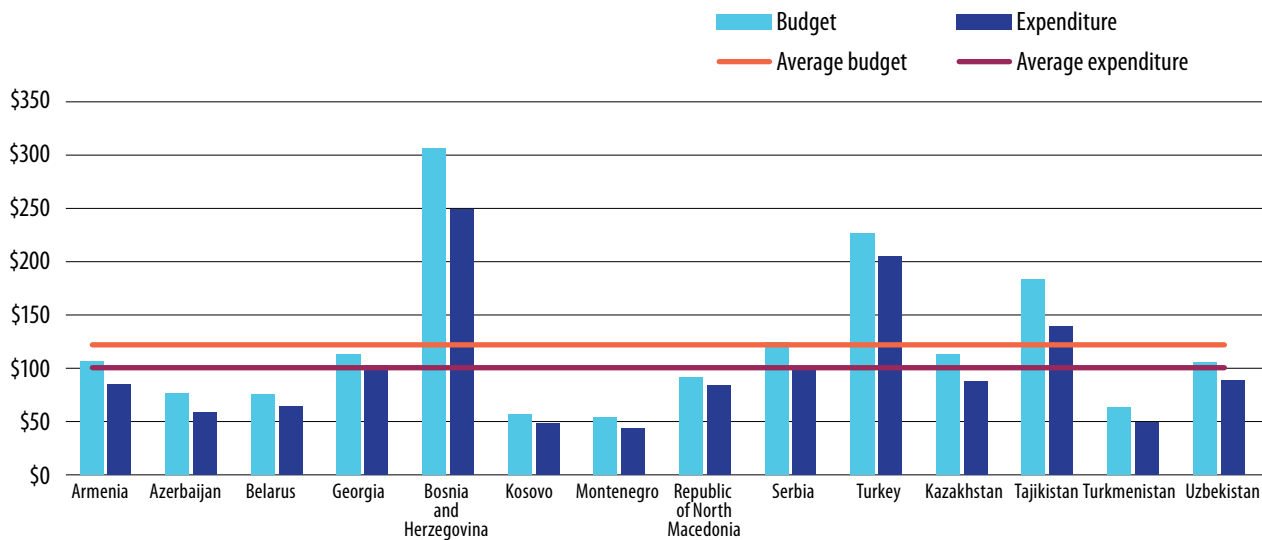
Source: UNDP IEO PowerBI, 16 March 2021

FIGURE 7. Government cost-sharing as a percentage of programme expenditure, 2015-2020
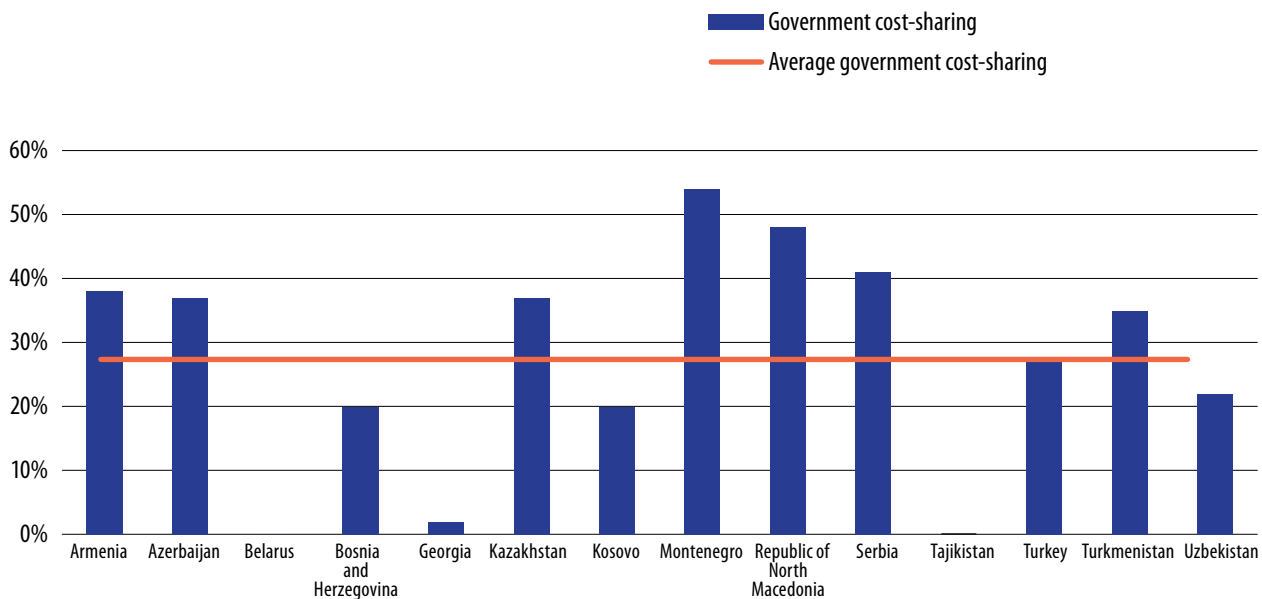
Source: Power BI, 16 March 2021

3.7.3 Partnerships

UNDP's strategy is grounded on partnerships and networks, which help boost results and their transformative potential. Analysis of UNDP's engagement with stakeholders shows that the most frequent interactions take place with national stakeholders (governments, civil society), followed by donors and other social actors.

