Independent Evaluation Office
United Nations Development Programme

INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION
GEORGIA

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INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION: Georgia

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ACRONYMS

ABL	Administrative Boundary Line
BIOFIN	Biodiversity Finance Initiative
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CO	Country Office
CPD	Country Programme Document
CSO	Civil Society Organization
ENPARD	European Neighborhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GoG	Government of Georgia
HCFCs	Hydrochlorofluorocarbons
ICPE	Independent Country Programme Evaluation
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
IFI	International Financial Institution
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LAG	Local Action Group
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
LT-LEDS	Long-Term Low Emission Development Strategy
MEPA	Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture
MHEWS	Multi-Hazard Early Warning System
MRDI	Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NIM	National Implementation
ODS	Ozone-depleting Substance
PAs	Protected Areas
PAR	Public Administration Reform

PMAG	Packaging Manufacturers Association of Georgia
PwDs	Persons with Disabilities
ROAR	Results-oriented Annual Report
SECAP	Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Evaluation Brief: Georgia

Country profile

In the past two decades, Georgia has made significant progress in institutional reform, economic development, and its Euro-Atlantic integration agenda. The country was granted EU candidate status in 2023, and advanced on key reforms under the EU's 'Nine Steps' roadmap. Meanwhile, rule of law reforms, decentralization, and enhanced public service delivery all improved democratic governance. However, recent political developments generated public debate and raised concerns about the civic space and the protection of human rights for vulnerable groups. Georgia continues to navigate complex geopolitical dynamics, particularly in relation to Russia and unresolved issues related to the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while also managing the socio-economic impacts of the war in Ukraine. Although the country has demonstrated economic resilience, challenges persist including low productivity, skills mismatches, and limited global value chain integration. At the same time, Georgia has maintained strong climate and environmental commitments, with ongoing efforts to align policies and promote sustainable, climate-smart growth through increased private sector engagement.

UNDP in Georgia

The 2021–2025 UNDP Country Programme in Georgia was designed to build on previous cycles and achievements, while supporting national development priorities and European integration efforts, with a strong focus on joint UN programming and long-term EU-funded initiatives. Aligned with four of the five UNSDCF outcomes, the Programme targeted structural drivers of poverty and inequality through an integrated approach combining policy advice, on-the-ground implementation, and scaling of innovative solutions. It prioritized the following four interconnected pathways: 1) democratic governance and human rights; 2) environmental governance, climate action, and disaster risk reduction; 3) sustainable, inclusive, and resilient economy; and 4) social cohesion and resilience. Over the covered period, UNDP remained the largest contributor to the UNSDCF, leading several outcomes and mobilizing substantial resources.

Findings and conclusions

UNDP's contributions to institutional strengthening and inclusive governance were significant, with an emphasis placed on capacity building, innovation, and democratic reform. Its interventions were practical, demand-driven, and inclusive, and served to promote the engagement of marginalized groups in governance processes and the civic space. Through efforts in public administration reform (PAR), parliamentary development, and access to justice, UNDP helped improve transparency, accountability, and inclusivity. However, progress in this period was constrained by systemic issues such as high turnover in partner institutions, political polarization, and resource limitations, all of which hindered the full institutionalization of new capacities and innovations.

UNDP also played a key role in environmental governance and disaster risk management, supporting Georgia's climate commitments, improving policy frameworks, and promoting local resilience. While many initiatives—such as the Multi-Hazard Early Warning System (MHEWS) and community-based adaptation projects—were well received, they were impeded by fragmented coordination, under-resourced institutions, and gaps in implementation. Similarly, UNDP's environmental protection and climate mitigation

efforts during this time often lacked the financial and regulatory incentives necessary for broader uptake. Strengthening national capacity, institutional collaboration, and long-term planning remained critical to sustaining these gains.

In the areas of rural development, vocational education, and private sector competitiveness, UNDP supported important reforms and piloted successful models during the reporting period. These efforts focused on enhancing local governance, improving agricultural productivity, and fostering SME development, with a particular emphasis on vulnerable groups. Nonetheless, structural limitations—including insufficient infrastructure and limited access to finance—hampered scalability and long-term sustainability. Looking ahead, greater integration with national economic frameworks and enhanced private sector engagement are needed to unlock the full potential of these interventions and strengthen inclusive growth.

At the same time, UNDP's presence in the conflict-affected Abkhazia region remained vital, especially through its support for local civil society, social services, and confidence-building initiatives. Operating in a politically sensitive and access-restricted environment, UNDP served as one of the few international actors facilitating inter-community cooperation. Although progress on broader peace issues was limited in the covered period, UNDP delivered tangible benefits in health, education, and infrastructure, thereby reinforcing social cohesion.

The evaluation concluded that UNDP's work in Georgia from 2021 to 2025 was highly relevant and effective, closely aligned with national priorities, and delivered meaningful contributions across governance, environment, rural development, and conflict-affected areas. Here, the Country Office (CO) showed strong adaptability and agility, responding with flexibility to shifting needs, unanticipated crises, political fluctuations, as well as complex regional dynamics. While the Programme achieved tangible results across all four of its pillars, challenges in scaling successful initiatives, ensuring sustainability, and engaging the private sector limited its broader and longer-term impact. Moreover, persistent political and structural barriers further constrained deeper reform and the institutionalization of change.

UNDP's continued relevance in Georgia will depend on its ability to navigate not only these complexities but also shifting geopolitical dynamics. The increasingly uncertain political environment poses significant risks to funding, strategic partnerships, and the Programme's continuity. To remain effective, UNDP must adapt strategically by diversifying its funding sources, strengthening civil society engagement, and refining its governance approaches in response to political and operational complexities. Bolstering the resilience of institutions, empowering reform-minded actors, and building inclusive coalitions for change will all be essential to sustaining progress, addressing systemic challenges, and maintaining UNDP's role as a trusted development partner amid uncertainty.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Strengthen proactive political risk management and adaptability through scenario planning, political economy analysis, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive programming.

Recommendation 2. Reinforce the portfolio approach incorporating cross-cutting thematic strategies, inter-portfolio coordination, and integrated planning and reporting systems.

Recommendation 3. Enhance strategic UN integration and partnership diversification by engaging the private sector and government through outreach, flexible funding models, and co-financing mechanisms.

Recommendation 4. Enhance M&E, knowledge management, and communication by capturing lessons learned, enhancing impact measurement, and promoting visibility through a results-driven communication strategy.

Recommendation 5. Streamline procurement and partner capacity building via standardized digital tools, improved communication in local languages, and regular training and mentoring.

Recommendation 6. Implement comprehensive sustainability planning with clear exit strategies, scaling models, post-project monitoring, and regular reviews to support long-term impact beyond UNDP's direct involvement.

CHAPTER 1
BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose, objectives, and scope of the evaluation

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducts Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPEs) to critically assess UNDP contributions to national development priorities and results. ICPEs are carried out in accordance with the provisions contained in the UNDP Evaluation Policy.[1] Under the ICPE framework, the evaluation team assesses UNDP contributions and the effectiveness of the UNDP Country Office's (CO) strategy with regard to the achievement of the development results articulated in its Country Programme Document (CPD).

The objectives of this ICPE were to:

- Support the development of the next UNDP Country Programme for Georgia by identifying best practices, results and key lessons learned from the 2021-2025 cycle;
- Strengthen the accountability of UNDP to national and international stakeholders and the UNDP Executive Board; and
- Contribute to knowledge generation, organizational learning, and decision making within UNDP.

This is the third independent country programme evaluation[2] conducted by the IEO in Georgia. The ICPE covered UNDP activities in the country and initiatives funded by all funding sources during the period of 2021 to 2025, including UNDP's own resources as well as donor and government funds. In addition, the ICPE included non-project activities such as coordination and advocacy, which are important in supporting the country's political and social agenda (for further details, see the ICPE Terms of Reference in Annex 1).

BOX 1. Key Evaluation Questions

1. To what extent has the UNDP Country Programme strategically addressed key national development priorities and the needs of its main stakeholders, including those at risk of being left behind?
2. To what extent was UNDP able to adapt its positioning and programmatic response to shifts in context and other changes in the operating environment, and to leverage comparative strengths?
3. To what extent were UNDP approaches and interventions successful in achieving the intended objectives of the Country Programme and contributing to broader, longer-term national development goals?
4. To what extent did internal and external factors influence UNDP's ability to deliver its programme efficiently and maximize contributions?

Source: Evaluation ToR

1.2 Evaluation methodology

The evaluation used the outcomes and outputs defined by the Country Programme for the period of 2021-2025 as a framework against which achievements were analyzed. It looked at each of the planned outcomes, their associated outputs, and their respective links to the strategic objectives of the Programme.

The ICPE also examined UNDP's capacity to adapt to changing circumstances and respond to national development needs and priorities. More specifically, the evaluation sought to answer four key evaluation questions.

The evaluation methodology adhered to the United Nations Evaluation Group Norms and Standards[3]. In line with UNDP's gender mainstreaming strategy, the evaluation examined the level of gender mainstreaming and gender equality in the formulation of the Country Programme and its operations, as well as the results achieved. Gender marker data were used to analyze the expected level of contribution to gender equality in the Programme's design and implementation. Pertinently, gender-related results were assessed using UNDP's Gender Results Effectiveness Scale.[4] The performance of the UNDP CO was scored for each indicator included in the evaluation matrix (Annex 2) using a four-point scale (presented in Annex 9).

The following methods were used to respond to the evaluation questions:

- **Document Review**: Analysis of the full portfolio of initiatives and other relevant documents, including decentralized evaluations, Results-Oriented Annual Reports (ROARs), project-level progress and final reports, as well as audits where available (see Annex 6 for the complete list of documents).
- **Pre-mission Questionnaire with the CO:** Captured the performance and results of the Programme, as well as major cross-cutting themes, such as gender, partnership, and design and implementation-related issues.
- **Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions:** A total of 123 key informants were interviewed, either in person or remotely, with a gender distribution of 55 percent female and 45 percent male. Civil society (39 percent) and government and public institutions (37 percent) were the categories with the most interviewed representatives. Furthermore, 11 representatives from cooperation agencies and donors participated, along with a few key informants from academia, the private sector, and the media.
- **Field visits and direct observations:** This entailed visits to locations in Batumi, Keda, Kutaisi, Lagodekhi, Mtskheta and Zugdidi, involving 38 participants, including local authorities, NGOs, contractors, and project beneficiaries.

1.3 Evaluation limitations

The evaluation faced several challenges, primarily due to Georgia's political climate becoming increasingly polarized and mass protests taking place in the weeks leading up to the data collection mission. Such developments were driven largely by the parliamentary approval of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence (see Section 1.4). The protests were mainly centered around Tbilisi, albeit similar actions occurred in other cities on a smaller scale. Accordingly, the evaluation team, in close coordination with the CO's senior management, adapted the mission with potential risks in mind and made last-minute changes in the field work. In this context, political sensitivity posed a significant challenge regarding the main stakeholders and their relationships established with the CO.

Discussions about governance reforms and democratic backsliding during interviews were particularly sensitive, with some interviewees hesitant to share information openly and objectively. To navigate and mitigate this challenge, the evaluation team implemented strict confidentiality measures and anonymity. There was a mixture of individual and group interviews, engaging a diverse range of stakeholders, including from civil society, to ensure a balance of perspectives. Moreover, the national evaluation consultant, familiar with the political context, helped to handle sensitive topics, and the evaluation team used indirect questioning techniques to approach subjects that interviewees might have been reluctant to discuss directly.

Access constraints to certain regions represented another significant limitation. The conflict-affected territories,[5] Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia, remained completely inaccessible for both fieldwork and remote interviews, and the Abkhazia region, Georgia,[6] has severe travel restrictions, limiting fieldwork opportunities. To address this impediment, the evaluation team conducted remote interviews, analyzed secondary data and reports, and relied on the expertise of UNDP staff and partners with direct experience of working on projects in the Abkhazia region.

Data availability and quality were also issues, given that outcome-level data were limited for Georgia as a whole and entirely unavailable for the Abkhazia region, where sociological surveys and research are not permitted by the authorities in control. The team mitigated this by triangulating data from various sources, including project documents, stakeholder interviews, and external reports. Finally, there were

attribution challenges whereby it was difficult to directly link higher-level changes to UNDP interventions, given the multiple actors and factors influencing Georgia's development landscape. Accordingly, the evaluation team deployed contribution analysis to assess UNDP's role and influence alongside other elements affecting Georgia's development trajectory.

1.4 Country context

In the past two decades, Georgia made significant progress on institutional and economic reforms, as reflected in the advances made in realizing its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. In particular, Georgia aligned its long-term development goals with European integration, seeking closer ties with the EU through agreements such as the EU-Georgia Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). The country's trajectory included strengthening its democratic institutions, improving the rule of law, and combating corruption through reforms in many areas of public policy, while concerted efforts were also made on decentralization and more citizen-centered public service delivery. Meanwhile, legal and electoral reforms, including constitutional amendments, resulted in the establishment of a full parliamentary system in 2018. Recent developments, however, require attention with regard to Georgia's democratic trajectory and the EU accession process.

Political context: Compared to the political challenges noted in the previous ICPE (2016-2020), the context deteriorated notably, marked by increased polarization and backsliding on certain governance reforms. While the country over the years gained global recognition for transparency, rule of law, safety, and economic freedoms,[7] some governance indicators showed decline such as in the dimensions of voice and accountability, political rights, pluralism and participation, as well as freedom of expression and belief[8] (see Annex 3 for more details on governance indicators). The recent approvals of controversial legislation such as the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence[9] in particular sparked concerns about civil society freedoms and democratic space. The passing of these laws provoked massive, youth-driven protests, highlighting strong societal resistance and rising political tensions. Despite the adoption of national policy documents like the second National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights (2022-2030), the protection of human rights for vulnerable groups, including the LGBTQI+ community, still requires further attention to guarantee equal rights and freedoms.[10] The recent adoption of the Law on Protection of Family Values and Minors, along with incidents of violence and controversy surrounding the accelerated amendments to the Law on Assemblies and the abolition of mandatory gender quotas for Parliament, risks undermining relevant advances in participation, inclusion, and gender equality.

Geopolitical and regional tensions: In the period under review, Georgia continued to navigate a complex landscape, balancing its aspirations for EU membership with its relationship with Russia. In December 2023, Georgia was granted EU candidate status, accompanied by a 'Nine Steps' roadmap outlining key reform priorities for Georgia.[11] While, the EU accession negotiations were postponed until 2028, the GoG has since continued to advance on the necessary reforms required for accession.[12] At the same time, Georgia continues to deal with unresolved conflicts with the Russian Federation and thus international organizations lack access to the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Georgia's relations with Russia remain strained, while the war in Ukraine had significant economic repercussions, including an influx of Russian immigrants, a spike in the number Russian businesses registered in the country, and a rise in the cost of living in the country.

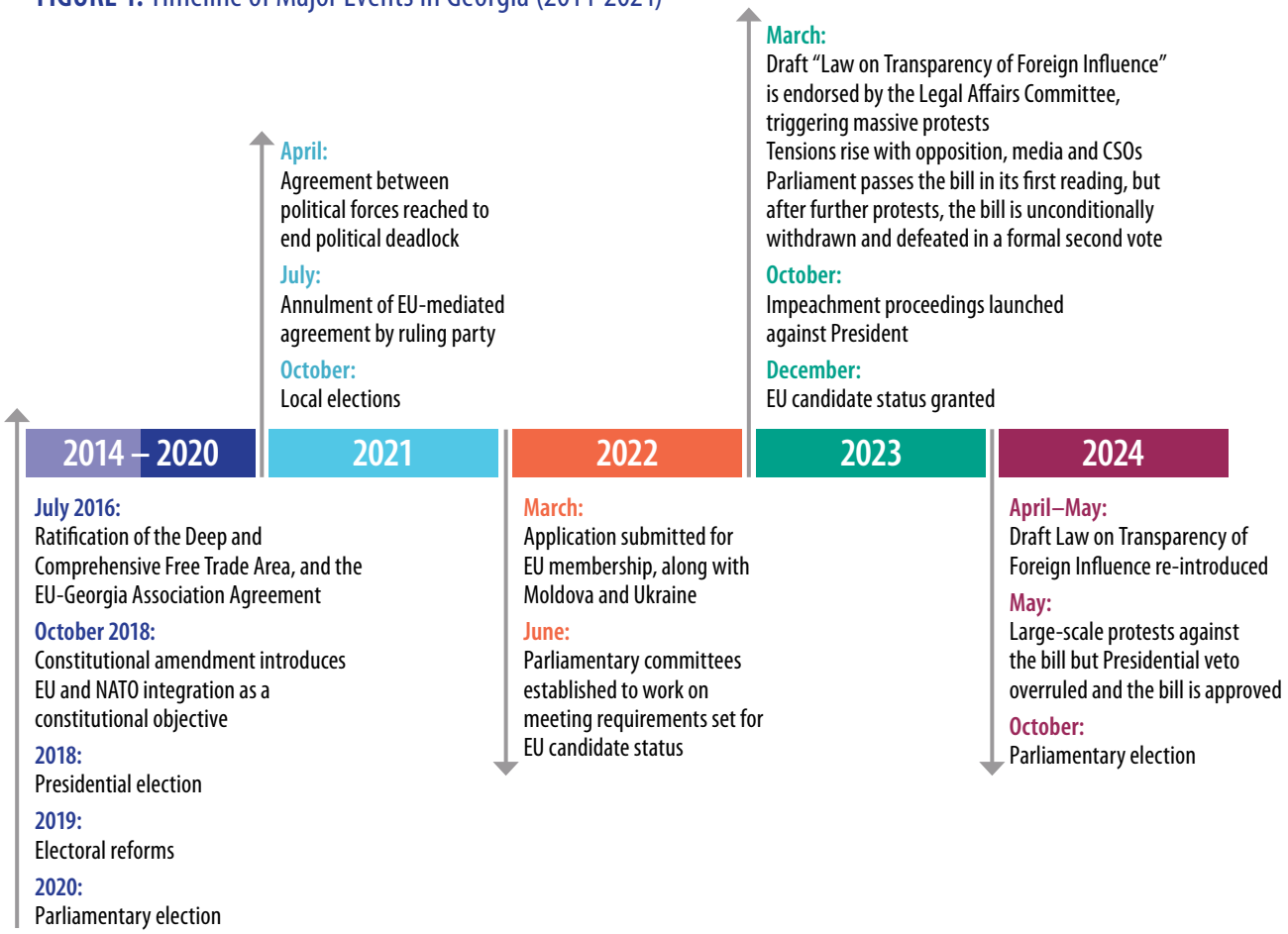
Economic outlook: Georgia's economy experienced moderate growth in recent years, supported mainly by agriculture, tourism, construction, and services. Growth rates slowed down in the covered period in comparison to the rapid expansion of the early 2000s, partly due to external shocks (i.e. the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine). In particular, gross domestic product (GDP) rose by 10.5 percent

in 2021, marking a strong rebound following a contraction of 6.8 percent in 2020, but subsequently decelerated to 7.8 percent in 2023.[13] Georgia has maintained a liberal business environment, and is still ranked as one of the most business-friendly countries in Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States.[14] Notable progress was made in poverty reduction and job creation in the post-pandemic period, with the poverty rate dropping to 9.4 percent in 2024.[15] Yet, these generally positive developments remain overshadowed by persistent structural challenges, such as weak and stagnant productivity levels, limited integration into regional and global value chains, and skill shortages and mismatches.[16]

Climate change and environmental agenda: Georgia actively pursued initiatives during the period under review to address climate change impacts and ecological deterioration. The country is largely on track to fulfill international obligations including UN conventions and the EU Association Agenda. Indeed, Georgia adopted the National Climate Strategy 2030 and 2021-2023 Action Plan and updated its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) in 2021 to the Paris Agreement. More recently, it prepared a third revision of its NDC in September 2024 for submission to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in February 2025. While efforts to improve waste management and enhance forest management, support a cleaner ecosystem, and promote eco-tourism are progressing in the right direction, several challenges remain. These include strengthening environmental policies to address gaps at the sector level and aligning them to achieve more climate-resilient growth, promoting climate-smart solutions in infrastructure, business, transport, and agriculture, and increasing private sector engagement for more sustainable development.