UNDP closely consults with national stakeholders. This increases government ownership of UNDP's work and the relevance and strategic importance of UNDP support.

UNDP consults extensively with national stakeholders to prepare strategies and plans in all 14 countries/territory. Close consultations also take place during implementation of interventions, which helps maintain the relevance and strategic positioning of the programme and UNDP's leverage in promoting and integrating development objectives, the SDGs and the Agenda 2030 priorities into government policies and plans. In Central Asia, the evaluation found that UNDP engaged strongly with the governments, but less so with civil society. This was found to be a weakness in terms of balancing the approach and interventions. In other sub-regions, slightly more engagement is noted, but in general UNDP's engagement strategy with civil society shows some deficiencies. These stem from UNDP's primary focus on working with government and State institutions. In the Western Balkans, for instance, UNDP's emphasis on supporting governments to fulfil EU accession requirements, along with financial constraints, leaves little opportunity for substantial engagement with civil society.

As perceived by partners, UNDP's core values include programme and project implementation (78 percent of respondents), capacity development (50 percent) and technical expertise (47 percent) (Figure 8). South-South and triangular cooperation for sharing knowledge and best practices was rated lowest by partners, as confirmed by several of the ICPEs.

FIGURE 8. Core UNDP values as perceived by partner organizations
Percentage of respondents

Source: UNDP partnership survey, 2020

UNDP could have taken a more proactive approach to improving synergy and cooperation with other UN organizations.

The reform process has brought important changes in how UNDP operates both on its own and in partnership with other UN organizations. Much of the change was the reformulation of UNDP's positioning and also more focused promotion of UNDP's work through the role of UNDP resident representatives across the region. UNDP has collaborated with other UN entities on a number of issues across the region, particularly in connection with the Sustainable Development Goals Fund. One joint project is the UN Joint Programme to Improve Livelihoods in the Aral Sea, implemented by UNDP, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNFPA and UN Volunteers. It aims to address multiple insecurities by tackling the social, economic, health and environmental consequences of the Aral Sea disaster.[23] Another example is the Joint Programme on Human Rights implemented by UNDP and UNFPA in Armenia, which aims to develop institutional capacity on gender-based violence to fight a culture of impunity for perpetrators. UNDP also has joint projects with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, United Nations Children's Fund and UNHCR in Georgia to enhance livelihood security and community resilience through agricultural development, health and education services.

UNDP also participates in and often chairs UN thematic working groups, which are generally perceived as contributing to the One UN spirit. However, UNDP faced criticism about the degree of its efforts to foster collaborative relationships with other UN organizations. Across the region, UNDP has the biggest budget and the widest mandate, which means that it covers much of the UN engagement in a country. For that reason, some UN entities view UNDP as working in a silo, with little coordination or synergies with other efforts across UN country teams.

South-South cooperation opportunities are not sufficiently explored and advanced. The initiatives that do take place assist networking and knowledge acquisition; they do not provide sufficient time to build the systems and habits needed to apply the knowledge to achieve transformative change.

There are notable variations among countries and subregions when it comes to utilization of the potential for South-South and triangular cooperation within country programme frameworks. Across the region, UNDP is the main convener and facilitator of exchange of knowledge and expertise. It also provides international and global know-how, experience and best practices across all of its thematic areas. As a strategic partner of governments, UNDP works closely with institutions to share interesting examples and best practices among countries.

For instance, UNDP's support to the Astana Regional Hub for civil service brought together regional experts and professionals for an exchange of experiences and best practices across the RBEC region and globally. UNDP country offices in Central Asia and the South Caucasus have organized staff exchanges and expertise sharing, useful for both the offices and for personal growth. In the Western Balkans, however, not much exchange has taken place, though the region benefits from multiple regional projects, which help bring together UNDP offices and experts and stakeholders. In general, most South-South or triangular cooperation events and exchanges are one-off and do not have the potential to develop and sustain longer term or deeper cooperation among countries or institutions.

---

23   The Aral Sea has dried up over the past several decades, resulting in a range of socioeconomic and environmental consequences, including land degradation, loss of biodiversity, climate change effects and deterioration of health and socioeconomic status among the region's population.

UNDP is building relations with the private sector, but this area is still underdeveloped. This is a missed opportunity in light of needs for resource mobilization and more inclusive programming.

UNDP has been increasingly proactive in exploring joint opportunities and partnerships with the private sector. For instance, the country office in Armenia engaged with the private sector to ensure the financial sustainability of tour operators participating in a tourism project, which was also used to promote private investments to achieve the SDGs. UNDP Armenia also created an 'ImpactAim' initiative bringing together the Government, development agencies and the private sector to discuss sustainable development issues and initiatives.