The following figure summarizes the main events and developments in Georgia from 2014 to 2024:

FIGURE 1. Timeline of Major Events in Georgia (2014-2024)[17]



1.5 UNDP in Georgia and the Country Programme under review

The UNDP Country Programme under review for the 2021-2025 cycle was designed to build on foundations established during the previous cycles, and add value to national efforts to address development challenges and priorities, while advancing the goals of European integration. UNDP Georgia's programmatic offer remained anchored in UN joint programmes and long-term flagship initiatives funded by the European Commission, while putting an emphasis on issue-based advocacy. The Country Programme directly incorporated four of the five UNSDCF 2021–2025 joint outcomes aimed at addressing structural factors and the root causes of poverty and inequality, namely the quality of governance institutions, the structure of the economy, and the legacy of conflict.

Following its approach of providing sustained support over multi-year periods, the CO for Georgia set out to promote a more integrated approach, combining upstream policy advice with downstream implementation and the scaling up of pioneering initiatives, while generating new synergies with international and national stakeholders.

Four solution pathways revolving around the following initiatives and lines of action were prioritized in the CPD (see Figure 2 on the following page).

For implementation, the total financial projection for UNDP's CPD amounted to US$101.6 million, representing 29.4 percent of the UNSDCF common budgetary framework, with UNDP being the UN agency making the highest contribution, followed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), FAO, and UNICEF.[18] With respect to financial share and responsibilities, UNDP led on UNSDCF outcomes 1 and 5, followed by outcomes 4 and 3. The CO was successful in mobilizing resources and expanding vertical funds. The projected and secured budget as of October 2024 was $135.7 million. Meanwhile, the signed budget for the period covered by the ICPE amounted to $118,567,610 for four outcomes, reaching an expenditure rate of 83.8 percent ($99,313,741).[19] The Programme was mainly funded by bilateral and multilateral donors, with the European Commission being the leading donor for UNDP Georgia, followed by the Green Climate Fund, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) (see Annex 4 for the financial overview). A detailed list of projects analyzed in the course of this evaluation is presented in Annex 5.

FIGURE 2. Country Programme Overview[20]

Enhanced human wellbeing, capabilities, and social equality in Georgia by 2030

PATHWAYS	Governance for equality and justice (Outcome 1 UNSDCF)	Safeguarding a green, clean, and climate-resilient environment (Outcome 5 UNSDCF)	Unlocking the potential of rural areas (Outcome 3 UNSDCF)	Improving living conditions for conflict-affected people (Outcome 4 UNSDCF)
				
UNDP CPD 2021 - 2025	**CPD Outcome 1:** Democratic governance and human rights	**CPD Outcome 2:** Environmental governance, climate action, and disaster risk reduction	**CPD Outcome 3:** Sustainable, inclusive, and resilient economy	**CPD Outcome 4:** Resilience and social cohesion
FOCUS AREAS	**i)** advancing the public administration reform, digital transformation of public services (transparency and accountability), and decentralization **ii)** civil society strengthening **iii)** improved access to justice, promotion of human rights, and gender equality	**i)** advancing institutional, legal, and policy frameworks for environmental governance, climate action, and sustainable resource management **ii)** promotion of innovation and evidence-informed policymaking **iii)** multi-hazard disaster risk management	**i)** improving vocational education and training with a focus on agricultural development and marginalized groups **ii)** SME and value chain development, and promotion of inclusive employment **iii)** private sector competitiveness	**i)** human security and resilience in conflict-affected communities **ii)** confidence-building, dialogue, and cross-border cooperation **iii)** improving basic service delivery and strengthening resilience to shocks and crises
APPROACHES				
PROJECT FINANCES	**Projects: 19** **CPD budget:** $22,003,982 **Actual budget:** $29,558,373 **Expenditure:** $24,763,459	**Projects: 12** **CPD budget:** $34,597,697 **Actual budget:** $31,549,417 **Expenditure:** $23,316,899	**Projects: 9** **CPD budget:** $22,002,889 **Actual budget:** $25,158,758 **Expenditure:** $21,574,594	**Projects: 11** **CPD budget:** $22,002,411 **Actual budget:** $32,301,062 **Expenditure:** $29,658,789

CHAPTER 2
FINDINGS

This chapter presents an assessment of UNDP's strategic and programmatic offer in Georgia, results achieved under each area of work, and the integration of and contribution to cross-cutting issues and factors influencing UNDP's performance and overall contributions during this cycle. The assessment was based on an analysis of the correlation between the results of projects and non-project activities, their contribution to the expected outputs under each outcome and, consequently, to the overall objectives of the CPD. In Annex 7, an overview of the CPD indicators and targets, along with the status of achievement (2021–2023), is presented, while Annex 8 summarizes the key findings and achievements evidenced in this evaluation.

2.1 UNDP's strategic and programmatic offer

Finding 1. Relevance and responsiveness. UNDP's programmatic offer remained highly relevant and responsive to national priorities, supporting major reforms and fostering partnerships at all levels.

The 2021-2025 Country Programme aligned well with Georgia's development priorities, strategies, and plans, and responded to the needs and interests of key counterparts and stakeholders at national, regional, and local levels. Such alignment was demonstrated by the following several key actions:

- UNDP leveraged its long-standing positioning and continued to foster close partnerships with key central government institutions and local governments across the country. For example, UNDP's ongoing support for the PAR reflected its deep engagement in key governance processes. These partnerships and continuous dialogue were critical to ensuring the relevance and legitimacy of UNDP's interventions during the cycle.
- UNDP directly supported the implementation of key national reform programmes and strategies,[21] aligning its programmatic offer with the policy frameworks in all core thematic areas and many of Georgia's international commitments and obligations (i.e. the EU integration process and the UNFCCC), thus ensuring the enduring relevance of its contributions.
- UNDP also remained a highly responsive player with regard to the main priorities of conflict-affected communities, particularly in Abkhazia region, applying the necessary political sensitivity to operate effectively there.
- During this cycle, UNDP emphasized the importance of contextualized solutions, by promoting participatory approaches (i.e. community mobilization and local planning processes) that engaged local stakeholders in identifying and addressing their key development challenges and furthering its support for civil society organizations (CSOs). Engagement with the latter remained crucial in the confidence-building processes across the administrative boundary line (ABL).

Interviewed stakeholders consistently acknowledged UNDP's value-added with regard to Georgia's development, particularly in its core areas of work (i.e., governance, poverty and equality, resilience, and environment). UNDP has over the years played a crucial role in areas where national capacity has been limited, offering technical assistance and policy advice (such as support in bringing Georgia's legal framework in line with EU standards as part of the Association Agreement's implementation), capacity building (such as training programmes for civil servants on good governance practices), and advocacy (including the promotion of open government reforms). This support helped Georgia to align its institutions, policies, and practices more closely with international standards, as well as notably fulfilling the requirements of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement. UNDP's continued assistance in digital governance, including open data and public service delivery, has been particularly vital in further solidifying Georgia's position as a regional leader in open government reforms.

In light of the complexity of the context, many stakeholders recognized that, despite notable progress made, achieving sustainable and tangible results remained challenging and required continuous support from UNDP and other development actors. This challenge was deemed particularly evident in areas where UNDP's flagship programmes held strong expertise, where long-term sustainability would depend on sustained efforts and resources.

Finding 2. Adaptability and leveraging of opportunities. During the period under review, UNDP demonstrated significant adaptability to the volatile context in Georgia, responding with flexibility to shifting needs, unanticipated crises, political fluctuations, and complex regional dynamics. Through agile resource allocation and adaptive programming—exemplified by the Governance Reform Fund (GRF)—UNDP tailored its approaches to meet diverse local needs and address emerging challenges across sectors and regions.

Throughout this cycle, UNDP faced significant contextual challenges, including an unsteady political environment, increasing restrictions in the conflict-affected Abkhazia region, and the escalation of geopolitical tensions, most notably the war in Ukraine and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In response, UNDP demonstrated both strategic foresight and flexibility by adapting its programming to accommodate shifting priorities and identifying new opportunities for engagement. Key highlights here include:

- UNDP increased its support for key reforms and capacity-building efforts to help Georgia meet EU Association Agreement requirements and advance on its EU accession path.[22] Following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, UNDP prioritized energy security and renewable energy initiatives, contributing to Georgia's energy independence and addressing national security concerns. Moreover, UNDP conducted a comprehensive risk assessment of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, facilitated dialogues with partners and donors, provided targeted support to impacted CSOs, and actively advocated for the protection of human rights and democratic space.
- Similarly, UNDP remained responsive to the complex and evolving dynamics in Abkhazia region, which was critical in light of the evolving geopolitical situation, restricted access, and heightened scrutiny of external funding. In line with the broader mandate of UN agencies, UNDP's primary aim was to foster confidence building and engagement. To support this, the CO employed innovative strategies, partnered with civil society, and addressed key social needs—especially in health and education—as vital entry points to support conflict-affected communities.
- At the local level, UNDP tailored its interventions to address the distinct needs of different regions and communities, drawing on its extensive experience across the country. Through the European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD), UNDP adapted rural development initiatives to promote economic diversification, enhance sustainability, and implement EU-compliant management systems. These efforts played a critical role in supporting Georgia's accession agenda by aligning national and local development regulations and practices with EU standards.
- Another key example of UNDP's adaptability to emerging needs during the cycle was the GRF project (see the box below for more details). By enabling the rapid reallocation of resources and expertise, the GRF allowed UNDP to swiftly address challenges as they arose and capitalize on new opportunities, resulting in more efficient and responsive governance interventions.

BOX 2. Governance Reform Fund (GRF)

The GRF is different from traditional project-based approaches in that it offers more flexible support to meet the needs of Georgia's governance sector.

- The GRF serves as a flexible platform that allows UNDP to address emerging needs and priorities without the constraints often associated with rigid project structures. This adaptability is particularly valuable in Georgia's volatile political landscape, where challenges and opportunities can arise unexpectedly. Such responsiveness, in turn, helps to build trust and strengthen UNDP's position as a valued partner in Georgia's governance reforms.
- One of the GRF's key strengths is its ability to provide sustained, long-term support in key governance areas. Unlike traditional short-term projects that struggle to achieve a lasting impact, this platform approach enables UNDP to maintain consistent support over extended periods of time. Such continuity is crucial for complex governance reforms that typically need years of sustained effort to take root and produce tangible results.
- The platform approach also facilitates UNDP's efforts to forge greater integration and synergies across various workstreams. Rather than operating in silos, interventions supported by the GRF are easier to coordinate and closely aligned with broader programme objectives.

Finding 3. Capacity building focus and approaches. UNDP played a significant and broad role in institutional strengthening and capacity building throughout this cycle, delivering practical, demand-driven interventions. A key part of its value-added was its facilitation of diverse stakeholder participation, particularly among marginalized groups, in governance processes. However, challenges such as high staff turnover and resource constraints within partner institutions limited the integration and application of newly developed capacities.

UNDP employed a multidimensional approach to capacity building, targeting government agencies, CSOs, and, to a lesser extent, private sector companies. Its initiatives spanned both technical skills (such as policy analysis, budgeting, and monitoring) and functional capacities like strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and change management. Notably, in the "Supporting Public Administration Reform" and "Governance Reform Fund" projects, this approach was applied across various sectors of public administration.

The evaluation highlighted several relevant successes in institutional strengthening and capacity building. UNDP's tailored, context-specific interventions ensured that newly acquired skills and knowledge were both relevant and applicable. For example, UNDP provided targeted refresher training for customs officers and environmental inspectors on ozone-depleting substances regulations, addressing specific national priorities. Moreover, its support for the implementation of the Law on Vocational Education and the development of the VET Strategy for 2024-2030 aligned with the evolving needs of the labor market. The emphasis on practical, hands-on learning and stakeholder engagement in governance processes, such as municipal planning and sustainable energy and climate action plans (SECAPs), further reinforced learning and enhanced coordination within municipal institutions.

UNDP placed a strong emphasis on fostering the participation of non-governmental stakeholders, particularly marginalized groups—such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities (PwDs)—in policy dialogues, decision-making processes, and reform monitoring.[23] This approach helped to ensure that governance processes were more inclusive. UNDP also helped CSOs representing marginalized groups to strengthen their organizational capacities and improve advocacy capabilities. For instance, the Leadership, Equality, Advocacy, and Democracy (LEAD) initiative significantly enhanced the technical and organizational

capabilities of grassroots CSOs, contributing to improved infrastructure for advocacy and service delivery. Similarly, the "Forest Friend" platform helped to engage the private sector in forest conservation, taking an inclusive approach to stakeholder engagement.

UNDP's contributions to institutional improvements encountered persistent challenges related to the low absorption capacity of partner organizations. Key factors in this regard identified in the evaluation included high staff turnover in critical institutions, competing priorities exacerbated by political polarization, and limited financial and human resources. Furthermore, resistance to change within parts of the public administration further hindered the adoption and scaling of new capacities. Many of these obstacles were beyond UNDP's direct control, and they significantly constrained the full internalization and sustainability of capacity-building efforts. Overcoming these hurdles requires a consistent focus on long-term institutional support and strategies to mitigate high turnover and resource constraints.

Finding 4. Innovation and knowledge generation. During this cycle, UNDP promoted a range of innovative solutions, introducing new knowledge, technologies, and practices with the potential to catalyze change across various sectors. While partners recognized the value of these innovations, it emerged there was still room for improvement in the scaling up of successful pilot initiatives and in harnessing the innovation potential of the private sector.

Building on the foundations laid in previous cycles, UNDP in the latest cycle continued to support government institutions to develop innovations and technologies. While digital disruption was part of the approach, in some cases innovation involved rethinking approaches and modus operandi, and how to approach known problems differently.

- **Governance and public administration:** UNDP's continued support for e-governance initiatives expanded the digitization of public services, improving accessibility and efficiency. In the area of confidence building and conflict resolution, while not entirely new, UNDP introduced novel approaches by fostering people-to-people contact and promoting joint action on shared challenges across divided communities. Notably, the establishment of the Ukrainian House for refugees, which included business support and skills training, exemplified the creative and holistic approach taken to refugee integration, combining economic integration (business support) with social integration (skills training).
- **Environmental governance and climate action:** Through the Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN), UNDP helped pilot innovative financing mechanisms, including biodiversity offsets, green bonds, and conservation trust funds to support climate change actions.
- **Private sector development:** UNDP helped modernize Georgia's packaging industry by supporting the creation of the Packaging Manufacturers Association of Georgia (PMAG), which brought together local manufacturers to adopt environmentally friendly production methods and new technologies. For example, through a matching grant scheme, packaging companies received technical and financial support to upgrade their machinery and obtain quality certifications, leading to improved access to both local and international markets. This support for eco-friendly practices and modern technologies served to introduce innovative approaches to development and sustainability in the packaging industry. UNDP also aided the development of business support centers that provided workspaces, mentoring, and technical assistance to help new entrepreneurs to launch and grow their companies. This work contributed to broader efforts being made in the country to bring about an environment more conducive to entrepreneurship and technological advancement. In vocational

education, UNDP introduced a combination of online and in-person learning methods (blended learning), giving students more flexible access to training while reducing costs. Overall, the latter was considered by interviewed stakeholders as an innovative shift in educational delivery methods.

- **Rural development and agriculture:** UNDP's efforts to institutionalize the EU LEADER[24] approach represented a systematic shift from centralized to community-led rural development. This was also innovative as it created new multi-stakeholder local action groups (LAGs) that gave local communities, businesses, and civil society formal decision-making power over development priorities and resources - a dramatic departure from the country's traditional top-down approach. Furthermore, the creation of the digital extension platform introduced new methods of transferring agricultural knowledge and providing extension services, offering the potential to transform how information is disseminated to farmers and other rural stakeholders.

While many interviewees recognized the value of successful pilot initiatives, scaling them up to achieve broader impact, especially in rural and remote areas, remained challenging.[25] Others also claimed there was potential for more innovative approaches in engaging the private sector in development initiatives, particularly in climate action and biodiversity conservation. Ensuring the long-term sustainability of these innovations, especially those reliant on external funding, would also require greater focus and the development of concrete sustainability plans.

2.2 UNDP contributions to programme objectives

2.2.1 Democratic governance and human rights

CPD OUTCOME 1:

Democratic governance and human rights

Output 1.1
Inclusive national and local governance systems have greater resilience and capacities to mainstream gender, ensure evidence-based and participatory policymaking, map and address inequalities, and deliver quality services to all.

Output 1.2
National legislation and policies to eliminate all types of discrimination, deliver gender-equal results, enhance human rights and equal access to justice, and equitable access to/universal coverage of quality social services, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalized.

Flagship initiatives: Governance Reform Fund; Supporting Public Administration Reform in Georgia - Phase 2; Fostering Regional & Local Development in Georgia - Phase 2; EU41TD: Advancing Decentralized, Effective, and Inclusive Governance; Parliamentary Support; Leadership, Equality, Advocacy, and Democracy Project; UN Joint Programmes: Gender Equality / Disability / Social Protection

Output 1.1: 13 projects (DIM (4); NIM (9))
Output 1.2: 6 projects (DIM (4); NIM (2))
GEN marker: GEN2 - GEN3 ratio: 84:16
Main thematic coverage/expenditure 2021-23: 48% governance; 22% decentralization; 16% LNOB

Finding 5. Public administration and modernization of public services. UNDP continued to play a pivotal role in supporting Georgia's reform and modernization agenda with respect to public administration and service delivery. Despite significant challenges stemming from the increasingly volatile political context, UNDP's close collaboration with key government entities in this time facilitated tangible improvements in accessibility, efficiency, and transparency in public administration and service delivery at the national and subnational levels.

In the cycle under review, UNDP remained a key partner to the GoG in its efforts to advance the comprehensive PAR agenda, working closely with key government bodies such as the Administration of the Government of Georgia (AoG), the Civil Service Bureau, the Ministry of Justice, as well as the Public Service Development Agency and the Digital Governance Agency. Building on previous cycles, UNDP's support was instrumental in this cycle in driving reforms and modernizing public services through targeted actions at both strategic and operational levels, particularly in enhancing citizens' access to and engagement with government services.

- **At the strategic level,** UNDP supported the development and implementation of key frameworks such as the PAR Strategy and Action Plan, promoting evidence-based and participatory policymaking. This support contributed to significant improvements in public sector governance, with the PAR Strategy achieving a 62 percent implementation rate by 2023.[26] According to interviewees, this represented notable progress in the reform process.
- **At the operational level,** UNDP's efforts were directed toward enhancing the capacity and professionalization of the civil service, developing tools for merit-based recruitment and performance management, and devising strategies for professional development and staff retention. In addition, UNDP supported the introduction of ethics and integrity codes within the civil service, helping to foster a culture of accountability and transparency.
- **With regard to public services,** UNDP provided crucial support to the GoG's digitalization agenda, aimed at transforming the way citizens engage with government services. The work in this area encompassed a wide range of public services, from administrative procedures to more complex interactions between citizens and public institutions. As of the time of the evaluation, over 240 digitized public services were integrated into the Unified Portal of e-Services – MY.GOV.GE, bringing notable increases in accessibility and efficiency, according to available data[27] and interviews. UNDP also helped reduce barriers to access, especially for citizens in remote or rural areas who previously faced challenges in physically reaching government offices. This support also included digital literacy activities and the promotion of the new e-governance services. Meanwhile, many of the interviewed stakeholders highlighted efficiency gains in government operations in terms of saving citizens' time, improving the level of convenience, and optimizing processing times. The digital transformation in which UNDP was closely involved was given credit for improvements in transparency and citizen engagement indicators, albeit multiple factors likely contributed thereto. Nevertheless, the increased accessibility of digital public services coincided with Georgia rising in the UN's E-Participation Index from 80th in 2020 to 72nd in 2022. Many of the interviewed stakeholders noted that the digitization of services reduced opportunities for corruption by minimizing the need for direct interaction in administrative processes and creating digital audit trails, though more research is needed to verify and quantify this specific impact.[28]

A focus on transparency and accountability in the internal operations of governmental entities was embedded across various initiatives, along with the promotion of citizen participation. This entailed the provision of support to enhance the transparency of national budget planning, SDG nationalization and

monitoring, and the implementation of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement. Government representatives emphasized UNDP's pivotal role in promoting inclusive, transparent whole-of-government policy standards and enhancing policy coherence. Various interviewees noted that the extensive civil servant training programmes had significantly boosted the capabilities of those involved and made certain aspects of public services more accessible and inclusive. These efforts contributed to the steady improvement of budget transparency, with Georgia globally and across the CIS region, ranking first among 125 countries in the Open Budget Index, scoring 87 points out of 100[29] (see Annex 3 for further details).