Similarly, in Belarus, the SDGs provided a window to promote closer involvement of the private sector in socially relevant issues. The private sector expressed significant interest in being associated with the SDG work, and a model for further engagement was tested during the Bike4SDGs advocacy campaign. In Azerbaijan, UNDP and UN Women organized advocacy and outreach activities for 12 companies to advocate for implementation of gender-responsive corporate policies and practices. In the Western Balkans, engagement with the private sector is concentrating on development of innovative green jobs and green business opportunities. In Central Asia, the private sector focus is on exchanges of best practices and innovative activities in information technology, local development and agriculture. However, strategies and plans for engaging with the private sector are at this point ad hoc, opportunistic and erratic.

CONCLUSIONS, LESSONS AND ISSUES FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

The conclusions and lessons discussed below are based on the findings and analysis of systemic issues described in Chapter 3. The synthesis presents eight issues for consideration with the aim of supporting UNDP response and future programme strategy in the region. These are relevant not only for the 14 UNDP countries/territory that were part of this synthesis, but also for UNDP's regional management.

4.1 Conclusions

1. **UNDP has positioned itself as a strategic development partner in the 14 ICPE countries/ territory in the RBEC region. While room for improvement exists, UNDP's expertise, transparent procedures and approaches, and support modalities are valued for tackling the development needs of countries within their reform processes.**

In all countries in the region, UNDP has positioned itself as a reliable and trusted partner of government. It has developed partnerships with national stakeholders in supporting upstream policy interventions and institutional reforms and building institutional capacity. UNDP's strategic position and wide array of demand-driven initiatives have intensified the relevance and national ownership of its country programmes, though these somewhat weakened the focus on achievement of deeper results within given areas. Superficial engagement in some sub-sectors and small fragmentated efforts conditioned by financing do not allow for consolidation and limit the catalytic potential of UNDP intervention.

2. **UNDP's upstream policy and capacity-building work has made important contributions. However, its downstream work, despite some positive results, offers very limited transformative potential.**

UNDP has made a considerable contribution in supporting countries with the institutional and policy reform process, a necessary precondition for creating the enabling environment to facilitate change. UNDP's multi-pronged approach has brought some significant results in strengthened access to and delivery of services, improved targeting of reform interventions and stronger legislative and policy frameworks. This has taken place through provision of technical assistance, policy advice, advocacy and piloting of innovative practices across sectors, including human rights, public administration and civil service reform, justice, economic development and labour, health and social welfare, and environment and climate change. UNDP's downstream work, in particular piloting and modelling approaches and services, has brought positive output results, but upscaling and institutionalization of results is limited. In most cases UNDP lacks a detailed plan on how it would ensure government buy-in and financial support to scale up working models and approaches. This in turn diminishes the transformative potential of such efforts.

3. UNDP's contribution to economic and social policies and institution-building in the region has been effective, bringing significant results in some countries.

Across the region, UNDP engagement and cooperation with national and subnational governments have been strong and produced a range of outputs with catalytic potential. These include the design and implementation of national and community development roadmaps, policies, plans and funds; promotion of collaboration within and between communities; and institutional capacity development. UNDP's efforts have enhanced the social service delivery capacity of governments. They have been vital in transforming national social welfare systems to make them more accountable, transparent and efficient, while addressing equity and improved coverage.

4. UNDP has made incremental but significant contributions to public administration reforms and open governments by supporting the evolution of e-government services and improvement of public and civil services.

In most countries, UNDP has adopted a comprehensive approach to public administration reforms, addressing policy, capacity and institutions linked to broader reforms within sectors. It has also tackled the capacity needs of State and non-State actors across the spectrum of UNDP's target groups and beneficiaries. UNDP investment in institutional development and capacity-building of civil society and public service to ensure more efficient, transparent and accountable systems has contributed strongly to improving the efficiency of professionals in the public sector and the judiciary. It has also aided the transparency and accessibility of services. However, in some countries the pace of public administration reforms is slow and incremental, making it hard to achieve visible accomplishments.

5. UNDP's contribution to the environment, energy, climate change and economic development portfolios has brought short-term results across the region, with varying potential for transformative change.

UNDP has invested varying levels of effort in each country to support national capacities across the environment, energy, climate change and economic development sectors, with important output-level results. However, their transformative potential is limited due to factors such as limited national capacities in the environment and climate change sectors, financial limitations and lack of commitment to engage and to change practices and policies to fully align with the Paris Agreement.

6. UNDP contribution to South-South and regional cooperation is relevant, albeit rather erratic.

Positioning itself as a strategic actor across the region, UNDP has been recognized as a trustworthy partner of governments with the capacity to establish and nurture cooperation both in the region and at the global level. Regional cooperation was supported through numerous regional and international events across the countries, which helped facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experience among them. Such support was especially valuable for countries like Turkmenistan, which is rather isolated from regional and global affairs on one side, and Kazakhstan and Turkey, which have ambitions of being regional and international development players, respectively. However, as seen across

the region, these exchange opportunities have not been sufficiently explored and advanced as part of a larger strategy; and when they do take place, they are usually one-off, benefiting participating individuals but with limited potential to develop and sustain longer term and deeper cooperation among countries or institutions.