In this cycle, UNDP's efforts in this area came up against extremely strong headwinds in the form of persistent political polarization and tension, and risks of backtracking on key governance reforms, including regarding the encouraging progress made in government effectiveness, public service delivery, and corruption control.[30] While democratic governance improved, certain issues persisted such as stalled judicial reform and weakened horizontal accountability (see Annex 3 for further details). Overall, while UNDP continued its crucial support for PAR in this cycle, just as it had in the previous cycle, the deteriorating political context limited the high-level impact of its efforts compared to earlier achievements.

Finding 6. Parliamentary development and legislative processes. UNDP made significant contributions to Georgia's parliamentary democracy during this cycle, focusing on enhancing the legislative, representative, and oversight functions of the Parliament and the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara. In particular, these efforts promoted openness, accountability, citizen engagement, and the mainstreaming of gender equality and social inclusion in parliamentary practices. Though notable progress was made, increasing political tensions overshadowed and constrained these accomplishments.

The "Parliamentary Development" project was UNDP's primary vehicle for supporting Georgia's parliamentary democracy during the period under review. The most notable contributions in this area were:

- **Strategic planning and procedural reforms:** UNDP supported the development of Parliament's first Strategic Development Plan and new Rules of Procedure. These enabled the institutionalization of a policy planning system, requiring all parliamentary committees to create annual plans and reports based on standardized criteria. The adoption of successive open parliament action plans in both the Parliament of Georgia and the Adjara Supreme Council was also supported by UNDP. Interviewees highlighted that these tools significantly improved Parliament's ability to engage in effective lawmaking and oversight. They also created new avenues for citizen engagement in the legislative process. This contributed to more evidence-based and participatory processes, as confirmed by parliamentary performance assessments which showed an improvement from level 2 to level 3 on a four-point scale by 2023.[31]
- **Enhanced parliamentary oversight:** According to stakeholders interviewed, UNDP's technical assistance was instrumental in operationalizing Georgia's constitutional amendments, which expanded the Parliament's oversight powers and strengthened the capacities of committees. This included training on how to conduct thematic inquiries and carry out post-legislative scrutiny. Innovative practices like thematic rapporteurships further enriched the parliamentary oversight role. Overall, legislative performance and accountability improved, according to interviewees and UNDP data from project progress reports and ROARs.
- **Gender equality and social inclusion:** UNDP made efforts during the cycle to integrate gender equality and social inclusion into parliamentary development activities, specifically focused on increasing women's political participation. This included training for women Members of Parliament (MPs) in gender-sensitive lawmaking and oversight. Despite these initiatives, the proportion of women in Parliament increased only marginally, from 18 percent in 2022 to 19 percent in 2023. Progress here

was hindered by the Parliament's rollback of gender equality measures, such as notably abolishing mandatory gender quotas in proportional party lists in April 2024. UNDP also worked to improve the accessibility of parliamentary information and processes for marginalized groups, including PwDs and ethnic minorities. However, the extent to which these measures improved access to information, trust, and accountability for populations at risk of being left behind was not measured.

While UNDP's contributions laid strong foundations for parliamentary reforms, these achievements were undermined by growing political tensions that narrowed the scope for sustained legislative improvement. Georgia's increasing political instability was reflected in its worsening score on the Freedom House Index from 2020 to 2024. In this period, its "Electoral Process" score declined from 8 to 7, and its rating for "Political Pluralism and Participation" dropped from 9 to 8. The country's overall "Political Rights" score decreased from 24 to 22, marking an 8.3 percent decline (see Annex 3 for further details). Pertinently, the Parliament was at the center of fierce political confrontations leading up to the 2024 parliamentary election in October, which diverted policymakers' attention away from key institutional reforms. Moreover, as noted by several interviewees, the frequent turnover of parliamentary staff hindered capacity-building efforts.

Finding 7. Access to justice and the rule of law. UNDP, in its support for access to justice and the rule of law during the cycle, prioritized vulnerable groups by addressing barriers related to geography, language, and disability. Its efforts also put an emphasis on gender mainstreaming across interventions. This led to increased awareness and improved service delivery in the justice sector. Yet, there was reportedly still room for more extensive public outreach on legal rights and available services, as well as a need for a stronger focus on changing social norms to further enhance access to justice for those at risk of being left behind.

Building on previous efforts targeted at broadening access to justice, in this cycle UNDP focused its support on the specific needs of vulnerable and marginalized groups, particularly those in remote, conflict-affected areas, and refugees. Another priority area here was strengthening the capacities of justice sector institutions and professionals to deliver fair and effective legal services, including the promotion and extension of access to alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.

UNDP supported Georgia's Legal Aid Service during the cycle with technical assistance, training, and awareness-raising activities. Interviews and reporting data confirmed that the establishment of a mobile legal clinic and the dissemination of legal information had had positive effects on access to legal services. The increase in the number of courts operating mediation centers—from 36 percent in 2022 to 57 percent in 2023—also significantly improved such access, particularly for women and conflict-affected individuals.[32] The quality of services improved through several actions including the adoption of guidelines for legal aid services for PwDs, and the training of 150 state legal aid lawyers (108 of them women). Among key training topics covered were disability rights, mediation skills, and entrepreneurship skills for refugees. Furthermore, legal documents were translated into minority languages to broaden their accessibility.

Another notable contribution of UNDP's was the re-establishment of the Legal Aid Providers Network, a structure that has enhanced coordination among state and non-state actors in the justice sector, as well as the support for organization of a regional conference. The latter resulted in the Tbilisi Declaration on Access to Legal Aid for Forcibly Displaced Persons, signed by the legal aid agencies of four countries (Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine), while also serving as a platform to advocate for gender justice and women's rights.

A new focus area for UNDP in the latest cycle was environmental justice. The CO conducted a baseline study on access to environmental justice, in which low awareness was identified as a major barrier. In response, UNDP began designing a targeted awareness-raising campaign and offered policy advice to strengthen the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement, ensuring that environmental

justice principles are integrated into the country's broader climate policies. The evaluation identified further opportunities for UNDP in this area, such as strengthening legal frameworks and supporting CSO advocacy, including regarding the integration of environmental justice into educational curricula.

Overall, stakeholders from the justice sector highlighted that UNDP's support enhanced awareness among target groups about access to justice and improved service delivery, with a particular focus on gender mainstreaming and social inclusion. However, the deepening political crisis created a disconnect between specific policy reforms, such as those facilitated by UNDP, and broader governance results. For example, the World Bank Governance Indicators showed a decline in Georgia's "Rule of Law" score, dropping from 0.22 in 2020 to 0.17 in 2022, indicating weakening law enforcement. Elsewhere, Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index painted a similar picture, with the country's score decreasing from 56 in 2020 to 53 in 2023, meaning a slide from 45th to 49th place in the global rankings. Despite UNDP's efforts and reported achievements at the output level, the deteriorating operating environment in Georgia has hindered these contributions from driving substantial, systemic high-level results. Moreover, some national partners emphasized that significantly improving access to justice would require much broader awareness-raising efforts and a stronger focus on addressing social norms that limit the public's inclination to demand justice.

Finding 8. Human rights, citizen engagement, and civil society participation. UNDP promoted human rights during the cycle by providing policy support, developing the capacities of key institutions, and empowering grassroots initiatives. Yet, structural challenges persist, including in the protection of marginalized groups and civil society to enable meaningful engagement. Surrounded by shifting contextual factors, UNDP's efforts in these areas encountered notable challenges, underscoring the need to reassess both its programmatic and operational strategies and strengthen advocacy efforts.

UNDP's efforts with regard to human rights in this period also included the promotion of greater recognition of human rights and civic engagement for effective, responsive, and inclusive democratic governance, as well as grassroots empowerment actions.

- **At the policy and legislative level,** UNDP contributed to the drafting of the National Human Rights Strategy (NHRS) 2022-2030 and facilitated the national coordination mechanism for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). In addition, UNDP supported the development of thematic action plans to promote disability rights. Furthermore, UNDP backed legislative efforts to align the Administrative Offenses Code with international human rights standards and to create disability-inclusive emergency response guidelines, alongside mental health reforms. By enabling community advocates to participate in policy discussions on non-discrimination legislation, UNDP ensured that the voices of affected groups were included in the policymaking process. Interviewees noted that these initiatives strengthened human rights protections and fostered a more inclusive legal framework.
- **At the institutional level,** UNDP supported the development of new organizational strategies, training programmes, and legal aid services for critical oversight bodies such as the Public Defender's Office (PDO) and the State Inspector's Service (SIS). Over 100 state officials received training on human rights issues, improving their ability to implement rights-based policies and practices, according to interviews and UNDP ROAR data.
- **At the organizational level,** a key focus of UNDP's efforts was on empowering CSOs to serve as effective advocates and partners in governance reform processes, facilitating networking and coalition building among CSOs working on common issues. By providing capacity building and technical assistance, UNDP enhanced organizational development, advocacy, and lobbying capabilities, which led to greater professionalization and recognition, although sustainability remained a challenge.

- **At community and individual levels,** efforts were focused on extensive training and capacity building for CSOs and vulnerable groups, accompanied by broad awareness-raising campaigns targeting discriminatory attitudes, social norms, and gender stereotypes. In-person events and spaces for dialogue with youth groups were also promoted. According to project reports, these initiatives reached 160 CSOs and over 1,000 individuals from vulnerable groups, including ethnic minority women, LGBTQI+ youth, and PwDs. Public outreach, along with collaborations with universities and media outlets, reached an estimated 100,000 citizens, which helped raise awareness on human rights issues and fostered greater engagement among these communities. Many interviewees noted that these efforts contributed to raising public demand for good governance and human rights.

Despite the achievements listed above, significant challenges persisted with regard to the broader human rights situation and civic engagement, particularly concerning the protection of marginalized groups and civil society to allow for meaningful engagement. The challenging environment limited the translation of achievements into broader governance outcomes. As per Freedom House data from 2020 to 2024, Georgia's "Civil Liberties" score fell from 37 to 36, with a specific reduction in "Freedom of Expression and Belief" from 10 to 9 (see Annex 3 for further details). On a positive note, the country's score on the UNDP Gender Inequality Index improved from 0.277 in 2020 to 0.283 in 2023, although the proportion of seats held by women in local governments remained low.[33]

Different interviewees corroborated these findings, pointing to ongoing human rights challenges, including in terms of effective protection of marginalized groups, freedom of expression, space for civil society and independent media, political polarization, and socio-economic inequalities. The complex structural barriers and the recent legislative changes underscore concerns about human rights limitations and the diminishing role of civil society. Stakeholders concurred that long-term, sustained interventions from both national and international actors were essential.

As much of UNDP's work during the cycle was based on partnerships and collaboration with local CSOs in various domains, the anticipated drastic reduction of NGO activities could result in the loss of vital civil society partners for programme implementation. At the same time, interviewees recognized UNDP's efforts in promoting multi-stakeholder coordination through various projects but stressed the need for stronger platforms that unite government, civil society, and development partners to tackle these challenges collaboratively. The evaluation highlighted that UNDP's operational strategies were not yet fully equipped to address anticipated issues and bottlenecks to continue to work closely with CSOs. UNDP faced the challenge of balancing advocating for civil society protection with maintaining a constructive relationship with the central government.

Finding 9. Decentralization and local governance. UNDP made significant contributions to decentralization and strengthening local governance during the cycle through policy development, institutional capacity building, civic engagement, and local economic development initiatives. These efforts together led to some tangible improvements in local governance albeit opportunities for stronger engagement in fiscal decentralization, private sector involvement, and scaling of successful pilot models remain unfulfilled.

UNDP provided critical support to the development and implementation of Georgia's Decentralization Strategy 2020-2025 and its accompanying action plan, which set out an ambitious roadmap for devolving greater powers and resources to municipalities, enhancing their efficiency and transparency, and fostering citizen participation in local decision making. UNDP provided technical assistance, policy advice, and facilitated multi-stakeholder consultations to ensure that strategies were evidence-based, locally responsive, and aligned with international best practices. It also supported amendments to the Budget

Code to empower municipalities financially. Moreover, UNDP pioneered municipal funding models, enabling local self-governments to receive donor funds directly and engage in public-private partnerships, strengthening their role in driving local development. Although several factors were at play, interviewees noted that this work contributed to a significant increase in total municipal budget receipts as a percentage of GDP, rising from 5 percent in 2020 to 7 percent by 2025.

Institutional capacity building was another key focus area for UNDP in the period under review. The emphasis here was on strengthening the capabilities of both national and local institutions to implement decentralization reforms. At the national level, UNDP supported the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure (MRDI) with training and technical assistance to lead these reforms. At the local level, UNDP worked with 63 municipalities to improve governance, transparency, and accountability, introducing tools like municipal development documents, gender-responsive budgeting, and performance management systems. Other achievements in this regard were the alignment of national legislation with the European Charter of Local Self-Government, and the development of data systems and tools for evidence-based local decision making. Relatedly, a key initiative was the partnership with the National Statistics Office of Georgia to establish a municipal statistics portal with 124 municipal-level indicators.

Moreover, UNDP played a key role in institutionalizing mechanisms for citizen engagement in municipal decision-making processes, such as establishing and strengthening citizen advisory councils, conducting public hearings and consultations, and implementing participatory planning and budgeting practices. Social accountability tools were also piloted during the covered period in collaboration with local authorities and CSOs whose capacities were strengthened by UNDP. Interviewed stakeholders generally recognized the value of these efforts in operationalizing participatory local planning processes. These involved local officials, CSOs, businesses, and community groups, creating new avenues for citizens to voice their needs and priorities, influence local policies and budgets, and hold authorities accountable.

UNDP also introduced and helped institutionalize the local economic development (LED) approach, which included the development of 10 LED training modules, officially endorsed for use across all municipalities. It assisted 37 municipalities in incorporating LED measures into their municipal development documents and budgets. At the same time, UNDP funded numerous LED initiatives of municipalities and CSOs in underserved regions, benefiting over 400 small businesses, with a focus on women's economic empowerment (68 percent of these businesses were women-owned).

UNDP's contribution in terms of fostering a more conducive environment for decentralization was widely acknowledged by the interviewed stakeholders. However, despite the feedback being positive overall, some missed opportunities for stronger engagement were identified. While local governments were extensively supported, several interviewees pointed to a persistent gap in fiscal decentralization, suggesting that more focus could have been placed on helping municipalities to diversify revenue streams and advocating for greater budget allocations from the central government. The evaluation found that there was also potential to foster engagement with the private sector, especially large investors and financial institutions, to strengthen LED initiatives and broaden funding sources for local development.[34] While UNDP successfully piloted models in some municipalities, some interviewees identified the absence of a clear strategy for scaling up these practices nationwide as a key gap. The establishment of a replication or scaling framework would have helped institutionalize successful models across all municipalities.

2.2.2 Environmental governance, climate action, and disaster risk reduction

CPD OUTCOME 2:

Environmental governance, climate action, and disaster risk reduction

Output 2.1
Environmental governance and institutional capacity enhanced to enable rational, equitable, and sustainable use of natural/ land resources, to ensure the conservation of ecosystems, use of innovative and climate-friendly technologies for an inclusive green economy, energy efficiency, and clean energy production, and to make communities more resilient to environmental shocks.

Output 2.2
Climate-sensitive, resilient, and risk-informed development promoted across all sectors in rural and urban areas to increase adaptive capacities and mitigate climate change impacts.

Flagship initiatives: Hydrochlorofluorocarbons Phase-Out Management Plan; Enhancing Financial Sustainability of the Protected Areas System in Georgia; Strengthening Climate Adaptation Capacities; Improved Resilience of Communities to Climate Risks; Forest Management
Regional: Biodiversity Finance Initiative - Phase 2; EU4Climate

Output 2.1: 9 projects (DIM (4); NIM (5))
Output 2.2: 3 projects (DIM (2); NIM (1))
GEN marker: GEN1 - GEN2 ratio: 34:66
Main thematic coverage/expenditure 2021-23: 91% climate change; 7% environment/ biodiversity; 2% energy

Finding 10. Environmental governance and policy framework. UNDP played a key role in supporting Georgia's environmental governance and policy framework during the cycle, particularly in addressing climate change, international commitments, and capacity building. While relevant milestones set by the Programme were achieved, there was still an opportunity to place greater emphasis on strengthening long-term national capacities and enhancing inter-institutional and sectoral coordination to ensure the sustainability of the supported initiatives and mechanisms.

UNDP leveraged its partnerships to strengthen its role in environmental governance and climate action. Its support strengthened the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture (MEPA) and its related institutions in climate policy design, data management, and reporting, all aligned with UNFCCC reporting requirements and Georgia's NDC (2021) goals.[35] The most notable UNDP contributions in this regard highlighted by the evaluation stakeholders were[36]:

- **Long-Term Low-Emission Development Strategy (LT-LEDS):** The development and adoption of LEDS 2050 (Georgia's first such strategy) under the EU4Climate project marked a significant step toward the country meeting its UNFCCC requirements and aligning national policy with the EU Green Deal and accession criteria. Other key achievements included bridging data gaps in the private sector and supporting the creation of SECAPs for local governments. Notably, one of the scenarios outlined in the LT-LEDS lays out a pathway for Georgia to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. With UNDP's support in this cycle, Georgia advanced in integrating climate considerations into national plans across sectors like health, energy, and agriculture, and boosted its capacity to engage in national and international climate negotiations (i.e. COP27 and in preparation for COP28) and policy implementation.

- **Strengthened legal frameworks:** Updates to regulations on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs), ozone-depleting substances (ODSs), and waste management responsibilities for producers, importers, and retailers helped to further align industry practices with EU standards and international treaties, and to promote best practices in emissions reduction and energy-efficient, low-emission technologies. UNDP supported legislative improvements across a wide range of areas, including the EU Water Framework Directive and the EU Floods Directive. This assistance helped the country to meet international obligations and harmonize its laws with EU legislation and standards. Much of this work was conducted in adherence with the EU-Georgia Association Agreement and involved drafting sub-laws or other legal acts for the GoG.
- **Biodiversity finance policy reforms:**[37] The development of innovative financing mechanisms, such as biodiversity offsets, green bonds, and conservation trust funds, to support biodiversity finance was an instrumental step toward addressing key biodiversity financing needs and revenue generation opportunities, such as greening agricultural subsidies and engaging the private sector through platforms like "Forest Friend," showcasing innovative approaches to resource mobilization and stakeholder participation in conservation efforts (see Finding 11 for more details).

UNDP's approach in this area combined technical assistance, tailored training for officials, and strong advocacy efforts, while focusing on improving inter-institutional and inter-sectoral coordination to address the fragmented nature of environmental governance specifically related to disaster risk reduction and early warning systems. The latter involved the delineation of roles and responsibilities among the MEPA and its subordinate bodies, the Emergency Management Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), the MRDI, and local government bodies, while also fostering more formalized processes and engagement on the part of the private sector, civil society, and local communities to strengthen their resilience in the face of recurring disasters. Despite progress being made and UNDP's facilitation efforts at various levels, challenges persisted in effectively operationalizing the governance system and coordinating among institutions, due to a variety of factors such as limited financial and human resources, overlapping mandates between the MEPA, the Emergency Management Service, and local government bodies, as well as institutional resistance to change.