7. UNDP's gender mainstreaming work has delivered important results in terms of more systematic response to women's empowerment and gender equality; however, success varies across the sectors.

Empowerment outcomes for targeted individuals and system-level solutions for women's rights and gender equality are generally positive. They have brought better services, inclusion and protection mechanisms across the social welfare, governance and, to a lesser extent, economic development sectors. UNDP invests in integrating gender into its programming, but the success of these interventions varies among sectors. It is particularly low in the environment and climate change portfolio.

4.2 Key lessons

1. UNDP country offices with more integrated programming were successful in designing deeper and more far-reaching interventions across sectors.

UNDP country offices added value through their ability to tackle the multidimensional needs of rights-holders by investing in efforts to connect cross-thematic programme interventions, in particular between inclusive growth portfolios and governance, social inclusion, resilience and wider empowerment efforts.[24] By making conscious efforts to ensure cross-thematic synergies, such interventions managed to consolidate programmes and their human rights orientation. This in turn helped the application of multidimensional solutions, resulting in improved livelihoods, empowered citizens and better services.

---

[24]   While a full integration of portfolios has not been recorded in any of the RBEC countries addressed in this assessment, examples of cross-thematic integration have been noted, particularly between economic development interventions and environmental protection. For instance, the Azerbaijan country office invested in synergies between the climate and sustainable land and forest management in the Greater Caucasus landscape projects, but also between gender, youth and VET; the Bosnia and Herzegovina office worked to integrate interventions in environment and energy; and integration between Montenegro and Kazakhstan involved projects focusing on economic development and environment (green jobs, country office emissions reduction, innovation, etc.). In Tajikistan the country office has gone further, introducing a flexible and multidisciplinary issue-based approach during implementation of the current country programme. It brings together all projects under the governance, sustainable economic development, environment, resilience and social sectors to ensure a holistic response for achieving multidimensional impact. Efforts to integrate its cross-sector approaches has resulted in grouping projects with common/similar areas of intervention to be implemented under 'programmes' or 'teams'. These frameworks include communities programme, disaster risk management team, access to justice and rule of law programme, energy and environment team, and HIV programme team.

2. Placing a major focus on governance and integrating it as a central theme underlying all sectoral interventions helps enhance transparency, accountability and inclusiveness of supply from duty-bearers and response to the demands of rights-holders.

Even if UNDP's portfolios across the region have had different thematic orientations, interventions in each country had a strong governance perspective. Those country programmes that integrated governance principles to underpin all sectoral efforts helped support efforts for peaceful, just and inclusive societies. Support to democratic governance remains UNDP's unique signature solution in the 14 countries/territory.

3. Transboundary and interdisciplinary approaches to environment and climate change resilience bring positive results in terms of increased human security and poverty alleviation.

The COVID-19 pandemic along with natural disasters and other crises have shown the relevance and urgency of investment in crisis prevention, resilience and climate change action that goes beyond community or country level. UNDP efforts with cross-country and regional perspectives showed that threats and crises can be better mitigated through more coordinated and coherent actions.

4. UNDP efforts that emphasized inclusive and participatory planning and implementation were more successful in addressing deeply rooted needs and priorities. They also enhanced national ownership, increasing the potential of catalysing results.

Across the region, UNDP engaged with governments and other actors in planning and implementing its country portfolios. However, in some countries in Central Asia, such engagement, particularly with civil society and UN organizations, could have been more systematic and pronounced. Strategic planning informed by comprehensive feedback received from a variety of stakeholders supports the strategic relevance of interventions and ensures that the unmet needs of rights-holders are appropriately targeted. It also enhances ownership and buy-in for the promoted and supported reforms. Eventually, inclusive approaches ensure that UNDP's interventions leave no one behind and adhere to do-no-harm principles.

5. System-level capacity development programmes require careful examination of externalities and government change processes to ensure their uptake.

Across the region, UNDP undertook extensive institutional capacity development through rather broad medium-term endeavours, which offered a range of relevant and demand-driven activities. To optimize results, tailoring such capacity-building efforts at a system level requires integrated cross-sectoral programming and careful examination of externalities and government change processes. Having a detailed theory of change with a precise definition of causal linkages within and across capacity-building efforts at the onset of such efforts can help country offices clarify desired outcomes and ways to achieve them. Also, deriving a strong monitoring and evaluation system from such a theory of change helps to clarify the pathways of change. Being able to systematically collect lessons and best practices may improve advocacy and also the uptake of reform interventions. It also provides a better understanding of UNDP's actual contribution to them.

6. Capacity-development efforts require engaging with and covering both the supply side (State actors) and the demand side (civil society organizations, rights-holders) to maximize impact potential.

Across the region, UNDP interventions that designed reform support plans and programmes to address the capacity development of both duty-bearers and rights-holders provided entry points for establishing strong partnerships leading to full uptake of the reforms. UNDP engagement with duty-bearers in developing systems and institutional mechanisms (through a multidimensional and inclusive approach) and that aimed at building capacities of rights- holders showed prospects of transformative effects.

7. Integrating the gender lens into interventions brings about transformative results.

Across all implemented UNDP interventions that integrated the gender dimension — such as empowerment of men and women for political, social or economic participation — important results were noted in terms of improved livelihoods or development. UNDP needs to pay careful consideration to the ways in which social norms and power structures impact the lives and opportunities available to different groups of men and women and use this knowledge as a prerequisite for planning successful and transformative interventions. This is particularly important for the RBEC region, where more women than men live in poverty and where women are disempowered from taking opportunities that may arise.

8. Innovation is a key ingredient for modernization and change, if it is embedded in an institutional framework to enable scaling up.

Thus far, UNDP has worked intensively on supporting innovation across different thematic areas. However, most such efforts have been erratic and geared to limited groups of beneficiaries and/or partners, ending up as interesting initiatives but not as scaled-up pilots. Planning innovation needs to include plans for how to scale up pilots across beneficiary groups or public systems. In some UNDP country offices innovative business models have considered value chains and wider business options beyond simple demonstration. Such cases have shown greater scale-up and transformational potential, beyond the individual or group level.

9. A demand-driven approach and flexibility improve relevance, but response needs to be embedded in a clear programmatic framework.

UNDP tends to be very demand driven, particularly in upper-middle-income contexts where resource mobilization is more complicated. A demand-driven approach has proven to increase government ownership of the interventions and the continued relevance of UNDP's work. In particular, responding to the needs of partners and being flexible has allowed UNDP to show its added value in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises, such as migration and natural disasters. In such cases UNDP has played a crucial role as a government partner in organizing socioeconomic, governance and health responses. Hence, responding to demand is welcome, with the caveat that such approaches need to fit into the wider UNDP framework and vision, in line with its mandate and spirit. Countries where the demand was embedded within a larger country programme theory demonstrated that interventions cumulatively contributed to the desired change, when coupled with sufficient resources to follow through.

10. Strong and inclusive partnerships are a foundation of ownership and facilitate the catalytic potential of accomplished outputs.

Given the upper-middle-income status of countries in the region, UNDP tends to focus much of its attention on upstream policy interventions and institutional reforms. However, for full uptake of the reforms, it is necessary to continuously invest in partnerships with other actors from civil society, the private sector and other UN entities. As some cases across the region have shown, partnerships bring a multidimensional perspective as well as diverse ideas. They can help push for change where there is resistance or improve understanding about what is needed and how to adapt the programme to achieve better results.

4.3 Issues for further consideration

1. UNDP should focus on seeking and deepening potential synergies and cross-portfolio connections to ensure the transformative potential is achieved.

It is clear that the bulk of UNDP interventions, including innovative pilots, depend on finding funding, which often results in donor-driven one-off initiatives. However, UNDP should carefully analyse the areas of support and possibilities to connect such efforts with other sector interventions, thus exploiting the potential for synergies within and across portfolios. This will also help UNDP to consolidate its portfolio by integrating themes and strengthening the focus and depth of its interventions to improve outcomes, tangible impacts and sustainability. Moreover, UNDP should capitalize on successful interventions, building on the lessons learned as a tool for policy advocacy to enhance scale-up potential.

2. All UNDP programmes and interventions should conform to results-based management principles to ensure clarity of pathways of desired change at the project and programme levels.

With regard to the articulation of results, project formulation requires a major overhaul, especially the part related to the results framework. Country offices should formulate clear programme outcome-level indicators that should be tracked across projects. These indicators should be linked to national SDGs to the extent possible.

On the measurement of results, country offices should strengthen their systems for monitoring activities, data collection and storage. They should be able to aggregate collected information at the programme level. Some elements require substantial improvement in tracking sustainability indicators, such as the absorption of training among national partners or the performance of pilot projects over time.

Country offices should strengthen human and financial resources related to monitoring and evaluation and provide more regular training on it. They should be more systematic in conducting evaluations and should promote thematic, outcome and portfolio evaluations in areas where projects are too small for full evaluations. They should also make more effective use of the recommendations generated by evaluations and should track their implementation more effectively. With regard to the use of results, country offices should ensure that decision-making is informed by solid analysis of results. Reporting should be strengthened and should focus on outcomes rather than inputs and outputs. Country offices should explore ways of incentivizing staff by linking rewards to results more effectively.

3. UNDP should develop an integrated and comprehensive resource and partnership mobilization strategy that involves prospective partners and donors, including in the private sector.

The regional development context and economic growth have led international financial institutions to enter into thematic areas where they were not active before. UNDP country offices thus need to develop a long-term resource mobilization strategy based on a well-articulated plan of engagement with partners, and clear targets to diversify the funding base and pursue it more forcefully. Considering UNDP's comparative advantages — including its implementation capacity, track record of working with diverse stakeholders, convening power and neutrality — UNDP should base its financing strategy around five pillars:

a. Preserve and further strengthen the partnership with the EU, GEF, Adaptation Fund and Green Climate Fund;

b. Develop partnerships with emerging donors in the region such as the Russian Federation, Slovakia and Turkey;

c. Pursue government cost-sharing opportunities more forcefully and communicate this clearly to government counterparts;

d. Identify more systematically possibilities for funding from international financial institutions;

e. Engage with the private sector by exploring innovative financial models.