On the other hand, improvements in the legal and regulatory frameworks along with information generation and management were highlighted by interviewees as pertinent to meeting the country's national and international commitments and UNFCCC reporting obligations, as well as the requirements of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. By supporting the development of Georgia's Fourth National Communication to the UNFCCC and its Second Biennial Update Report, UNDP helped the GoG to strengthen existing institutional arrangements for climate transparency and support the achievement of long-term targets aimed at addressing the impacts of climate change. Preparations for the Fifth National Communication and First Biennial Transparency Report (BTR) to the UNFCCC were underway at the time of the evaluation, with submissions planned for December 2024 and early 2025, respectively. Moreover, this enhanced knowledge base was instrumental in aligning Georgia's climate policies with the ambitious goals of the EU Green Deal such as the capacity to engage with the EU's carbon trading mechanisms, opening up the path for access to green finance mechanisms and technical assistance programmes. UNDP's support in developing climate budget tagging (CBT) concepts and the NDC (2021) investment plan laid the groundwork for integrating climate considerations into national budgeting processes and supporting NDC implementation. This work, later continued by the World Bank, exemplified UNDP's catalytic role in promoting international standards.

Despite developments being positive overall and relevant contributions being made, the evaluation identified ongoing challenges in the ability of key stakeholders to sustain progress. These included, among other issues, the effective implementation of new and improved frameworks and strategies, which depended on prioritizing and allocating resources at both national and subnational levels. Meanwhile, interview findings also indicated that the capacity to assess the potential and feasibility of international climate finance mechanisms had been strengthened, thereby enhancing both access and utilization. Climate change considerations were more thoroughly integrated into sectoral policies, including through SECAPs in several pilot municipalities. Despite the MEPA's strong political will and effort, comprehensive planning and implementation involving various ministries (e.g. the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development and the MRDI) and local authorities still required greater political commitment and institutional capacity.

Moreover, Georgia continued to face challenges in advancing climate action, although the EU4Climate project helped in different areas. Key issues in the period covered included aligning policies and strategic frameworks with EU climate standards, enhancing decarbonization, improving energy security, and strengthening climate resilience. Different interviewed stakeholders highlighted the multi-tiered governance approach of the initiative as effective in supporting inter-institutional collaboration to address Georgia's climate challenges while fostering strong engagement and ownership.

Finding 11. Environmental protection and climate change mitigation initiatives. UNDP developed and promoted innovative initiatives to complement policy support with concrete actions aimed at contributing to Georgia's NDC goals. While community and private sector engagement improved, the scalability and sustainability of these initiatives faced challenges, primarily due to financial constraints and the need for stronger incentives and enforcement mechanisms for environmental regulations.

At the national level, UNDP supported efforts to reduce GHG emissions, promote energy-efficient technologies, and finance forest and biodiversity protection initiatives. It played a key role in facilitating private sector collaboration and promoting low-global warming potential (low-GWP) technologies, across various sectors, including refrigeration, air conditioning, and manufacturing. Moreover, the "Green Cities" initiative supported a gradual shift toward greener alternatives and provided important technical assistance in improving urban mobility and making it sustainable.

Yet, the adoption of environmentally friendly alternatives to support the phasing out of HCFCs and other ODSs was burdened by delays and constraints. Among these were some market resistance, insufficient technical capacity, and gender disparities in the refrigeration and air conditioning sector.[38] In the latter case, the need arose for further analysis to ascertain the underlying reasons behind this imbalance and to develop targeted interventions to increase women's participation in this sector. Meanwhile, continuous efforts were needed to address specific barriers impeding the HCFC phase-out process to fully realize emission reduction potential in pursuit of the climate change mitigation goals. Given that Georgia's economy had long been heavily reliant on sectors that contributed to GHG emissions, challenges persisted in updating infrastructure, enforcing regulations, and scaling sustainable practices. The same applies to the required technical capacities to implement and monitor the established standards, guidelines, and regulations across sectors.

At the community level, UNDP, under the Climate Promise initiative, supported Georgia's forestry reform and the introduction of sustainable forest management practices. These efforts helped increase Georgia's carbon sink, reduce pressure on forests, and promote the use of wood residues as energy sources through the business service yards (BSYs) approach, while also improving access to energy-efficient technologies and sustainable energy sources.[39] The approach steered a shift from social woodcutting to sustainable practices by developing the capacities of foresters and local communities in fire risk management and sustainable

energy production. At the same time, community engagement improved, with several communities launching local conservation initiatives. However, the limited availability of financial and technical resources constrained broader replication. Nonetheless, the potential for national replication was vivid, in alignment with the national vision outlined in the Forest Code. Furthermore, by enabling private companies to utilize timber waste for alternative energy production, UNDP helped reduce pressure on forests and promote energy-efficient technologies.

Securing long-term financing for biodiversity conservation initiatives proved a persistent challenge, with obstacles such as limited private sector involvement, inadequate public-private partnerships, and insufficiently diversified funding sources. UNDP introduced mechanisms under Phase II of the BIOFIN to integrate long-term financial sustainability for Protected Areas (PAs) into national planning. Efforts here included mainstreaming biodiversity in agriculture, tourism, and forestry, leveraging private investment, developing public-private partnerships, and diversifying funding sources. Seven finance solutions were identified, such as mitigating the negative impacts of agricultural subsidies, supporting sustainable use of non-timber forest products (NTFPs), and updating the financial needs of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP). According to UNDP annual reporting data, the terrestrial and marine PAs that were either created or under improved management increased from 313,112 hectares in 2022 to 431,872 hectares in 2023.[40]

Through the project "Enhancing financial sustainability of the protected areas system in Georgia," several financial sustainability instruments were piloted for PAs.[41] While positive results were achieved (such as establishing a solid basis for biodiversity monitoring, and improving the Agency of Protected Areas' (APA) financial management capacity), addressing key barriers to the long-term financial sustainability and effectiveness of the PA system remained a major challenge. The mid-term evaluation of the project recommended significant changes to enhance its strategic impact.[42] In addition, the absence of a comprehensive national strategy and action plan for the PAs hindered progress toward reaching a consensus on sustainable finance solutions.

Similarly, under the BIOFIN, a crowdfunding pilot for forest protection was tested but faced implementation challenges due to limited technical capacity. Greater investments in technical expertise, thorough assessments, and knowledge-sharing were necessary for it to succeed. While the pilot made valuable contributions, the evaluation highlighted some limitations in terms of fully implementing and scaling innovative financial mechanisms across sectors and regions. This was also linked to the need for greater private sector involvement, with a focus on incentivizing private investment and promoting corporate responsibility in biodiversity finance. UNDP provided significant support under the Climate Promise initiative, in a remote, mountainous area of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, on the protected landscape of Machakheli Valley, where 230 households received solar panels and water heaters to reduce the use of fuelwood and relieve pressure on forests. Ultimately, increasing the share of renewable energy in the overall energy mix contributed to nearing NDC targets and helped increase the carbon storage capacity of Adjara's forests.

Finding 12. Disaster risk management and community resilience. UNDP strengthened national and local capacities to handle disaster risk management during this cycle, focusing on climate-related risks and supporting the development of data-driven disaster management plans and a MHEWS. Along with operational challenges, gaps persisted in effective policy implementation, inter-institutional coordination, and resource allocation to sustain the disaster management system and response mechanisms.

Building on the foundations built and lessons learned from the previous programme cycle, UNDP continued to be a key partner to the GoG in the course of putting in place a comprehensive disaster management system.

At the national level, UNDP played a key role in the establishment of Georgia's integrated MHEWS for risks such as floods, landslides, strong winds, drought, avalanche, hail, and mudslides, which marked a significant shift from reactive to proactive disaster management. Through the "Scaling-up Multi-Hazard Early Warning System and the Use of Climate Information in Georgia" programme, which integrated three inter-related projects funded by the Green Climate Fund (GCF), the SDC, and Sida, UNDP continued to develop the capacities of key institutions, namely the National Environment Agency, the Environmental Information and Education Center, the Rural Development Agency (all three of which operate under the MEPA), the Emergency Management Service (under the MIA), and the Roads Department (under the MRDI). The Programme focused on establishing modern climate risk management practices, improving monitoring and forecasting systems, and developing the MHEWS, ultimately enhancing the resilience of at-risk communities. The strategy ultimately chosen was to develop zoning initiatives to prevent construction in high-risk regions and establish a common alerting protocol (CAP) for standardized emergency alerts. This systemic change ensured that all potential threats were gradually taken into greater consideration in disaster planning, preparedness, mitigation, and response strategies at national and local levels.

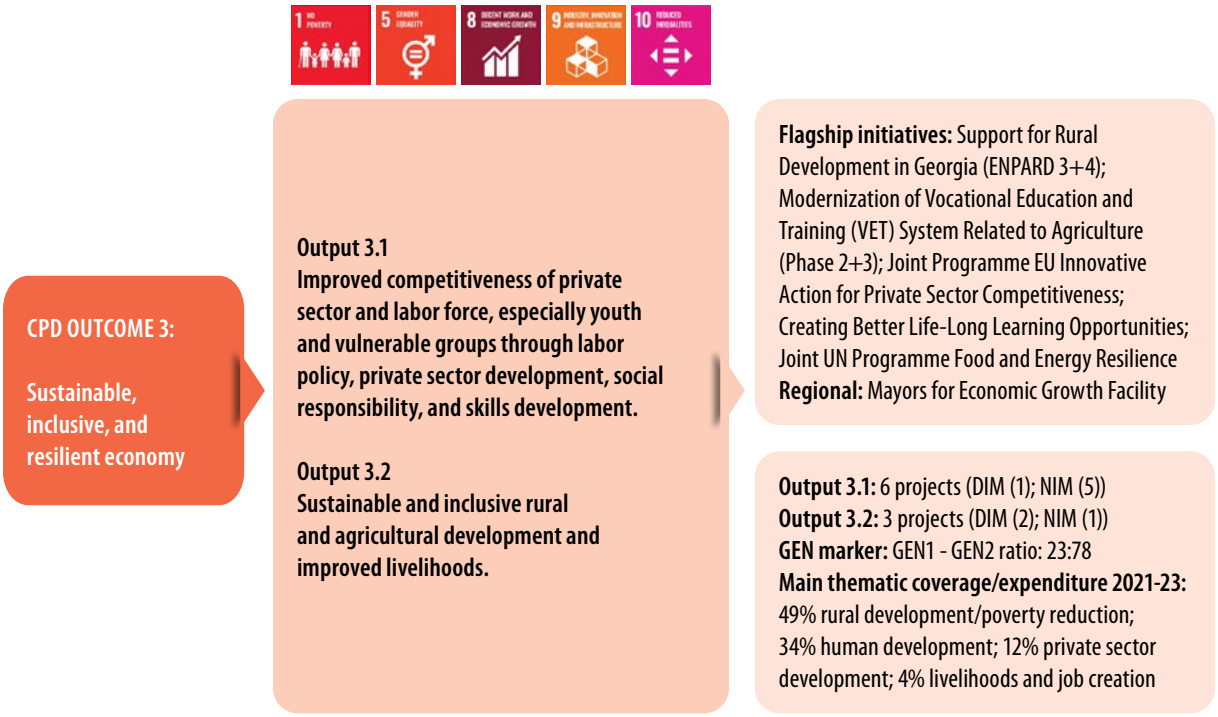
Continuing UNDP's long-standing work in the Rioni River basin, efforts in this cycle were focused on scaling up towards national coverage, with hazard and risk information and maps for 11 river basins[43] generated and disseminated to inform decision making and planning, and to raise public awareness. Investment in technical infrastructure, such as hydro-meteorology and agrometeorology networks and data integration systems, enhanced the ability of Georgian institutions to monitor hazards, issue risk maps, improve forecasting, and issue timely alerts for possible extreme weather conditions. The implementation of the plan was somewhat hindered by coordination obstacles at different levels though, as well as bureaucratic complexities and data access limitations of government agencies. In particular, the role of the Emergency Management Service, the intended primary user of the disaster risk information system, and the full operationalization of the system remained critical aspects on which work was still needed, according to some interviewees. While the project is scheduled to run until the end of 2027, and a handover strategy was developed to define the framework for real-time data collection and processing, the evaluation revealed risks to the consolidation and sustainability of the entire MHEWS network, which is essential for its proper functioning.[44]

At the subnational level, the emphasis placed on risk-informed local action precipitated a shift in focus toward building community resilience, placing communities at the center and promoting the perspectives and needs of the most vulnerable groups and disaster-prone communities in risk strategies. Community-led risk identification and the development of localized strategies were recognized by stakeholders as effective approaches to promote sustainable disaster risk reduction measures. The strengthening of the role and responsibilities of local governments to operationalize frameworks and the early warning system, was also highlighted as key for a well-functioning system. According to UNDP's results-oriented reporting data, 10 subnational governments adopted and implemented local risk-informed development strategies in line with the National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy (2017-2020), setting a target of improving the resilience of over 51,000 people in 2023, by enhancing their health, food, water security, and livelihoods using public and private sector resources.[45]

Implementation of the MHEWS encountered challenges stemming from highly complex technical components, requiring demanding public procurement processes, in a context where national agencies had limited absorption capacity (i.e. insufficient human resources for training and handover). In addition, COVID-19 restrictions and procurement delays further hampered the progress of interconnected activities

up until the time of the mid-term evaluation (August 2022). Moreover, the evaluation revealed the need for enhanced monitoring to ensure the effective implementation of the dedicated Gender and Social Inclusivity Plan, particularly in comprehensively tracking the participation of marginalized communities and addressing the differentiated needs of vulnerable groups in risk reduction and response planning. Overall, UNDP provided necessary guidance and operational technical support to overcome these bottlenecks, ensuring the Programme stayed on track to achieve its expected results by mid-2027. Through delivering capacity building, methodologies, and equipment, UNDP promoted the adoption of modern approaches here. Meanwhile, challenges in effective inter-institutional coordination remained a key risk to be addressed for the efficient management of the MHEWS, once fully operational.[46]

2.2.3 Sustainable, inclusive, and resilient economy



Finding 13. Policy and institutional framework for rural and agricultural development. UNDP interventions strengthened policy frameworks and institutional capacities to promote rural development and enhance private sector competitiveness during the period under review. However, the scaling up and long-term sustainability of the initiatives remained contingent upon the definition of financing models, further strengthening of municipal support, and enduring commitments to effective policy implementation, in addition to structural challenges such as in relation to infrastructure and connectivity. Enhancing the effectiveness of frameworks, ensuring proper implementation, and strengthening stakeholder coordination remained essential to overcome these constraints.

During this cycle, UNDP continued its strong support for people-centered, inclusive, and sustainable rural development, building on the long-term EU-funded ENPARD (phases 3 and 4)[47] and the "Support to Rural Development in Georgia" project. These initiatives focused on supporting a more integrated and community-led local development approach and creating sustainable livelihood opportunities

in marginalized areas. Such efforts advanced organizational and policy reforms and strengthened multi-stakeholder engagement, contributing to more integrated rural development. The ENPARD provided crucial support to the MEPA and its Rural Development Agency to boost the institutional reform process as well as technical capacity development, while aligning policies with EU accession requirements, notably through the development of the Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy 2021-2027 and related action plans. Another milestone here was the new Law on Agriculture and Rural Development of Georgia, along with the establishment of a comprehensive M&E system to track rural development strategies. By 2023, ENPARD's efforts had resulted in the creation of 25 public-private partnerships that focused on lifelong learning, targeting vocational, soft, digital, and future skills.[48]

As highlighted by different interviewees, ENPARD was also very effective in strengthening inter-agency coordination mechanisms at national and local governance levels, and supported the Civic Committee for the Monitoring of the National Strategic Plan for Agriculture and Rural Development by engaging CSOs in policy dialogue. In this context, UNDP advanced the institutionalization of the EU LEADER/ Community-led Local Development (CLLD) model,[49] piloting it in eight municipalities and integrating it into rural development programming.[50] This approach focused on empowering municipalities, unions of local active citizens, and LAGs as a key component of the phase-out strategy and gradual transfer of responsibilities to local actors.

UNDP facilitated the adaptation of the EU's rural development policies to Georgia's context, enhancing alignment with European best practices and standards in rural development and agriculture. While there were successes in specific regions, scaling the LEADER/CLLD model nationwide was deemed crucial to ensure a broader impact. Key informants highlighted the challenge of sustaining LAGs beyond initial funding and support, emphasizing the need for ongoing capacity development and resource allocation. LAGs faced sustainability challenges due to their dependence on EU funding, inconsistent capacity development, and weak partnerships with local municipalities. Addressing these gaps through diversified funding and stronger municipal support remained critical to long-term success. While some LAGs diversified funding and were able to keep activities going, many faced financial instability and decreased membership following the end of ENPARD III. The evaluation found that efforts to leverage private investment and develop sustainable financing models to support long-term rural development initiatives needed to be enhanced. Moreover, the geographic dispersion of municipalities under the LEADER approach limited the ability to achieve economies of scale and hindered the efficient sharing of best practices across regions. This geographic fragmentation impeded more effective identification, promotion, and scaling of innovative projects across municipalities. While LAGs were active, the scattered nature of their operations hampered the broader dissemination of innovative ideas.

Overall, UNDP successfully advanced environmentally sustainable practices in rural Georgia, surpassing targets regarding expanding PAs and implementing energy-efficient household initiatives like solar panels and insulation. Capacity building within the National Forestry Agency supported sustainable forest management, and demonstration sites helped promote the broader adoption of these practices. However, the evaluation suggested that a longer implementation period and a more geographically focused approach could have better facilitated the replication and scaling up of successful initiatives.

Rural isolation and disparities, including infrastructural challenges, continued to hinder economic growth, with private sector development and labor mobility constrained by poor transportation, unreliable energy supply, and limited digital infrastructure. Policy implementation across sectors was fragmented during the covered period, highlighting the need for clearer frameworks to improve collaboration among stakeholders. While progress was made in promoting sustainable practices, sectoral inconsistencies limited efforts to

balance productivity with environmental conservation in rural and agricultural development. The M&E system developed with UNDP's support was designed to monitor and evaluate the implementation of Georgia's Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy for 2021–2027 and its associated action plan. However, the local communities and municipalities were not directly involved in the development of the M&E system, which primarily included ministries and agencies that were part of the Inter-Agency Coordination Council and those responsible for implementing specific activities outlined in the action plan.

Finding 14. Modernization of vocational education and training (VET). UNDP played a pivotal role in supporting VET reforms and institutional capacity strengthening during this cycle, expanding its previous efforts to better target the needs of the agricultural sector and tailor services to vulnerable groups. Challenges remained though in terms of accessibility, sustainability, monitoring, and integration with broader economic frameworks, as well as in reaching marginalized individuals and communities.

UNDP continued to support Georgia's VET system through the implementation of different initiatives[51], with a stronger focus on aligning VET programmes with labor market demands, and facilitating employment opportunities, especially in the agricultural sector. The interventions here put an emphasis on lifelong learning principles and targeted vulnerable groups, including individuals not in education, employment, and training (NEETs), through flexible educational pathways, tailored support services, and partnerships with local governments and NGOs. This approach fostered a more inclusive environment and promoted community-based learning initiatives. According to UNDP data, the number of conflict-affected young people with improved access to schools, VET colleges, and university increased from 1,637 in 2022 to 3,025 in 2023, with 60 percent of beneficiaries being women.[52]

Engaging NEETs and marginalized groups proved challenging due to geographic, socio-economic, and cultural barriers. Remote rural and mountainous areas, along with inadequate infrastructure and limited digital connectivity, created physical obstacles to participation. Socio-economic factors also played a role, as immediate income needs often took precedence over education and training, leading individuals to choose low-paying jobs over furthering their education. Cultural factors, especially in minority or conservative communities, discouraged participation, particularly among young women. Moreover, limited awareness of available opportunities, low motivation from prolonged disengagement, and a lack of visible role models compounded these challenges. Inadequate support systems, such as career guidance and mentorship, further hindered efforts to engage and re-engage these groups. Finally, according to several interviewees, a mismatch between existing programmes and the realities of local job markets or individual interests led to disengagement even after initial contact was made.

On the other hand, notable progress was made in engaging agricultural sector stakeholders to identify skill gaps and training needs, moving towards a demand-driven education model. Collaboration between VET institutions and the agricultural sector was thus enhanced, with linkages established to better align training with employment opportunities. This was evidenced in the support shown for the development of agricultural extension services and the promotion of non-formal education. These efforts also facilitated the introduction of new services—such as advisory support and financial instruments—by both public and private business development providers within the broader innovation and business development ecosystem. As key drivers of this process, the institutional strengthening of the MEPA and its agencies—the Rural Development Agency and the Environmental Information and Education Center—was one of the key results of the VET project.

Overall, relevant milestones were achieved during this cycle, including the new Law on Vocational Education and the development of the VET Strategy for 2024-2030, which ultimately facilitated the establishment of the Skills Agency. The creation of this entity, along with the first sector skills organization (SSO) AgroDuo

established in 2019 in the agricultural sector to enforce VET reforms, indicated the potential for long-term institutional sustainability, as highlighted in interviews. In addition, the development of comprehensive databases, M&E systems, and coordination mechanisms across various sectors contributed to making institutional frameworks more robust.[53]

Yet, interviews also revealed several challenges to sustaining extension services in rural areas, along with educational offerings, given the dependence on continued funding from state budgets, donors, and private sector collaboration. The scaling up of initiatives in rural and minority areas was impeded by a shortage of skilled professionals and limited resources, which hindered efforts to maintain educational quality. With regard to the strategy employed under the EU-funded project "Creating better lifelong learning opportunities through local partnerships," interviewed stakeholders recognized the importance of private sector engagement in VET reform. The project mainly relied on two primary partners, Sunny House and the Skills Agency, yet the involvement of business associations and SSOs was minimal. The evaluation revealed gaps in the established mechanisms for effective collaboration and coordination between the private sector and the national VET system, which may have limited the potential for sustainability and long-term impact.

On the other hand, maintaining engagement with NEETs after initial contact and reaching marginalized communities, particularly in rural and remote areas, required a clearer and more realistic strategy. While advocacy efforts were made to include lifelong learning and NEETs re-engagement strategies in national policies, better coordination among government bodies and other stakeholders was needed to ensure effective implementation at all levels. The long-term sustainability of networks and cooperation forums remained uncertain at the time of the evaluation.

Despite these challenges, improvements in employment outcomes, agricultural skills development, and public-private partnerships illustrate the transformative potential of UNDP's support for VET in Georgia. These changes not only enhanced Georgia's VET system but showed results in terms of improved livelihoods and economic opportunities, as evidenced through interviews and site visits. Moving forward, addressing the remaining challenges in accessibility, sustainability, and integration with broader economic frameworks remains crucial to fully realize the potential of these advances in the VET sector.

Finding 15. Private sector and SME development. UNDP's contributions to private sector development and employment varied in scale during this cycle but were generally well aligned with the country's development needs. Efforts here focused mainly on promoting a cluster approach, SME development, skills enhancement, and fostering innovation ecosystems. Yet, challenges remained in scaling initiatives nationwide and ensuring long-term sustainability, particularly due to a dependence on external funding, limited institutional capacity, and slow policy development and coordination among diverse stakeholders. The shift to a more integrated, portfolio-based approach offers both opportunities and challenges for UNDP in terms of strengthening its support for Georgia's private sector development.

UNDP's ongoing support for private sector development and job creation focused on aligning more closely with industry and labor market needs to drive growth and competitiveness. Recognizing that job availability depends on both workforce skills and labor supply (a key structural challenge), UNDP tailored its strategy accordingly. A key part of the approach taken was to promote modern practices and foster resilient industrial clusters, aimed at integrating entrepreneurship more strongly and advancing the circular economy. For example, UNDP helped groups of related businesses work together more effectively, particularly in the packaging industry, where it supported the formation of the Cluster Management Organization.

UNDP also played a pivotal role in developing industry clusters in Georgia by promoting a cluster approach and providing technical assistance and capacity building. These efforts were aimed at enhancing the management and operational capabilities of cluster organizations and their member companies, particularly in the packaging sector. A focus was placed on adopting eco-friendly practices and modern technologies to improve market access and support sustainable packaging solutions. Through a matching grant scheme, UNDP facilitated significant investments in modernizing machinery, achieving quality certifications, and boosting operational efficiency within packaging companies. Different interviewees noted the pilot's success, particularly in the paper packaging industry, which saw improved trade balances and expanded access to local and international markets as a result. Key aspects here included gender mainstreaming to support women-led businesses, which made up a significant portion of the cluster membership, and a focus on improving digital competitiveness and e-commerce.

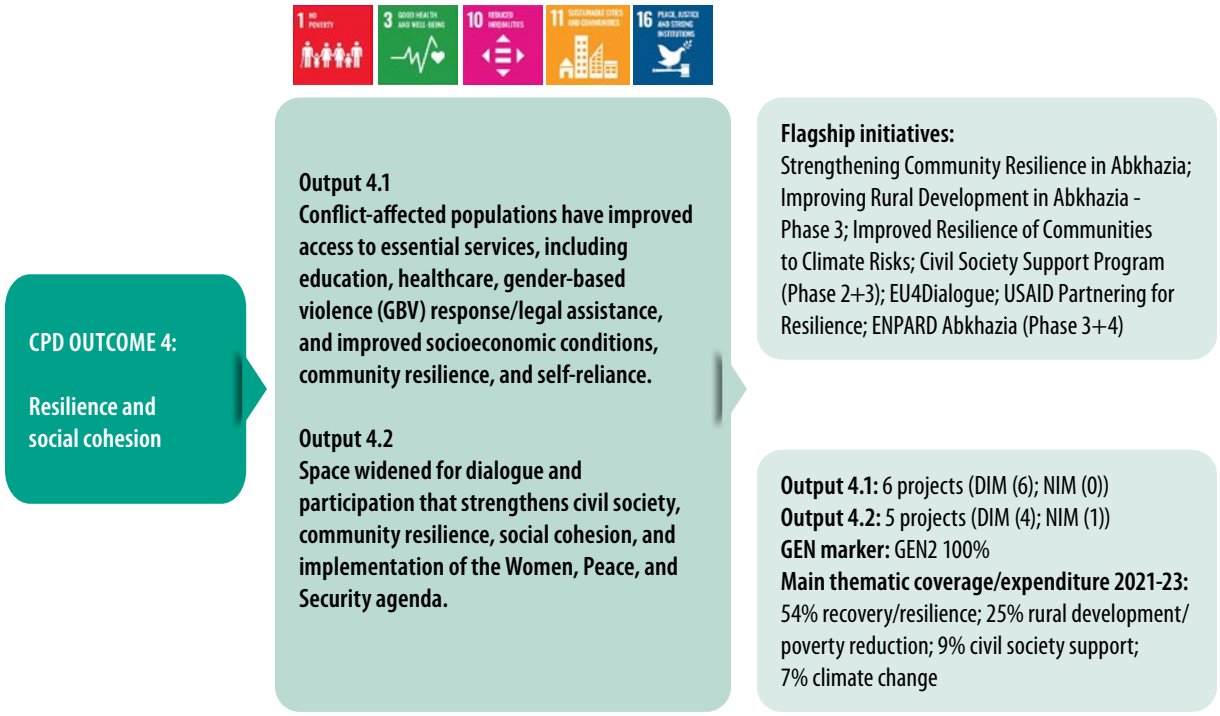
The establishment of the Cluster Management Organization based on the model of the PMAG was a key achievement in this regard, providing a collective voice for manufacturers and importers while fostering collaboration and dialogue among industry stakeholders. The PMAG actively engaged with national policymakers to advocate for measures that would support the packaging sector and enhance its competitiveness, facilitating the development of a more favorable regulatory environment and conditions for domestic and foreign investments. While the long-term sustainability of the PMAG and its initiatives was attributable to financial support mechanisms of the cluster members, replicating this model in other sectors remained a challenge that required additional resources and planning.

The project "Greening the Future," launched in 2024, aimed to support the development of innovation hubs and incubators, fostering an environment conducive to entrepreneurship and technological advancement.[54] This included initiatives to promote digital transformation and e-commerce capabilities among SMEs, with the objective of contributing to economic competitiveness by promoting energy efficiency and sustainable practices in local businesses.

Overall, UNDP facilitated increased collaboration among the private sector, government, and educational institutions, fostering a more integrated approach to economic development. At the same time, many successful initiatives remained limited in scope, due to challenges in scaling up—especially in rural and remote areas—stemming from funding constraints, slow transitions to domestic financing, and limited institutional capacity, compounded by geographic and infrastructural barriers. The policy and regulatory environment, though supportive, was ill-equipped to develop comprehensive frameworks that facilitate nationwide scaling. Furthermore, effective coordination among diverse stakeholders remained difficult on a larger scale. Finally, successful models often required significant adaptation before they could work effectively in different socio-economic and cultural contexts across Georgia. These factors collectively contributed to the gap that emerged between successful pilot initiatives and their broader implementation, highlighting the complex nature of scaling up development projects in the Georgian context.

Ensuring the long-term sustainability of programmes, especially those dependent on external funding, remained a concern. While there has been progress made in this regard, deeper and more widespread private sector involvement is needed to drive sustainable economic growth.

2.2.4 Resilience and social cohesion



Finding 16. Facilitating confidence building and improved access to essential local services. During the cycle, UNDP maintained its vital presence in the Abkhazia region, one of the few international actors operating in an increasingly restrictive environment. While efforts here facilitated communication and interaction between communities along the ABL, significant progress on key conflict issues was limited. Despite these challenges, UNDP provided essential support to local social services and community needs, focusing on sectors such as health, education, agriculture, and community infrastructure, and delivering tangible peace dividends amid access constraints, political sensitivities, and an extensive scale of need.

In the area of **peacebuilding, dialogue, and social cohesion,** UNDP remained the main international organization physically present in the Abkhazia region. This presence in a highly isolated and very restrictive environment continued to be widely recognized as vital by all stakeholders. By carefully navigating political sensitivities on both sides of the ABL,[55] UNDP was one of very few actors allowed to maintain a foothold and implement confidence-building activities in the Abkhazia region.

UNDP's key contribution in the Abkhazia region during this cycle was facilitating spaces for individuals and groups from both the region and the rest of Georgia to collaborate on shared issues. These initiatives supported cross-ABL cooperation among CSOs, youth groups, professional associations, and community leaders, focusing on areas like health, education, culture, and the environment. UNDP provided technical expertise, convening power, risk management, and flexible funding to encourage collaboration among willing partners. Despite a volatile and politically sensitive environment – marked by ongoing tensions and a lack of political will for reconciliation from the authorities in control in Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions – interviews and reports confirmed that UNDP effectively sustained and even expanded people-to-people

contacts and liaison activities. In 2023 alone, these efforts reached over 30,000 people, 59 percent of whom were women, according to the CO's results monitoring.[56] This underscored UNDP's capacity to cope with the complexity of the context, and emphasized the legitimacy and credibility of its work in these regions.

Assessing the direct impact of these activities on the conflict dynamics and inter-communal relations was impossible due to the complete lack of data in the Abkhazia region as a result of restrictions imposed by the authorities in control on the conducting of surveys and socio-political research.[57] The evidence collected for this evaluation was largely circumstantial, based on interviews with participants and beneficiaries of the confidence-building process. Overall, interviewees highlighted the value of the people-to-people approach as it allowed for constructive engagement of experts and community leaders in a situation where formal political processes for conflict resolution have not yet brought tangible results. The approach enabled divided communities to cooperate on issues of shared concern, break down stereotypes, and gradually restore a degree of mutual understanding. Different ICPE participants also noted that the focus on youth, women, and marginalized groups broadened the base for trust building.

The broader reconciliation process continued to be rather difficult and challenging in a context of protracted conflict. The persisting divisive public narratives and an increasingly shrinking civic space on both sides of the ABL continued to constrain trust-building efforts. Moreover, access to South Ossetia region remained impossible, not only for UNDP but for all other international organizations.[58]

UNDP's efforts to improve **access to essential services for conflict-affected and isolated communities** continued to have a critical impact on the population in the Abkhazia region. Confidence-building activities here were interlinked with the provision of social services and responded to the basic needs of communities. Meanwhile, the focus on inclusive, participatory approaches helped foster local ownership by actively involving communities in identifying and addressing their own development priorities. Projects in sectors such as education, health, culture, and agriculture offered tangible benefits and a sense of shared purpose. For instance, the ENPARD Abkhazia Region Programme bolstered agricultural livelihoods, improved food security, and rehabilitated essential facilities like schools and health clinics, enhancing access to basic services. The EU4Dialogue project further supported telemedicine, medical training, and cross-ABL cooperation on health issues, improving the quality and reach of care. Both initiatives prioritized vulnerable groups, including women, youth, and PwDs, ensuring that their needs were addressed.

Data on the real impact of these investments at the socio-economic level remained unavailable. According to UNDP reporting data, the number of conflict-affected people with improved access to essential healthcare services increased from 71,814 in 2022 to 73,114 in 2023, with 56 percent of them being women. Similarly, access to psychological assistance services increased over the same period, along with access to education, VET, and extension services for farmers.[59] Participants interviewed noted that most of these social service initiatives delivered some tangible peace dividends and helped lay foundations for further work on restoring the social fabric torn by the conflict. Despite these contributions, interviews revealed that the scale of unmet needs remained large, given the protracted conflict-induced isolation and the underdevelopment of the Abkhazia region. Social infrastructure and service delivery systems required long-term investment and capacity building. However, access constraints, political sensitivities, and donor restrictions limited the reach and overall impact of assistance. Interviews revealed that strengthening the nexus between humanitarian, community development, and peacebuilding interventions could play a critical role in breaking cycles of vulnerability in the region. UNDP could further leverage its role as an impartial broker to facilitate more systematic coordination among service providers and promote integrated, resilience-based approaches.

Finding 17. Implementation through CSOs and their strengthening. During this cycle, UNDP continued to be a lifeline for civil society in the Abkhazia region, prioritizing support for organizations on both sides of the ABL as a key driver of peace and social cohesion. It invested heavily in capacity building, technical assistance, and funding for CSOs. While circumstantial evidence suggested an increase in the number of organizations capable of promoting social cohesion and peacebuilding, significant challenges persisted, with UNDP still playing a crucial role in the provision of ongoing support.

UNDP prioritized strengthening civil society on both sides of the ABL, seeing that as a key force in promoting peace and social cohesion. Accordingly, it engaged with 160 cross-ABL, regional, national, subnational, and community-based organizations. Through initiatives like the Civil Society Support Programme (CSSP), Confidence Building Early Response Mechanism (COBERM), and EU4Dialogue, significant investments were made in building the capacity, connectivity, and resilience of CSOs. Support here included comprehensive capacity building, technical assistance, grant funding, networking opportunities, and platforms for collaborative action on critical issues. These efforts addressed a wide range of needs, with training mainly focusing on organizational assessment, strategic planning, and communications. UNDP also helped many CSOs to develop small-scale projects, provided necessary funding, and encouraged an emphasis on gender and youth inclusion to promote more equitable and inclusive development.

Quantitative data on the actual impact of this support for civil society were not available for the reasons noted above. However, there was circumstantial evidence based on administrative information gleaned from the CO, while qualitative information emerged from the interviews conducted for this evaluation. UNDP reported that the number of cross-ABL, regional, national, subnational, and community-based organizations with the capacity for social cohesion increased from 131 in 2022 to 160 in 2023.[60] The establishment of the Civil Resource Center and regional hubs in the Abkhazia region provided CSOs with a space for meeting, coordinating, and training opportunities. UNDP also incentivized the expansion of civil society in the Abkhazia region, with many grants also being allocated to CSOs with whom UNDP had not worked before. Furthermore, UNDP's support for building the capacity and connectivity of CSOs on both sides of the ABL expanded the channels through which constructive crossline collaboration and advocacy could take place.

Despite the progress made, civil society in the Abkhazia region continued to face significant challenges during the cycle, including political pressure, limited funding, and societal polarization. The space for independent activism remained constrained, with CSOs still facing societal stigma and bureaucratic hurdles, especially in relation to their confidence-building efforts. Furthermore, the brain drain of skilled professionals and scarce domestic resources have further weakened the sustainability of CSOs, while public mistrust and apathy remain substantial obstacles. These challenges highlighted the need for UNDP's continuous support to build trust and capacity within civil society, ensuring that CSOs have the necessary resources and expertise to sustain their activities in the long term.

2.3 Overall performance and cross-cutting issues

The following findings reflect the assessment of the CO's overall performance, highlighting cross-cutting aspects (i.e., implementation modalities, partnerships, monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning, gender, and the leave no one behind (LNOB) principle) along with key factors that influenced positively and/or implied continuous challenges and areas of improvement to achieve better results.

Finding 18. Partnerships, positioning, and outreach. In this cycle, UNDP maintained strong partnerships with government institutions, CSOs, and development partners, effectively leveraging its impartial position as a facilitator in the Abkhazia region. While it played a key role in donor coordination and civil society support, its engagement with the private sector remained limited. Growing political polarization created significant challenges for partnerships, the full impact of which was not yet known at the time of this evaluation. Despite UNDP's reputable public image and high visibility in Georgia, there was potential to further enhance the establishment of measurable targets to assess progress.

Close collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, including government institutions, CSOs, and development partners continued to be a cornerstone of UNDP's work in Georgia, facilitating the continuation of key processes from previous cycles and enabling progress to be made in strategic areas. The following points highlight UNDP's unique role during the cycle as an integrator, facilitator, and impartial broker of knowledge:

- UNDP operated in an environment where there is strong national ownership of reforms, offering demand-driven and context-specific support, with the capacity to understand local and national complexities and sensitivities. Many interviewees identified UNDP's unique position as an impartial facilitator of communications and partnerships in sensitive areas, particularly in the Abkhazia region. Holding such a position allowed UNDP to maintain channels of communication during the most recent developments and unfolding tensions at the national level, and to continue to implement confidence-building measures in a region where few international actors can operate.
- Partnerships and collaboration with diverse CSOs were essential to delivering the Country Programme, particularly in relation to the work and contributions in the Abkhazia region, where UNDP's role as the primary supporter of civil society ensured that necessary support, resources, and organizational strengthening were provided. Different interviewees highlighted the role UNDP played in creating a bridge between state and non-state actors and bolstering civil society's capacity. This included strengthened engagement in governance processes, providing oversight to the public sector, and advocating for policy reforms.
- UNDP leveraged regional programmes to promote cross-country learning, especially in the context of Georgia's EU integration. Through initiatives like "Mayors for Economic Growth" and EU4Dialogue, UNDP facilitated the exchange of experiences, joint action, and alignment with EU standards across the South Caucasus and Eastern Partnership countries during the cycle. These platforms have played a key role in fostering regional cooperation and advancing the integration agenda.
- UNDP's close collaboration with other development partners, in addition to its distinctive role in supporting donor coordination and acting as an integrator in several key areas, continued to be widely recognized by national and international stakeholders. Positive examples of UNDP's coordination role include multiple donor initiatives under the climate change framework, the arranging of donor support in PAR implementation, and coordination of ENPARD implementation among multiple partners (including the EU, FAO, and other donors).
- Engagement with the private sector during the cycle was limited, largely due to the sector's inherent weaknesses and resource constraints. These challenges hindered UNDP's ability to leverage private sector resources and expertise to benefit its initiatives. However, there were opportunities for collaboration, particularly in local economic development and sustainable business practices, which would benefit from a clearer engagement strategy and action plan.

While strong partnerships with national stakeholders were essential to UNDP's work during the cycle, the recent tensions and backsliding in some areas of the democratic reform processes (as mentioned in the context section of this report) required further attention. The success of reforms is highly dependent on political will at the highest levels. The October 2024 election was unanimously perceived by interviewees as pivotal with regard to the subsequent trajectory of key reforms, especially in democratic governance.