4. UNDP's institution strengthening and piloting efforts should integrate comprehensive scale-up and sustainability measures beginning with the design stages.

UNDP should elaborate scaling-up and sustainability plans and exit strategies for the structures it establishes. This should include specific measures that ensure the replication, upscaling and institutionalization of piloted activities. Country offices should forge a better understanding of the dynamics of scaling, which are quite different from the dynamics of piloting. They should also strengthen the system for monitoring and tracking the performance of pilots over time, including the lessons they generate during the piloting stage and the extent to which they get replicated and scaled up. Also needed are clear criteria for evaluating the success of pilots. In addition country offices should document more effectively the results, lessons, experiences and good practices so they can be shared more widely and aid the replication process.

5. Country offices should develop a more coherent strategy for innovation that clearly defines what constitutes innovations and what are the expected results of them, with clear metrics.

The focus in innovations should be on realizing practical improvements that tackle specific social, climate change or environmental problems, ideally linked to existing project initiatives. A systematic analysis of the political economy of innovations is needed — addressing the level of openness to innovations in specific public organizations, the sources of support for and resistance to innovations, etc. Country offices should pay greater attention to the practical results of the innovations they support.

Within innovation and piloting efforts, clear criteria are needed for evaluating the success of innovations. They should track more effectively what happens to innovations over time, what changes they generate at the practical level and how their impact can be sustained in the long run.

6. **UNDP's commitment to and insistence on realizing human rights should not be muted by political or strategic positioning.**

Although UNDP is applying a human-rights-based approach across its portfolio, visible results in countries and areas of intervention are the exception to the rule. UNDP should provide further support to empower institutions to mainstream and integrate human right standards across their work portfolio as well as in legislation. Institutional frameworks for human rights created with UNDP support need longer term technical assistance to engrain independence and quality engagement. In addition, country offices should advocate for and underpin human rights principles and standards in their interactions with national stakeholders, despite political and operational complexities, to the extent possible.

7. **UNDP should continue supporting government efforts to upgrade public services and engage with citizens.**

UNDP's results in public administration and access to justice should be used as a foundation for deeper engagement, particularly in e-governance, increasing transparency, access to services and realization of human rights. These areas have proved to be of common relevance and priority, and they have government buy-in and commitment across all the countries in the region. These have been the areas of comparative advantage for UNDP in these countries, where it continues to be the partner of choice in supporting governance reforms.

8. **UNDP should consolidate and expand its support to local governments to help them embrace and implement reforms and build their capacities to fulfil their mandates.**

UNDP found its niche in supporting local governments in the absence of other development partners focusing on this level of government. UNDP should continue and expand such support to ensure more comprehensive engagement with local partners. Particular attention should be placed on institutional capacity development of local authorities to promote and benefit from reforms, for example in line with EU accession aspirations, but also to enable them to implement new regulatory and institutional mechanisms put in place through national reforms. Convening partnerships at local and regional level should also be an underlying support stream of UNDP.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1.
SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

The countries of Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States have recorded human development progress and significantly improved State capacities over the past two decades. All countries have achieved middle-income status and eradicated extreme poverty during this period. At the same time, the region has witnessed growing disparities in terms of income distribution, gender and access to high-quality and affordable public services.

All of the countries except Tajikistan have achieved either high or very high rankings in the Human Development Index. Yet an estimated 70 million people in the region still live on less than $10/day and are vulnerable to poverty. According to the last regional human development reports for the region (2016),[25] some countries identified up to 50 percent of their workforce (particularly youth) as either long-term unemployed or engaged in precarious,

informal employment. Social exclusion also affects ethnic minorities, including Roma communities, people living with disabilities or in ill-health, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities. Table A1 highlights key development indicators for the 14 countries/territory included in the synthesis.

While human development scores show relatively low gender inequality and relatively high gender and development scores, gender disparities remain high (Table A1). Research shows that women across the region earn less than men, not only due to labour market discrimination but also to unequal access to education or occupation choices. The Human Development Report Office estimates for 2017 showed that women across the region earned 44 percent less on average than men. Gender-based violence is also an issue of concern. In addition, women continue to be underrepresented in the political arena and decision-making bodies.

---

[25] UNDP, 'Regional Human Development Report 2016: Eastern Europe, Turkey, and Central Asia'; and 'Regional Human Development Report 2016: Western Balkans'.