Regarding communication and advocacy, UNDP Georgia's "Partnerships and Communications Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2025" helped enhance outreach and efforts to influence the public agenda, particularly on human rights and social inclusion through targeted campaigns, media partnerships, and social media engagement. The CO collaborated with Euronews Georgia and the Georgian Public Broadcaster on civic engagement, and on the internationally recognized "Forest My Friend" story, which won the UNDP Digital Award 2022. The CO maintained a consistent output of 10-12 impact stories annually, while executing five to seven thematic campaigns. Throughout these efforts, UNDP promoted branding and donor visibility standards, ensuring that all communications adhered to institutional guidelines and donor requirements. The evaluation, however, identified the need for a communications strategy with clearer targets or benchmarks, which would allow for more effective measurement of its overall effectiveness.

Finding 19. Inter-agency coordination and joint programming. UNDP's joint programmes with other UN agencies expanded and inter-agency coordination and collaboration generally improved during the cycle. Yet, challenges remained in fully leveraging the UN Country Team's potential, particularly in optimizing the operational environment for joint programming and enhancing communication and advocacy efforts.

A key feature was UNDP's emphasis on joint initiatives with other UN agencies in Georgia. For example, the Joint Programme on Gender Equality, in collaboration with UNFPA and UN Women, allowed UNDP to tap into the specialized expertise of these agencies to increase efficiency and yield better results. Similarly, the Partnering for Resilience Programme involved cooperation with UNFPA, UN Women, UNICEF, and FAO in specific components. Joint programming of that nature enabled UNDP to achieve positive results in critical areas such as gender equality, human rights, private sector development, food security, and rural development.

The delinking process[61] brought gains, according to different stakeholders interviewed, the most widely recognized of which was the improved coordination and collaboration between and among UNDP and other UN agencies, as was also reflected in the increase in the number of joint initiatives. However, the pressure to "deliver as one" sometimes burdened the design and implementation of projects with additional requirements. To address these challenges, UNDP engaged in dialogue with the Resident Coordinator Office (RCO) and other UN agencies, advocating for a more strategic and selective approach to joint programming. This strategy focused on aligning each agency's mandate, expertise, and resources with specific development challenges. UNDP also prioritized strengthening bilateral partnerships with agencies like UN Women and UNFPA to foster more organic and complementary collaboration.

At the operational level, significant progress was made in addressing management and coordination challenges, particularly those related to the complexity of different operating and reporting systems and decision-making structures. Key improvements in this realm included the development and strengthening of governance arrangements, enhanced communication and information-sharing practices, and the introduction of joint frameworks and tools. These efforts, along with team-building initiatives, contributed to more streamlined coordination across and among agencies and improved the overall effectiveness of joint programming.

In the context of the post-delinking period, several interviewees suggested that UNDP could play a more proactive role in the inter-agency coordination process through platforms like the UN Country Team, outcome and thematic groups, and donor coordination meetings.[62] The evaluation revealed that bottlenecks impeding joint programming persisted and that some opportunities could have been seized more comprehensively to foster synergies that would secure better results and the achievement of the common objectives of the UNSDCF.[63]

Finding 20. Programme coherence and adoption of the portfolio approach. The Country Programme demonstrated great consolidation and internal and external coherence during the period under review. Efforts to promote the adoption of the so-called "portfolio approach" improved coordination in addressing multidimensional challenges more effectively and facilitated synergies across outcomes and initiatives. Yet, the full integration of a programmatic approach remains constrained by the project-based nature of fundraising, which limits flexibility and long-term strategic planning.

Compared to the previous cycle,[64] the Country Programme in this cycle exhibited greater consolidation and overall coherence. Three main factors contributed to this shift: long-term sustained engagement in key reform areas; the adoption of the portfolio approach with more interconnected and complementary interventions; and stronger operational collaboration.

- The adoption of the portfolio approach in CPD implementation involved the consolidation of initiatives into portfolios (i.e. different associated projects under one umbrella) which helped break down traditional silos, connect initiatives more efficiently across thematic areas, and foster cross-disciplinary responses. While individual projects continued to address specific development challenges, stronger linkages and complementarities were established to maximize mutual benefits. This led to improved communication and coordination among sector leaders and project teams, as well as better alignment with national policies. It also enhanced the CO's ability to address multidimensional challenges more effectively. For example, in the "Mayors for Economic Growth" project, this approach helped integrate various aspects of local governance and economic development. Meanwhile, in the "Greening the Future" project, UNDP mobilized expertise from various sectors and teams to integrate energy efficiency as part of an area-based development approach. In the "Inclusive Innovative Action for Private Sector Support" project, the portfolio approach helped in the integration of energy efficiency and circular economy principles into private sector development activities.
- UNDP's sustained engagement with the reform process across multiple programme cycles remained a key facilitating factor in terms of overall coherence and support for critical reforms, particularly in areas where it had developed a clear comparative advantage. This approach was especially evident in democratic governance and confidence-building initiatives, including civil service reform, parliamentary support, public service delivery, cross-ABL confidence building, and women's empowerment. With regard to environmental protection and energy, UNDP's focus on long-term projects—such as promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy in line with Georgia's Paris Agreement commitments—demonstrates this continuity. Notable projects like "Greening Economy" and "Climate Change Adaptation" (co-funded by the GCF and the Swiss and Swedish governments) as well as other initiatives under Climate Promise (Japanese–funded support for sustainable forest management practices to enhance GHG absorption and the adaptive capacities of forests) highlight this ongoing commitment. This sustained engagement has deepened UNDP's institutional expertise and strengthened relationships with both government and non-government partners.

- In emerging areas like environmental justice, which combines environmental protection with human rights and democratic governance, UNDP further demonstrated the benefits of its cross-cutting approach. This coherent approach led to the consistent integration of gender equality and social inclusion across the Programme. Furthermore, efforts to align Georgian legislation with EU environmental directives—covering areas like air quality, waste management, and extended producer responsibility (EPR)—highlighted the Programme's emphasis on cross-sectoral collaboration.

Despite efforts and strides being made to improve coherence, cross-fertilization, and systemic thinking, greater integration of the portfolio approach remained unrealistic. The evaluation identified several structural challenges beyond the CO's control. These included heavy donor dependence, rigid project frameworks, and complex reporting requirements, all of which constrained long-term, comprehensive strategies. Fundraising followed a project-based model tied to specific, time-bound initiatives, limiting flexibility. Moreover, the portfolio approach introduced operational complexities, requiring new skills, processes, and systems to ensure effective management. At the time of the evaluation, the approach was still under development, and the CO was seeking operational solutions for better implementation across different projects and sectors.

Finding 21. Programme delivery and resource mobilization. In the period under review, UNDP enhanced programme delivery and resource mobilization through diversified funding and new partnerships, executing the budget adequately with skilled staff and an efficient structure. Yet, challenges persisted in the shape of short-term donor funding and limited government and private sector financing. In particular, operational complexities arising from the new ERP system led to bottlenecks affecting responsiveness and efficiency. Meanwhile, beyond the CO's control, a greater focus on change management and better alignment of expectations with partners were needed to mitigate these challenges.

During this cycle, the Programme's delivery rate increased by 25 percent, highlighting the CO's ability to manage an increased budget, overcome operational hurdles, and expand its footprint. Notable progress was made in mobilizing resources and expanding partnerships, with larger project budgets and an increasing number of EU-funded projects.[65] The CO also diversified its partnerships, establishing relationships with Norway, Denmark, Japan, and the Czech Republic, while also accessing vertical funds like the GCF and securing a $27 million grant for a climate change adaptation project. This diversification improved the CO's financial stability and programmatic flexibility.

The CO successfully capitalized on emerging opportunities by proactively engaging with development partners, through demonstrating its value proposition as a trusted and effective partner. A key aspect of UNDP's prudent financial management was the strategic use of its modest TRAC-1 allocation of $350,000 per year for co-financing purposes and innovative initiatives, and the CO's utilization of TRAC 2 funding. This approach not only maximized the impact of available resources but, according to many interviewees, also strengthened trust and credibility with donors, positioning UNDP as a reliable and committed partner.

Despite these gains, challenges persisted, particularly due to UNDP's dependence on short-term donor funding (mainly from bilateral sources) and the limited financial contributions from the Georgian government and private sector. This constrained long-term planning and impacted local ownership and sustainability. While the Partnerships and Communications Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2025 outlined efforts to diversify funding sources, progress in securing government cost-sharing and private sector contributions remained limited.

While the CO continued to strengthen sound programme management and operational efficiency, this cycle was marked by corporate change processes that brought challenges. On a positive note, the substantial increase in the delivery rate demonstrated the CO's absorption capacity, while overcoming operational hurdles and expanding its footprint. The evaluation found that most projects demonstrated efficient use of resources, with high budget delivery rates (often more than 90 percent) and a focus on maximizing impact despite constraints. The CO's governance arrangements, risk management practices, and controls were generally found to be well-established and functioning effectively.[66] Nevertheless, the adoption of the new corporate ERP system and the introduction of the new centralized system (GSSC) added layers of complexity to previously streamlined processes, impacting the responsiveness and efficiency of execution. Despite the CO's efforts to streamline procurement processes in this transitional phase, the UNDP Office of Audit and Investigations (OIA) audit noted areas requiring further improvement.[67]

The evaluation confirmed through interviews that delays in procurement, recruitment, and fund disbursements continued to affect project timelines. This was particularly evident in processes led by third parties, where the complexity of national procurement regulations posed significant challenges, further compounded by changes in UNDP's ERP system. While this was largely outside of the CO's control, it affected relationships with implementing partners and overall operational agility to a certain extent. For example, the slow procurement process under the responsibility of the implementing partner delayed the "Sustainable Forest Management" project, which had a short implementation timeframe. Similarly, partners reported delays in recruiting key project staff and disbursing funds, which hampered project execution. Furthermore, the GCF project had only spent 38 percent of its budget after four years of its seven-year implementation period, evidencing limitations and capacity gaps among the responsible parties to conduct high-value procurement processes.

Operational constraints posed reputational risks for UNDP and burdened the CO in its ability to respond efficiently to emerging needs and maintain streamlined processes. Relevant lessons learned emerged from this process, as well as procurement processes led by responsible partners, around the need to foster dialogue, manage the expectations of national partners on the functioning of UNDP's operational procedures more realistically, and define what support is necessary from UNDP to mitigate risks. Considering these challenges, the CO staff remained a significant asset during this cycle, with a deep contextual understanding, strong relationships with stakeholders, and an expansive institutional memory. Its organizational structure and investment in staff capacity building also contributed to its operational efficiency.

Finding 22. M&E, learning, and knowledge management. UNDP established a comprehensive M&E system during the cycle under review, supported by a well-structured Country Programme results framework. The evaluation identified opportunities for improvement though, such as by ensuring all indicators have clear baselines and targets and developing more coherent theories of change. Furthermore, the use of monitoring insights to generate knowledge and inform decisions was limited.

UNDP implemented a comprehensive M&E plan to track the progress of its Country Programme and assess its contributions. The results framework of the CPD was well-structured, logically linking outcomes, outputs, and indicators. Another notable strength was the inclusion of gender-disaggregated data, which enhanced understanding of impacts on women and girls and supported targeted interventions.

The CO employed 10 project-specific M&E specialists who provided services across multiple projects. Most projects established robust M&E frameworks and adhered to regular reporting cycles, with implementing partners submitting progress reports and UNDP conducting periodic reviews. The introduction of logical frameworks in programmatic agreements required partners to report on indicators contributing to project-level results, ensuring a clear connection between partner activities and higher-level outcomes.

The evaluation identified several areas requiring further improvement in M&E and results-based management practices. Key issues here included the need for more precise outcome-level indicators, clearer data collection methods, and the establishment of robust baselines and targets. Moreover, the evaluation highlighted the need for more coherent theories of change at both programme and thematic levels, which would entail linking outputs to outcomes and desired impacts more clearly. Finally, the integration of user-friendly digital tools for real-time data collection and analysis was seen as an important step toward improving efficiency and responsiveness.

The evaluation also highlighted a crucial gap in post-project monitoring, as most M&E activities were concentrated during project implementation, leaving limited resources to track outcome-level changes once projects had concluded. Capacity limitations among CSO grantees and local implementers further affected the quality of monitoring data, with some interviewees noting inconsistencies in data collection methods.[68] Moreover, there was limited engagement from implementing partners and local stakeholders in the design of M&E systems, which reduced the effectiveness of monitoring efforts.

Knowledge management was identified as an area requiring more systematic attention. Although many projects delivered knowledge products, such as studies and training modules, the quality and accessibility thereof varied significantly. Furthermore, there was limited evidence that monitoring insights were systematically discussed and utilized by project teams with a view to strategic adaptation. This indicates a need to strengthen the feedback loops between monitoring, knowledge generation, and learning to ensure that data-driven insights inform decision making, course corrections, and improved programming.

Finding 23. Sustainability and transfer of responsibilities. UNDP employed several approaches during the cycle to ensure the sustainability of its results, including embedding practices within government systems, leveraging partnerships, and securing partner commitments. Yet, sustainability remained fragile due to a heavy reliance on donor funding and challenges in scaling up initiatives. Some barriers were structural and context-dependent, while technical aspects, such as planning and tracking replication efforts, influenced the extent to which initiatives were sustained.

The sustainability of UNDP's work in Georgia remained closely linked to the long-term nature of many of the initiatives implemented in this cycle. The following were found to have contributed positively to the sustainability of results:

- One of UNDP Georgia's key approaches was the integration of new practices, policies, and structures within existing government systems and legal frameworks to ensure sustainability. For example, in its environmental portfolio, UNDP helped the GoG to incorporate sustainable land management practices into national agricultural policies and regulations, accompanied by extensive capacity development efforts aimed at government officials, CSOs, communities, and beneficiaries. This deliberate focus on institutionalization was identified as a crucial factor ensuring sustainability beyond the projects' lifecycles.
- Another key factor in guaranteeing sustainability was UNDP's close and trusting relationships with key national counterparts, which allowed for a strong alignment with national priorities. For example, UNDP's collaboration with the Parliament and the Supreme Court was crucial in implementing new parliamentary oversight mechanisms and establishing a judicial e-case management system. In the area of confidence building, most ICPE participants viewed UNDP's support for CSOs across Georgia including the Abkhazia region as vital in maintaining a network of peace actors engaged in peacebuilding activities. Moreover, UNDP's partnership with the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG) facilitated the creation of a peer learning and capacity development platform for municipalities, which the NALAG now manages independently.

- UNDP also facilitated sustainability by securing commitments from partners to allocate resources for the continuation of key initiatives after the projects' completion. For example, the Civil Service Bureau dedicated staff and budget resources to implement new civil service reforms in the public administration sector. In vocational education, the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth pledged to integrate competency-based curricula into the national education system. Meanwhile, CSOs, such as the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA), incorporated legal aid activities into their core programmes and actively sought funding to sustain these services.

Despite these positive developments, sustainability remained a significant challenge, echoing the difficulties of the previous cycle. Several initiatives, particularly those involving CSOs and local development projects, continued to depend heavily on international donor funding, posing risks to long-term viability. Decentralized evaluations highlighted the lack of flexible, locally sourced funding streams for CSOs, especially in the Abkhazia region, where the donor funding situation was particularly restricted. Another challenge here was the absence of clear strategies ensuring the financial sustainability of initiatives beyond project lifecycles.[69]

While many projects successfully piloted innovative practices, the evaluation found a lack of consistency and clear strategies on replicating and scaling these initiatives to bring about broader adoption and future impact. For example, capacity gains in local governance initiatives were concentrated in municipalities directly involved in the given projects, without strategies for nationwide replication.[70] Moreover, limited engagement with the private sector—an important partner for scaling innovations—was noted in several decentralized project evaluations.[71]

The evaluation attributed sustainability challenges primarily to structural factors, including the country's limited fiscal space, as well as high staff turnover and capacity weaknesses within partner institutions.[72] These obstacles were further exacerbated by the volatile political environment and polarization, leading political leaders to shift their priorities away from governance reforms. Nonetheless, opportunities were highlighted for the CO to place greater emphasis on technical aspects of sustainability, such as effective planning and monitoring of replication and scaling efforts.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

This chapter presents the conclusions of the evaluation on the performance and contributions of UNDP to development results in Georgia, the way forward and corresponding recommendations, along with the CO's management response.

3.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1. UNDP's work in Georgia during this cycle was highly relevant and effective, aligning with national priorities and demonstrating adaptability. While its initiatives delivered meaningful results, challenges in scaling successful efforts and strengthening private sector engagement compromised sustainability and UNDP's value proposition.

UNDP's work in Georgia during the period under review was very relevant and highly valued. The Programme closely aligned with national priorities, supported major reforms, and demonstrated remarkable adaptability to the country's increasingly volatile political context. The CO made substantial contributions to the capacity building of national institutions and partners, while also maintaining a clear focus on vulnerable groups and responding with flexibility to emerging challenges. UNDP also promoted and introduced some innovative approaches across the four portfolios, but encountered challenges in scaling pilots and geographically focused initiatives, as well as in leveraging private sector potential. While maintaining a strong value proposition, UNDP should have more clearly defined the conditions for the sustainability of its initiatives. The latter should also include developing strategies and action plans to secure the necessary resources and commitments, as well as strengthening engagement with the private sector to effectively scale successful pilots.

Conclusion 2. UNDP contributed to democratic governance during this cycle through the provision of technical expertise and capacity building, achieving tangible improvements in various areas. However, broader political challenges limited high-level impact, with the greatest successes here seen in e-governance and citizen engagement. Fiscal decentralization and the scaling up of pilot initiatives remain areas of unrealized potential.

UNDP made significant contributions to democratic governance, particularly PAR, parliamentary development, access to justice, human rights, decentralization, and civic engagement. It brought valuable technical expertise, capacity building, and policy support, leading to tangible improvements in institutional frameworks, service delivery, and citizen participation. Despite the progress made, broader political challenges, including increasing polarization and stalled reforms, limited the overall impact. The potential for fiscal decentralization and scaling up pilot initiatives is still largely untapped, suggesting there is a need for a stronger focus on these aspects if governance reforms are to advance as desired.

Conclusion 3. UNDP's environmental and climate initiatives led to notable policy and practical improvements in this cycle. However, implementation challenges persisted due to limited institutional capacity, resource constraints, and coordination difficulties among implementing partners.

UNDP's environmental and climate-related initiatives led to substantial improvements in policy frameworks and natural resource management. However, challenges related to policy implementation, coordination, and resource constraints linger, putting the achievement of systemic, long-term change at risk. Efforts to expand PAs, improve community resilience, and promote clean energy were successful, but will require continuous attention to overcome these barriers.

Conclusion 4. UNDP contributed to rural development, vocational education, and private sector competitiveness in the period under review, but there are still challenges to overcome with respect to scaling and sustainability. To accomplish the latter, more focus is needed on expanding successful models, promoting incentives for stronger private sector engagement, enhancing monitoring mechanisms, and emphasizing inclusive growth strategies, particularly for vulnerable groups.

UNDP's contributions to rural development, vocational education, and private sector competitiveness led to observable improvements, particularly in job creation and align skills with market needs. Despite this, scaling initiatives and ensuring their long-term sustainability were hindered by difficulties connected with defining financing models, strengthening municipal support, and addressing infrastructure limitations. To have a broader impact, a consistent focus on expanding successful models and enhancing private sector engagement is essential.

Conclusion 5. UNDP's presence in the Abkhazia region was crucial with regard to confidence-building efforts, inter-community collaboration, and supporting civil society during the covered period, with visible benefits yielded in social sectors. Nevertheless, transformational change on major conflict issues remained limited due to political processes achieving little in terms of conflict resolution, as well as access limitations and the large scale of unmet needs in the region.

UNDP played a critical role in maintaining a presence and implementing confidence-building activities in the Abkhazia region. By creating spaces for inter-community collaboration on shared concerns, supporting local social services, and serving as a lifeline for civil society, UNDP fostered dialogue and cooperation along the ABL. While these efforts helped maintain communication between and among communities, meaningful progress on major conflict issues remained limited due to the stalled peace process. UNDP's approach here focused on inter-ethnic collaboration in sectors such as health, education, and agriculture, producing some genuine peace dividends and fostering a sense of common purpose among participants. However, the overall impact on the peace process was tethered by access restrictions, political sensitivities, and the fact that many needs in the region continue to go unmet.

Conclusion 6. UNDP improved its operational performance during this cycle through taking a more strategic approach than before and forging strong partnerships, but it faced challenges with regard to short-term funding and operational complexities. Furthermore, sustainability remains a concern, with funding still lacking diversification, and challenges in the streamlining of operations, knowledge management improvement, and the development of clearer scaling strategies.

With regard to operational performance, UNDP adopted a more consolidated and strategic approach in the cycle in question compared to previous cycles, by implementing a portfolio approach that helped to boost coordination. It maintained strong partnerships, increased programme delivery, and mobilized resources. But, at the same time, it continued to face challenges concerning short-term donor funding and its ability to leverage government and private sector financing. While recording high budget execution rates and staff demonstrating their competence, the introduction of new corporate systems led to increased complexity and delays in some operational processes. One particularly positive feature of UNDP's approach to sustainability here was the embedding of newly created structures and practices within existing government systems, which was achieved by leveraging close partnerships with every main and long-standing counterpart. However, sustainability remains fragile due to a reliance on international funding and challenges in the course of scaling up initiatives. Looking ahead, focus should be sharpened on diversifying funding sources, streamlining operational processes, enhancing knowledge management, and developing coherent strategies to replicate and scale up successful initiatives.

Conclusion 7. UNDP faces significant challenges due to a deteriorating operating environment, particularly in governance. The volatile context has impeded its ability to operate effectively, meaning that it will require exceptional adaptability and will have to make some shifts in its partnerships and approaches to navigate emerging constraints.

Overall, UNDP's performance during the 2021-2025 cycle was evaluated positively, even though it had to deal with significant challenges in a worsening operating context. The impacts thereof on its work on governance in particular pose a considerable threat to the long-standing efforts and successful implementation of the Country Programme. While the CO demonstrated robust response capacity, translating output-level results into higher-level outcomes became increasingly difficult, affecting the long-term sustainability of UNDP's achievements. In this evolving landscape, being adaptable, reassessing key partnerships, and having a strategic focus on managing political and operational risks turned out to be crucial for UNDP in maintaining its relevance and achieving meaningful results, proving its resilience and value in Georgia.

3.2 The way forward

A vital aspect of UNDP's 2021-2025 Country Programme was the challenging operating environment shaped by the country's uncertain political picture. This instability raises the risk of major donors withdrawing their support for government cooperation and partnerships with civil society being disrupted. In response, UNDP may need to fundamentally rethink its strategic approach. Specifically, it should explore innovative ways of supporting Georgia's development while balancing its long-term commitments with the practical realities of a changing political and funding landscape.

Although UNDP showed notable flexibility in the latest cycle, its ability to continue doing so might soon be severely tested. The political situation in Georgia has entered a period of heightened uncertainty, marked by growing concerns over the country's backsliding in several democratic governance reforms, and weakening commitment to its democratic path and EU integration aspirations. This uncertain political climate has major implications for Georgia's relationships with its international partners, particularly major development donors, which have historically played a crucial role in supporting Georgia's democratic reforms. Key donors have indicated that if the current political situation persists or worsens, they may cease all cooperation with government institutions.

UNDP's sustained work in the country, characterized by a strategic combination of policy advice, technical assistance, and grassroots partnerships, led to significant contributions in Georgia's democratic governance reform process in this cycle. Achievements in this regard included the adoption of key reform strategies, the introduction of innovative citizen engagement models, and the empowerment of marginalized voices—important milestones on the country's democratic journey. These accomplishments were recorded amid a rapidly evolving political and institutional context in which various factors hinder the pace, depth, and sustainability of reforms. Georgia has regressed on several democratic governance initiatives, with polarization, power imbalances, and vested interests clouding the political milieu. Tackling these challenges would require strenuous efforts to adhere to the EU's principles and meet its membership criteria related to human rights and democratic governance.

UNDP's work in support of democratic governance and EU integration could be significantly tested if recent developments continue in the same direction. Two drastically different paths lie ahead for the country, depending on how things play out in the aftermath of the 2024 election. One path would likely lead to a resumption of the eager pursuit of reforms across all areas and the EU integration process. However, the other would expectedly bring further restrictions, limited space for civil society, and possibly even the abandonment of Georgia's EU integration ambitions.

For UNDP, this situation presents significant challenges that could fundamentally affect its operations in the various following ways:

- Firstly, UNDP's work, particularly in democratic governance, has historically relied on strong partnerships with government institutions and international donors. However, the potential withdrawal of key donors from government cooperation poses a significant risk to this support system. This could lead to a sharp decrease in funding for UNDP projects across various sectors, disrupting ongoing initiatives and partnerships.
- Secondly, much of UNDP's work depends on partnerships with local NGOs in areas such as confidence building, gender equality, and disability rights. If these organizations are forced to close or significantly scale back their activities, UNDP risks losing key civil society partners essential to implementing its programmes. This is particularly critical for confidence-building efforts, including those in the Abkhazia region, which rely entirely on NGO involvement. Any disruption to civil society would directly and significantly impact this aspect of UNDP's work.

To remain effective, UNDP must adapt its strategies and engage with both government and grassroots actors while upholding its commitment to democratic values, as well as the protection of civic space and fundamental rights. The potential ripple effect following the October 2024 election could significantly impact UNDP's work. In particular, the CO may need to rethink its strategic approach, possibly reducing or redesigning key programmes that rely on donor funding and government cooperation, such as parliamentary support, PAR, and decentralization efforts, where UNDP is a long-standing leader. The changing political landscape might also push UNDP to alter how it engages stakeholders, especially if major donors pull away from government partnerships. That could mean focusing more on civil society partnerships, local capacity building, or finding innovative ways to sustain dialogue and reforms in a more restrictive environment. Moreover, UNDP's role as an impartial actor, especially in sensitive areas like conflict resolution and confidence building in the Abkhazia region, could be challenged if the operating space for CSOs becomes more constrained.

Looking ahead, UNDP must remain adaptive and politically astute, particularly in its governance work. Tailoring interventions to the changing context and finding new entry points for reform will be essential here. Strengthening the resilience of governance institutions, empowering change agents, and building broad-based coalitions for reform will also be key to overcoming political and structural barriers. A stronger focus on bottom-up approaches and engagement of local actors, while also continuing engagement with the GoG on reform priorities, should be part of its strategic rethink.

UNDP must also find a way to maintain long-term support for Georgia's development and democracy against the backdrop of a shifting political and funding landscape. Diversifying funding sources, including greater private sector engagement, will be crucial in that area. To endure this uncertain future, UNDP should enhance scenario planning, risk management, and the integration of resilience principles across its programmes.

3.3 Recommendations

Drawing on the findings and insights outlined in the previous sections, this ICPE sets out the following recommendations. The actions advised under each of these recommendations are primarily to be carried out by UNDP.

Recommendation 1. Strengthen Proactive Political Risk Management and Adaptability

Develop a comprehensive risk management strategy to navigate the complex political landscape, including scenario planning for potential political changes and their impact on UNDP's programming. Establish a dedicated risk monitoring process and conduct periodic political economy analyses. Form a dedicated task force responsible for continuously monitoring political developments and risks, with regular updates provided to the senior leadership. Proactively identify and cultivate relationships with key reform advocates across different government institutions, civil society, and political groups. Ensure that these champions are engaged in dialogue on UNDP initiatives and are equipped to support programme continuity and institutional resilience during political transitions. Reformulate programme goals and targets to reflect changing political realities and identify realistic entry points for impact based on the evolving political context.

Recommendation 2. Integrate a Cross -cutting/Thematic Portfolio Approach

Strengthen the portfolio approach by developing cross-cutting thematic approaches that align initiatives across different sectors. Design comprehensive thematic strategies, such as a climate change adaptation approach that explicitly links environmental sustainability, economic resilience, and governance reform. Establish inter-portfolio working groups to oversee these integrated themes, meeting monthly to synchronize activities and track progress.

Develop integrated results frameworks for themes that transcend traditional sector boundaries. These frameworks should define specific, measurable objectives that span across such frontiers, with clearly identified indicators to track progress. Ensure that these results frameworks are embedded in the planning and reporting processes of all relevant projects.

Recommendation 3. Enhance Strategic UN Integration and Partnership Diversification

Intensify efforts to diversify partnerships, with a particular focus on engaging the private sector. Develop sector-specific engagement plans with clear targets for partnership formation and resource mobilization. This could include creating a dedicated private sector engagement team and developing tailored value propositions for potential corporate partners.

Solidify attempts to attract government cost-sharing based on stronger value proposition and develop a government engagement strategy with clear targets for increasing contributions. Advocate for and pilot more flexible funding models with donors, such as outcome-based funding or multi-year programmatic agreements, to allow for more integrated and adaptive programming.

Recommendation 4. Enhance M&E, Knowledge Management, and Communication

Improve the M&E system by developing more coherent theories of change, ensuring all indicators have clear baselines and targets. Establish a knowledge management system that more effectively captures and utilizes lessons learned across projects.

Enhance the communication and visibility strategy by integrating more metrics to assess the effectiveness of efforts and activities in all areas, with a focus on measuring change and impact, including influence on actions, decision making, and behavioral change, while determining knowledge transfer and utilization. Given the need to foster broader visibility and dissemination at the national level, the focus should be on showcasing UNDP's impact more effectively, enhancing public engagement, and clearly communicating

results, knowledge and learning, and best practices to UNDP's key stakeholders including the general public. Set specific targets for media coverage, social media engagement, and the effects of public awareness of UNDP initiatives and joint UN programmes, to be measured using regular surveys.

Recommendation 5. Streamline Procurement and Partner Capacity Building

Overhaul procurement processes by conducting a thorough analysis of bottlenecks. Consider measures such as widening the competitive pool, improving solicitation documents, consistently applying evaluation criteria, and implementing digital tracking solutions. Create standardized templates and fast-track procedures while developing a robust supplier database with performance tracking. Strengthen internal controls through risk-based oversight mechanisms and establish clear key performance indicators (KPIs) for monitoring procurement performance. Manage the expectations of national partners more effectively by providing them with greater clarity about UNDP's procurement processes and rules. Implement systematic partner feedback collection and regular performance reviews to ensure continuous improvement. Create a clear and concise guide explaining in the relevant local languages (Georgian and Abkhaz) UNDP's procurement rules, processes, and timelines, specifically tailored for local CSOs, national government entities, and private suppliers. This should include FAQs and common misconceptions to ensure partners have a solid understanding of how procurement works.

Develop a regular capacity-building programme on UNDP rules and procedures for local CSOs and government partners, focusing on updated and adjusted UNDP rules and practices on project management, M&E, and financial procedures. Provide hands-on mentoring during procurement processes. Organize regular information sessions for potential vendors to explain procurement processes, evaluation criteria, and submission requirements.

Recommendation 6. Implement Comprehensive Sustainability Planning

Ensure that sustainability is considered from the outset by requiring every project to develop clear exit strategies and scaling plans during the design phase. These plans should outline how project outcomes will be sustained and expanded after UNDP's direct involvement ends, identifying responsible parties and necessary resources accordingly.

Develop a standardized "sustainability toolkit" for all projects, including templates for exit strategies, scaling plans, and post-project monitoring frameworks. For every project, establish specific milestones and performance indicators to track sustainability. Some such milestones and indicators should measure long-term impact beyond project timelines. Implement regular sustainability reviews at key stages of the project lifecycle, including mid-term and end-of-project assessments. These reviews should evaluate the robustness of the given exit strategy and the feasibility of scaling successful practices, with adjustments made where necessary.

3.4 Key recommendations and management response

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Strengthen Proactive Political Risk Management and Adaptability

Develop a comprehensive risk management strategy to navigate the complex political landscape, including scenario planning for potential political changes and their impact on UNDP's programming. Establish a dedicated risk monitoring process and conduct periodic political economy analyses. Form a dedicated task force responsible for continuously monitoring political developments and risks, with regular updates provided to the senior leadership. Proactively identify and cultivate relationships with key reform advocates across different government institutions, civil society, and political groups. Ensure that these champions are engaged in dialogue on UNDP initiatives and are properly equipped to support programme continuity and institutional resilience during political transitions. Reformulate programme goals and targets to reflect changing political realities and identify realistic entry points for impact based on the evolving political context.

Management response: Accepted

UNDP Georgia accepts the recommendation to further strengthen risk management throughout its programming. Structures are already in place for monitoring political developments and risks and producing political economy analysis, not least with the peace and development advisory (PDA) team supporting the UNCT and hosted within UNDP. UNDP Georgia also has well-established networks with all relevant stakeholders, including those listed in the recommendation, and will ensure the knowledge obtained through these relationships is distributed throughout the organization. Meanwhile, greater effort will be dedicated to ensuring that this knowledge is used to inform programming.

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
1.1 Regular political updates from PDA team shared with the Extended Management Team (Snr. Mgmt.; Operations Manager; M&E Specialist; Portfolio Team Leaders; and Project Managers). The Democratic Governance portfolio is also to prepare bi-weekly updates until the political situation stabilizes.	Monthly until the end of 2025	PDA; Democratic Governance portfolio; Extended Management Team		
1.2 Monthly programme meetings with the Extended Management Team to discuss risks and, as necessary, readjust programming.	Monthly throughout 2025	Extended Management Team		
1.3 Political risks are incorporated into the project risk logs, updated regularly, and raised at project boards/steering committees. In case of exigencies, they are updated more frequently on a needs-basis.	At least once during 2025; more frequently if required by the situation and the nature of the project	Extended Management Team		

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Integrate a Cross-cutting/Thematic Portfolio Approach

Strengthen the portfolio approach by developing cross-cutting thematic approaches that align initiatives across different sectors. Design comprehensive thematic strategies, such as a climate change adaptation approach that explicitly links environmental sustainability, economic resilience, and governance reform. Establish inter-portfolio working groups to oversee these integrated themes, meeting monthly to synchronize activities and track progress.

Develop integrated results frameworks for themes that cut across traditional sector boundaries. These frameworks should define specific, measurable objectives that span across such frontiers, with clearly identified indicators to track progress. Ensure that these results frameworks are embedded in the planning and reporting processes of all relevant projects.

Management response: Accepted

UNDP Georgia accepts the recommendation to strengthen the portfolio approach and ensure cross-cutting themes are better addressed.

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
2.1 Joint planning, implementation, monitoring, and reporting is ensured within the frameworks of various processes including the UNSDCF, the CPD, portfolio meetings (intra-portfolio), integrated work plans, programme meetings (inter-portfolio), staff meetings, CO meetings, etc.	Annually and, as per results, group planning process to be implemented until the end of 2025	Team Leaders; jointly with other UN agencies		
2.2 Monthly programme meetings with the Extended Management Team to discuss cross-cutting themes and enhance inter-portfolio discussion/ coordination. Regular LPAC meetings with the participation of the Extended Management Team (at a minimum), ensuring greater portfolio convergence.	Monthly, implemented until 2025	Extended Management Team		

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Enhance Strategic UN Integration and Partnership Diversification

Intensify efforts to diversify partnerships, with a particular focus on engaging the private sector. Develop sector-specific engagement plans with clear targets for partnership formation and resource mobilization. This could include creating a dedicated private sector engagement team and developing tailored value propositions for potential corporate partners.

Solidify attempts to attract government cost-sharing based on stronger value propositions and a more robust engagement strategy. Develop a "government engagement strategy" with clear targets for increasing cost-sharing contributions. Advocate for and pilot more flexible funding models with donors, such as outcome-based funding or multi-year programmatic agreements, to allow for more integrated and adaptive programming.

Management response: Accepted

UNDP Georgia accepts the recommendation to intensify efforts in diversifying partnerships, engaging the private sector, and exploring additional opportunities for government cost-sharing, not least due to the changing donor landscape in Georgia.

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
3.1 As part of monthly programme meetings with the Extended Management Team, establish a cross-portfolio task force to map possible entry points for private sector engagement.	Dec 2025	Extended Management Team		
3.2 Ambitious government cost-sharing targets will be specified and discussed with relevant government counterparts in preparation of a resource mobilization target table for the upcoming CPD 2026-2030.	Jun 2025	UNDP Senior Management		

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Enhance M&E, Knowledge Management, and Communication

Strengthen the M&E system by developing more coherent theories of change, ensuring all indicators have clear baselines and targets. Establish a knowledge management system that more effectively captures and utilizes lessons learned across projects.

Enhance the communication and visibility strategy by integrating more metrics that assess the effectiveness of efforts and activities in all areas, with a focus on measuring change and impact, including influence on actions, decision making, and behavioral change, while also determining the degree of knowledge transfer and utilization. Given the need to foster broader visibility and dissemination at the national level, the focus should be on more effectively showcasing UNDP's impact, enhancing public engagement, and effectively communicating results, knowledge and learning, and best practices to key UNDP stakeholders including the general public. Set specific targets for media coverage, social media engagement, and the effects of public awareness of UNDP initiatives and joint UN programmes, to be measured using regular surveys.

Management response: Accepted

As UNDP Georgia is elaborating the theory of change (ToC) which will inform the next CPD, this recommendation will partially be addressed. Deep dives into key thematic areas relevant to UNDP's next five-year plan will also contribute to more coherent theories of change in general. UNDP Georgia will enhance the M&E system by focusing on standardizing the design of programme and project ToCs, ensuring their alignment with the CPD ToC, and improving the measurement of outcome-level results across both programmes and projects. Considering the political uncertainties in play, assumptions which have otherwise consistently been fairly accurate for the past decade are currently being questioned. Hence, UNDP Georgia will focus on strengthening political economy analysis and internal processes to better inform programming (refer to Recommendation 1 above).

In terms of communication and visibility, UNDP Georgia has built a respected public image and a strong reputation in Georgia through impactful programmes and strategic communication efforts. In 2024 alone, despite a politically sensitive environment, the CO generated 190 communication opportunities across all programmatic areas and implemented nine public campaigns using a combination of digital and face-to-face tools. These efforts achieved significant public outreach, with the voter education campaign reaching over 1 million people. The CO agrees with the recommendation and will incorporate more specific quantitative and qualitative indicators into its annual communication strategy to further enhance impact measurement and strategic planning.

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
4.1 Design a programme and project management (PPM) capacity enhancement plan and deliver regular PPM sessions (focusing on project ToC design and alignment with the CPD ToC, outcome-level results measuring, etc.) for programme and project personnel.	Q4 2025	M&E Specialist; Extended Management Team		

Recommendation 4 (cont'd)

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
4.2 Finalize a framework for knowledge management (e.g. micro-narratives framework) providing consolidated narrative and quantitative data for the CO programme and projects.	Q3 2025, updated twice a year	Innovation Specialist/ AccLab; M&E Specialist		
4.3 As part of monthly programme meetings with the Extended Management Team, integrate a sensemaking process in overall programming and strengthen 'lessons learned' as a mandatory agenda item in steering committee/project board meetings.	Q4 2025	Innovation Specialist/ AccLab; Extended Management Team		
4.4 Measurable communication indicators will be introduced in the communication and visibility strategy in the new CPD 2026-2030.	June 2025, updated once a year	Communications Analyst		

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Streamline Procurement and Partner Capacity Building

Overhaul procurement processes by conducting a thorough analysis of bottlenecks. Consider measures such as widening the competitive pool, improving solicitation documents, consistently applying evaluation criteria, and implementing digital tracking solutions.

Create standardized templates and fast-track procedures while developing a robust supplier database with performance tracking. Strengthen internal controls through risk-based oversight mechanisms and establish clear KPIs for monitoring procurement performance.

Manage the expectations of national partners more effectively by providing them with greater clarity about UNDP's procurement processes and rules. Implement systematic partner feedback collection and regular performance reviews to ensure continuous improvement. Create a clear and concise guide explaining in the local languages (Georgian and Abkhaz) UNDP's procurement rules, processes, and timelines, specifically tailored for local CSOs, government entities, and private suppliers. That should include FAQs and common misconceptions to ensure partners have a solid understanding of how procurement works.

Develop a regular capacity-building programme on UNDP rules and procedures for local CSOs and government partners, focusing on updated and adjusted UNDP rules and practices on project management, M&E, and financial procedures. Provide hands-on mentoring during procurement processes. Organize regular information sessions for potential vendors to explain procurement processes, evaluation criteria, and submission requirements.