TABLE A1. Key development indicators of ICPE countries/territory

Categories	Central Asia				South Caucasus and Commonwealth of Independent States				Western Balkans and Turkey					
	Kazakhstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus	Georgia	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	Montenegro	North Macedonia	Serbia	Turkey
Status	UMIC	LI	UMIC	LMIC	UMIC	UMIC	UMIC	UMIC	UMIC	UMIC	UMIC	UMIC	UMIC	UMIC
HDI[26]	0,825 (VH)	0.668 (M)	0.715 (H)	0,720 (H)	0,776 (H)	0,756 (H)	0.823 (VH)	0.812 (H)	0.780 (H)	0.714 (H)	0.829 (VH)	0.774 (H)	0.806 (VH)	0.820 (VH))
HDI adjusted to inequality	0,794	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.681	6.5% loss	N/A	0.649	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
GDP per capita (current US$)[27]	9,812	870	6,966	1,724	4,622	4,793	6,663	4,697	6,108	4,417	8,908	6,022	7,411	9,125
Gini index[28]	27.5	30.8	40.8	35.3	34.4	26.6	25.2	36.4	33	29	39	34.2	36.2	41.9
Poverty rate[29]	2.50%	26.30%	N/A	14.10%	23.5%	6%	5.6%	19.5%	16.9 %	17.6 %	23.6%	21.9 %	24.3 %	14.4 %
Land covered by forest (%)	1.2	3	8.8	7.5	11.7	12	42.6	40.6	42.7	N/A	61.4	39.5	31.1	15.4
Percent of renewable energy in final energy consumption	1.56	45	0.04	2.97	10.04	2.31	6.77	28.6	40.7	20.45	43	24	21.2	13.37
Country office emissions (metric tons per capita)	14	0.6	12.4	2.8	1.7	3.8	6.1	2.7	6.5	5	3.2	3.3	6.4	4.7
Corruption index ranking[30]	124	152	161	158	105	152	70	41	89	93	67	93	87	78
Gender Inequality Index[31]	0.19	0.31	N/A	0.28	0.24	0.32	0.11	0.33	0.15	N/A	0.11	0.14	0.13	0.3
Percent of seats held by women in parliament	17.8%	17.5%	25%	16%	24%	15%	30%	15%	21.4%	32.5%	22.2%	38.3%	40.8%	17.3%
Voice and accountability index[32]	-1.21	-1.83	-2.13	-1.61	0.05	-1.49	-1.4	0.2	-0.2	N/A	0.03	0	0.03	-0.81
Freedom House scores[33]	23 (not free)	9 (not free)	2 (not free)	10 (not free)	53 (partly free)	10 (not free)	19 (not free)	61 (partly free)	53 (partly free)	65 (partly free)	62 (partly free)	63 (partly free)	66 (partly free)	32 (not free)

Notes: HDI = Human Development Index; UMIC = upper middle income countries; LMIC = lower middle income countries; VH = very high; H = high; M = medium; N/A = no data available.

---

[26]   http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi.
[27]   https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD.
[28]   https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI.
[29]   https://data.worldbank.org/topic/poverty.
[30]   https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2018/index/.
[31]   HDI 2020, http://hdr.undp.org/en/data.
[32]   https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/. Voice and accountability index (-2.5 weak; 2.5 strong), 2019 country rankings: The average for 2019 based on 194 countries was -0.03 points. The highest value was in Norway, 1.69 points, and the lowest in Eritrea, -2.19 points. The indicator is available from 1996 to 2019.
[33]   https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores.

The 14 countries/territory studied face similar governance challenges. Many need public management reform, greater recognition and enforcement of the rule of law and access to justice, participatory democracy, improved compliance with human rights and other international conventions, greater engagement of women and civil society in government policy-setting and decision-making, and more attention to gender-based violence.

The countries in the region are vulnerable to natural disasters including climate change-related effects such as flooding, droughts and other environmental risks. Some of these are exacerbated by human activities such as unsustainable water and land management practices, and high reliance on fossil fuels. All of these risks pose long-term threats to human security and biodiversity. The region also faces earthquake risk.

Geopolitical and ethnic tensions continue to affect the region due to ongoing conflicts and the heritage from past conflicts. This is exacerbated by the geographic position of the region at the juncture between Western Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

This position makes the region an important transit area but also a source and destination for human migration.

In 2020, the 14 ICPE countries/territory were unprepared to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. The measures introduced to contain the spread of the disease (lockdowns resulting in job losses, closed schools and shuttered transportation) had a massive socioeconomic impact, deepening existing inequalities. The pandemic also put pressure on governments to offer quick responses, such as by delivering digital services and enabling access to information and social protection, while functioning in transparent, accountable and effective ways. Many countries in the RBEC region faced threats to democratic systems and the rule of law, as well as a decline in their human development rankings.[34] Most clearly, COVID-19 has exacerbated gender inequalities, with women facing a dramatic loss of income and paid work, while their unpaid work at home grew. Gender-based violence also increased.[35]

---

[34]   http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/covid-19-human-development-course-decline-year-first-time-1990.
[35]   UNDP, UNICEF, 2020, 'RBEC Gender Equality Study: COVID-19 Response in Europe and Central Asia', https://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/coronavirus/regional-response-to-COVID19.html.

ANNEX 2.
METHODOLOGY NOTE

The synthesis used a rapid evidence assessment (REA), a process that brings together information and knowledge from a range of sources to inform debates and urgent policy decisions on specific issues. REAs make concessions relative to the breadth, depth and comprehensiveness of the search to produce a quicker result. This synthesis applied REAs to synthesize information around the six signature solution themes in the 14 ICPE countries/territory. Like better-known systematic reviews, REAs synthesize the findings of single studies (evaluation reports, external studies and analyses of contextual issues in the region pertaining to UNDP's areas of intervention) following a standard protocol, but they do not analyse the full literature on a topic.

A coding strategy guided the selection of a set of codes and subcodes (see box). Relevant texts were tagged, coded and collated under the six themes and cross-cutting issues, and were then compared at different levels with iterations until clear recurring themes emerged. These were then distilled into key findings organized across UNDP's six signature solutions.

Examples of good practice and innovative solutions are highlighted in boxes serving as examples of UNDP's efforts in a given area. Further examples and evidence are presented within the findings to underpin the main analytical statements. Important patterns and associations among the key findings were interpreted and the process was repeated until the key takeaways were identified. These takeaways represent the main points and key messages coming out from the synthesis of UNDP work in the RBEC region. To assist with coding and data management, Quirkos© software was utilized.

> **BOX.** List of codes and subcodes

Background

Signature solution 1:
Keeping people out of poverty

SS1. Health

SS1. Promote sustainable
      livelihoods and jobs

SS1. Integrated social
      protection packages

SS1. Education and training

SS1. Success

SS1. Failure

Signature solution 2:
Governance for peaceful, just
and inclusive societies

SS2. Support to national and
      local institutions to be
      more inclusive, accountable
      and responsive

SS2. Enhancing core
      government functions and
      service delivery

SS2. Inclusion of vulnerable and
      marginalized populations in
      governance systems

SS2. Strengthening human
      rights systems

SS2. Failure

SS2. Success

Signature solution 3:
Crisis prevention and
increased resilience

SS3. Conflict prevention
      and peacebuilding

SS3. Early warning systems and climate
      or disaster information

SS3. Mainstreaming climate adaptation
      and DRR in national and local
      development plans

SS3. Jobs and livelihoods within
      recovery and resilience framework
      of support, migration

SS3. Failure

SS3. Success

▶

Signature solution 4: Environment: nature-based solutions for development

SS4. nature-based solutions

SS4. climate change, emissions reduction

SS4. overall strengthening of the linkages between vertical funds and other support for sustainable livelihoods and rural development

SS4. Failure

SS4. Success

Signature solution 5: Clean, affordable energy

SS5. Failure

SS5. Success

Signature solution 6: Gender equality

SS6. Failure

SS6. Success

UNDP's institutional structures

Theory of change

Partnerships

Innovation

Funding

Monitoring and evaluation

Gender strategy

Project management

Approach

Coordination and synergy

UNDP strengths

UNDP challenges

Conclusion

Recommendations

ANNEX 3.
DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

- Human Development Index (HDI) 2020, http://hdr.undp.org/en/data

- http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/covid-19-human-development-course-decline-year-first-time-1990

- http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/

- https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/rankings

- https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores

- https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/

- https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2018/index/

- UNDP, 2021, 'Midterm review of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021'

- UNDP Evaluation Policy, http://web.undp.org/evaluation/policy.shtml

- UNDP IEO, 2015, 'Evaluation of UNDP Contribution to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment', http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/thematic/gender.shtml

- UNDP and UN Women, 2017, policy brief, 'Investing in social care for gender equality and inclusive growth in Europe and Central Asia', https://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/dam/rbec/docs/undp-rbec-gender-investing-in-social-care-for-gender-equality-and-inclusive-growth.pdf

- UNDP IEO, 2019, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Armenia', https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/9895

- UNDP IEO, 2019, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Azerbaijan', https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/9896

- UNDP IEO, 2019, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Belarus', https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/12266

- UNDP IEO, 2019, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Georgia,, http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/adr/georgia.shtml

- UNDP IEO, 2019, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Kazakhstan', https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/12566

- UNDP IEO, 2019, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Kosovo*', http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/adr/kosovo.shtml

- UNDP IEO, 2019, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: North Macedonia', http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/adr/north_macedonia.shtml

- UNDP IEO, 2019, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Serbia', http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/adr/serbia.shtml

- UNDP IEO, 2019, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Tajikistan', http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/adr/tajikistan.shtml

- UNDP IEO, 2019, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Turkey', https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/12289

- UNDP IEO, 2019, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Turkmenistan', https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/12290

- UNDP IEO, 2019, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Uzbekistan', http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/adr/uzbekistan.shtml

- UNDP IEO, 2020, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Montenegro', https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/1852

- UNDP, UNICEF, 2020, 'RBEC Gender Equality Study: COVID-19 Response in Europe and Central Asia', https://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/coronavirus/regional-response-to-COVID19.html

- World Bank data https://data.worldbank.org/indicator

IEO | INDEPENDENT
Evaluation Office

United Nations Development Programme

Independent Evaluation Office
United Nations Development Programme
One UN Plaza, DC1-20th Floor
New York, NY 10017, USA
Tel. +1(646) 781 4200

⊕ / www.undp.org/evaluation

🐦 / UNDP_Evaluation

f / ieoundp

▶ / evaluationoffice

Evaluations for a #strongerUNDP