Management response: Accepted

Sub-recommendation 5.1 was implemented in 2023 as part of the management audit recommendations and standard operating procedures (SOPs) were updated accordingly. UNDP Georgia has introduced a 'lessons learned template' to collect feedback from each procurement case and to inform future tendering and the development of procurement methods and evaluation criteria. It is also digitally tracking the feedback collection via that same template.

Sub-recommendation 5.2 has already been implemented, as UNDP Georgia uses standard templates that are mandatory for each procurement case depending on the procurement's complexity. The procurement plan has clear KPIs developed for each procurement case and these are tracked afterwards by the procurement unit in the system. The CO also tracks its performance against KPIs on the procurement dashboard (Quantum Negotiations Statistics - Power BI).

Sub-recommendation 5.3 has already been implemented. Each procurement case conducted by UNDP Georgia includes a pre-bid conference for potential suppliers and partners. During the pre-bid conference, UNDP thoroughly explains all technical as well as procedural aspects of procurement in local languages and answers all related questions raised by potential bidders.

The responsible partners (CSOs and government entities) undergo harmonized approach to cash transfers (HACT) micro-assessment prior to engaging with UNDP, they are regularly (at least annually) subject to programmatic visits and financial spot-checks (above 50K), which ensures their compliance with the requirements of UNDP PPM and financial rules and regulations, as well as providing partners with valuable information about their operations and suggestions for improvement, where relevant.

The CO already implements hands-on mentoring during procurement processes on a daily basis. Standard solicitation documents offer comprehensive information about tendering cases including evaluation criteria, etc. Nevertheless, for complex cases, the CO conducts pre-bid conferences to provide additional clarification to potential vendors.

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
5.1 Ensure the CO obtains HACT compliance certification for the year 2025.	Feb 2026	Team Leaders, M&E Specialist, and Operations Manager		

RECOMMENDATION 6:

Implement Comprehensive Sustainability Planning

Ensure that sustainability is considered from the outset by requiring every project to develop clear exit strategies and scaling plans during the design phase. These plans should outline how project outcomes will be sustained and expanded after UNDP's direct involvement ends, identifying responsible parties and necessary resources.

Develop a standardized "sustainability toolkit" for all projects, including templates for exit strategies, scaling plans, and post-project monitoring frameworks. For every project, establish specific milestones and performance indicators to track sustainability. These should include milestones and indicators measuring long-term impact beyond project timelines. Implement regular sustainability reviews at key stages of the project lifecycle, including mid-term and end-of-project assessments. These reviews should evaluate the robustness of the given exit strategy and the feasibility of scaling successful practices, with adjustments made where necessary.

Management response: Accepted

UNDP Georgia accepts that sustainability needs to be considered more carefully in its programming, not least in connection with the recent political developments in Georgia. A more systematic approach may be considered to strengthen this aspect of programming in Georgia, particularly in steering committee/project board meetings. Although UNDP could advise partners to include post-project monitoring frameworks in their internal processes, it is beyond UNDP's control to ensure that these are followed up.

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
6.1 In the project design process, introduce detailed elaboration of sustainability elements in project documents including an exit strategy, sustainably matrix, and a post-project monitoring process.	Dec 2025	M&E Specialist; Extended Management Team		
6.2 As part of monthly programme meetings with the Extended Management Team, ensure that: 1) clear exit strategies and scaling plans are prepared for project LPACs; and 2) regular sustainability reviews are undertaken at key stages of the project lifecycle, including mid-term and end-of-project assessments, and listed as a mandatory agenda item in steering committee/project board meetings.	Dec 2025	M&E Specialist; Extended Management Team		

* Status of implementation is tracked electronically in the Evaluation Resource Centre (ERC) database.

ANNEXES

Annexes to the report (listed below) are available on the website of the Independent Evaluation Office at: https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/24788

Annex 1. Terms of reference

Annex 2. Evaluation matrix

Annex 3. Georgia's governance indicators

Annex 4. Country office at a glance

Annex 5. List of projects for in-depth review

Annex 6. Documents consulted

Annex 7. Status of country programme outcome & output indicators

Annex 8. Synthesis of key findings and main achievements

Annex 9. Performance rating

Endnotes

[1] See Independent Evaluation Office. 'UNDP Evaluation Policy.' Available at: http://web.undp.org/evaluation/policy.shtml.

[2] The last assessment of development results (ADR) and country programme evaluation were conducted by the IEO in 2010 (https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/3992) and 2019 (https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/16851).

[3] See the United Nations Evaluation Group website: http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914.

[4] The IEO's Gender Results Effectiveness Scale classifies gender results into five categories: gender negative (results have a negative outcome that aggravated or reinforced gender inequalities and limiting norms); gender blind (results paid no attention to gender, and failed to acknowledge the different needs of men, women, girls and boys, and other marginalized populations), gender targeted (results focused on the number of women, men, or marginalized populations that were targeted), gender responsive (results addressed the different needs of men, women, and marginalized populations, and focused on the equitable distribution of benefits, resources, status, and rights among other things but did not address the root causes of inequalities), and gender transformative (results contributed to changes in norms, cultural values, power structures, and the roots of gender inequalities and discrimination).

[5] Report of the Secretary-General on the Status of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia, and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia (A/79/892), 2 May 2025

[6] For the purpose of the present ICPE report the 'Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia' and 'Abkhazia, Georgia' are hereinafter referred to as 'Abkhazia region' and 'South Ossetia region.'

[7] In 2023, it ranked 1st worldwide in budget transparency (Open Budget Survey) and 1st in Eastern Europe and Central Asia for rule of law (World Justice Project 2024). It leads the region in Transparency International's 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index (53rd globally) and ranks 43rd in the Global Corruption Index.

[8] Regressions in governance performance were most noticeable in the dimension of 'voice and accountability' (World Bank Governance Indicators 2020 and 2022), as well as in the 'political pluralism and participation' subcategory, the 'political rights' category, and the 'freedom of expression and belief' subcategory (Freedom House 2020 and 2024).

[9] The bill requires non-governmental groups, and print, online, and broadcast media that receive 20 percent or more of their annual revenue – either financial support or in-kind contributions – from a "foreign power" to register as "agents of foreign influence" with the Ministry of Justice. The initial draft law was withdrawn following large protests in Tbilisi and strong international reactions in 2023 but was ultimately passed in an adjusted version in 2024. For more details, see Human Rights Watch: Georgia: 'Foreign Agents' Bill Tramples on Rights. March 2024.

[10] UN Human Rights Council, Letter of the Special Rapporteur to the Government of Georgia (OL GEO 3/2024); EU statement on the legislative package on "family values and protection of minors" (September 2024); European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission). 'Georgia. Opinion on Draft Constitutional Law on Protecting Family Values and Minors.' Adopted by the Venice Commission at its 139th Plenary Session (Venice, 21-22 June 2024); OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights 'Georgia. Opinion on two organic laws of Georgia amending the election code and the law on political unions of citizens in relation to gender quotas' (Opinion-Nr.: ELE-GEND-GEO/501/2024 [ELD/NS], June 2024); See also, Report 'The Human Rights Situation of the LGBTQI Communities in Georgia,' UN Women (2022); Human Rights Watch Report 2024.

[11] European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR): Georgia Report 2023, November 2023.

[12] European Parliament 'Joint Statement on Georgian government's decision to pause its accession to the European Union'. Brussels, 29 November 2024.

[13] International Monetary Fund (2023). Georgia: Economic outlook. Retrieved from https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/GEO

[14] In the World Bank's Business Ready (B-READY) 2024, Georgia is in the top three among 50 countries, along with Singapore and Estonia. According to Fraser Institute's "Economic Freedom of the World 2024", Georgia ranked 21st, and is ahead of 19 EU member states. Heritage Foundation's "Index of Economic Freedom 2025" ranks Georgia 20th in Europe, ahead of 7 EU candidate countries. Its global ranking is 35th out of 184 countries (a score of 69). As per the country's economic freedom score, Georgia is ranked as "moderately free" according to the 2025 Index.

[15] National Statistics Office of Georgia. Indicators of Poverty and GINI Coefficients 2024.

[16] World Bank Georgia: Economic Outlook. October 2023; Asian Development Bank: Asia Development Outlook (ADO) April 2023.

[17] The evaluation covers the programme cycle implementation from January 2021 to August 2024 and includes only events before 1 October 2024.

[18] UNSDCF 2021-2025.

[19] Budget and expenditure data extracted from Power BI and General Ledger and Country Office, extracted on November 2nd, 2024.

[20] The IEO extracts financial information at the project level from PowerBi/ATLAS and Quantum, including the general ledger. The information and figures can differ from those of the CO depending on the data sources (e.g. STREAM) and extraction dates. Last update: 2 November 2024.

[21] These included Georgia's National Development Strategy 2020-2025, the National Action Plan for the Implementation of the Association Agreement with the European Union (2020-2023), the Public Administration Reform (PAR) Strategy and Action Plan, the Public Service Development Strategy for 2022-2025, Open Parliament Action Plans, the Judicial Reform Strategy, National Human Rights Strategy and Action Plans, National Action Plan on Gender Equality, National Strategy for Youth 2020-2025, the Decentralization Strategy 2020-2025 and Action Plan, the Regional Development Programme 2018-2021, the National Poverty Reduction Strategy 2020-2023, the National Environmental Action Program (NEAP) 2020-2025, the Education Strategy 2020-2025, the Regional Development Strategy 2020-2025, the Strategy for Development of High Mountain Settlements 2019-2023, the Vocational Education and Training Reform Strategy, the SME Development Strategy, the E-Health Strategy and Action Plan, the Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy and Action Plan, the National Strategy on Climate Change (2019-2021), the Climate Change Action Plan (2022-2025), the National Strategy for Development of Statistics, and several others.

[22] Through the Fostering Regional and Local Development (FRLD2) project (see mid-term evaluation). Another example is the support provided by UNDP for the alignment of national legislation with EU environmental directives, such as on waste management and air quality standards, demonstrating adaptability in the face of emerging political and regulatory priorities. On climate and energy, UNDP supported the development of a long-term low-emission development strategy aimed at reaching carbon neutrality by 2050, aligning with Georgia's EU Energy Community commitments.

[23] This included skills for policy analysis, advocacy, and constructive engagement with government institutions.

[24] The EU's "Links between actions for the development of rural economy" (LEADER) initiative is a community-led local development approach that empowers local actors to drive rural development. The approach focuses on bottom-up rural development and integrating it with national strategies and institutions. Examples of its initiatives are ENPARD and Mayors for Economic Growth.

[25] For example, in the evaluation of the Fostering Regional and Local Development (FRLD) project, evaluators noted that "sustainability is not yet assured," and that capacity gaps in target municipalities and limited revenue streams hindered scaling efforts. In addition, successful LED models piloted in municipalities showed potential for wider adoption, but replication at scale, particularly in under-resourced areas, was constrained. As another example, in the Governance Reform Fund (GRF) project, there is recognition that while successful pilot initiatives were implemented, scaling up these initiatives faced challenges, particularly due to limited fiscal space for expanding reforms and the high turnover of champions within public institutions. Moreover, the Decentralization and Good Governance project reports identified gaps in sustainability, noting that much of the success was concentrated in specific municipalities or sectors, with limited strategies in place to replicate or sustain innovations across the country without additional donor support.

[26] UNDP Georgia, Country Programme Indicator Matrix. ROAR 2023.

[27] Over the past two decades (2003-2022), Georgia made notable improvements in online services and telecommunications infrastructure, with an increase in key dimensions of the UN E-Government Development Index, situating the country in the high EGDI group. United Nations E-Government Survey (2023).

[28] UN E-Government Survey 2022. E-Participation Index (EPI) rank: E-participation mechanisms that are deployed by the government as compared to all other 186 countries.

[29] Progress was also made regarding budget oversight. Compared to the 2021 survey, the score increased from 74 to 83 and Georgia improved its ranking from 21st to 5th place. International Budget Partnership, Open Budget Survey, 2023.

[30] See Annex 3 for details.

[31] By 2023, UNDP's assessments showed that the Parliament's capacity for inclusive and accountable lawmaking had increased from level 2 to level 3 on a four-point scale. UNDP ROAR 2021, 2023.

[32] Annual Report for the "Improving the Rule of Law and Access to Justice for All" project, 2023.

[33] 23.7 percent in 2021 and 24 percent in 2022 and 2023. According to UNDP ROAR data.

[34] For example, in the Fostering Regional and Local Development (FRLD) project, while partnerships were developed with small businesses and local entrepreneurs, engagement with larger private sector actors and financial institutions was limited. The FRLD and Disability Inclusion (Leave No One Behind) project reports mention the importance of private sector involvement but acknowledge the gap in systematically involving the private sector in development initiatives.

[35] The project "Preparation of first Biennial Transparency Report and fifth National Communication to the UNFCCC" with a strong emphasis on building institutional capacities, provided substantial training for national experts enhancing national data systems.

[36] The regional project "EU4Climate" for the six EU Eastern Partnership countries supported the establishment of an enabling environment by developing crucial climate policy documents like the NDC, LT-LEDS, and NECP. These efforts established a solid policy framework, aligning Georgia with international climate standards and the EU Green Deal.

[37] The Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN) program in Georgia, as a part of a global programme, designed financial solutions such as greening agricultural subsidies and engaging the private sector through platforms like "Forest Friend," showcasing innovative approaches to resource mobilization and stakeholder participation in conservation efforts.

[38] The "HCFC Phase Out" project supported ODS legislation and regulations alignment with EU standards. Training of customs officers, environmental inspectors, and RAC technicians on ODS regulations and practices was provided. According to the HCFC progress report 2022, mostly men participated in the training session and highlights the need for further analysis of gender roles and representation in other areas like customs and environmental inspection, and in the wider business sectors related to refrigerants and solvents.

[39] The "Sustainable Forest Management" project constructed and equipped three Business Service Yards (BSYs) in Mtskheta municipality, promoting sustainable harvesting practices.

[40] UNDP Georgia ROAR 2023.

[41] The "Enhancing financial sustainability of the Protected Areas system in Georgia" project focused on the financial sustainability of the sub-system of the PAs representing key biodiversity areas (KBAs) - as defined by the GEF, to demonstrate Improved management and financial effectiveness.

[42] The evaluation recommendations addressed the limited progress made in the diversification of sustainable financing options beyond tourism revenue, weak project design (including poor situational analysis and inadequate identification of root causes of barriers), unrealistically ambitious project objectives, and a lack of clarity between objective and project title, as well as the need for systematic assessment and potential reforms of the overall PA management system to improve effectiveness and sustainability, etc.

[43] UNDP's initiative was so large that it could not cover all 11 river basins simultaneously; thus, a phased approach was used, starting with smaller river basins in western Georgia – hazard maps, identification of communities at high risk of multi-hazards, basin-level climate risk planning, and community-based climate risk management.

[44] The mid-term evaluation highlighted: "There is a lack of clear exit strategy and concerns about the continued support for implementation after the project concludes. There are also significant concerns about the lack of a comprehensive approach to ensuring the long-term implementation of the updated policy and legislative framework."

[45] UNDP Georgia, Country Programme Indicator Matrix.

[46] Among other key operational level challenges were the lack of detailed landslide hazard maps due to unavailable satellite data, an insufficient legal framework for hazard mapping and zoning policy, limited local level capacity to understand and use risk information for planning, a need for further integration of hazard information into development planning, and low public awareness of early warning systems and risk-informed decision making.

[47] The total budget for ENPARD in Georgia, covering the period of 2013-2025, is €188.7 million (I Phase – €52 million, 2014-2017; II Phase – €50 million, 2016-2019; III Phase – €77.5 million, 2018-2022; IV Phase -€2.6 million, 2022-2025, in addition to ENPARD Abkhazia, – €6.6 million, 2018-2023).

[48] UNDP Georgia, Country Programme Indicator Matrix.

[49] This local development approach was introduced in the previous cycle and consists in engaging local actors in the design and delivery of strategies, decision making, and resource allocation for the development of rural areas. LEADER projects are managed by LAGs and each involve a small rural area.

[50] Gori, Dusheti, Tsalka, Khashuri, Akhaltsikhe, Ambrolauri, Zestaponi, and Telavi.

[51] Vocational Education projects phases 2 and 3 and the Modernization of Vocational Education and Training (VET) System related to Agriculture project, and joint interventions with the EU, focused on developing and modernizing curricula to reflect current industry needs and incorporate modern practices and technologies.

[52] UNDP Georgia, Country Programme Indicator Matrix.

[53] Inter-Agency Coordination for Rural Development - at both national and municipal levels for collaboration among different governmental bodies and stakeholders involved in rural and agricultural development; Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS). Under ENPARD-4, UNDP provided support to set up the IACS, which plays a crucial role in coordinating the management of agricultural payments and ensuring compliance with EU standards, thereby enhancing inter-agency coordination and implementation efficiency.

[54] The regional project 'Greening the Future, Advancing Rights and Stability: Spurring an Inclusive and Green Transition with Responsive Governance in the Eastern Neighborhood Region' is funded by the Government of Denmark and implemented by UNDP. Focusing on Georgia and Moldova, the $10.8 million initiative spans from 2024 to 2027, aiming to bolster environmental governance and foster a climate-sensitive economy.

[55] The administrative boundary line (ABL) refers to the demarcation lines that separate Georgian-controlled territories from the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These are de facto borders, with checkpoints and border guards.

[56] UNDP Georgia ROAR 2023.

[57] Sociological surveys are not allowed by the authorities in control in Abkhazia. The last such survey in Abkhazia was conducted with the support of UNDP, but it was strongly opposed by the authorities in control.

[58] An exception is the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which has been granted some access by the authorities in control.

[59] See Annex 7: UNDP Georgia, Country Programme Indicator Matrix.

[60] UNDP Georgia, Country Programme Indicator Matrix.

[61] The term "delinking" in the UN context primarily refers to the process of separating the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) system from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This reform, part of the broader UN Development System (UNDS) reform, aims to ensure the RC system is independent, more effective, and better positioned to support the 2030 Agenda.

[62] For example, the evaluation of the Fostering Regional and Local Development (FRLD) project highlighted ad hoc coordination with other donors like USAID and GIZ on local governance initiatives. While collaboration with donors was productive, the evaluation pointed to the need for a more structured, proactive approach in donor coordination meetings. In the GRF and PAR projects, there was collaboration with various UN agencies, such as UN Women on gender-responsive budgeting and UNICEF on child rights, which helped mainstream inclusion in governance. In the area of confidence building, UNDP led a joint programme funded by USAID which included contributions from UNICEF, UNFPA, UN Women, and FAO.

[63] Ideas related to this include the harmonization of business processes, pooling of resources and expertise, and development of common tools and standards.

[64] The 2019 ICPE noted that UNDP had potential for further integration, collaboration, and efficiencies between and among projects, especially in the governance portfolio, as well as for central and local governance initiatives.

[65] From 2021 to 2023, UNDP Georgia increased the programme delivery from $24 million to $30 million; the number of donors contributing over $1 million annually increased from three to five, and the number of EU-funded projects rose from five to eight, reflecting UNDP's successful adaptation to EU funding requirements, including participation in "Team Europe" initiatives.

[66] UNDP OAI Audit Report for the period from January to December 2022 assessed the CO's overall performance as fully satisfactory (the highest rating that can be awarded). May 2023.

[67] The OAI audit raised concerns about the effectiveness of market research and competition, especially for procurement transactions under $200,000, and highlighted the need to improve market research and develop solicitation documents. OAI Audit Report. May 2023.

[68] For example, in the GRF and FRLD projects, it was noted that while CSOs played a critical role in implementing and monitoring reforms, many faced significant capacity limitations. These gaps were particularly evident in their ability to generate and report high-quality monitoring data. In the Human Rights for All project, local implementers, including CSOs, faced challenges in effectively tracking and reporting outcomes. The Disability Inclusion (Leave No One Behind) project similarly highlighted that capacity limitations among local implementers, especially grassroots organizations for PwDs, affected the quality of monitoring data. While these organizations were essential partners in monitoring project progress, many lacked the necessary training in data collection methodologies and reporting standards. In the Stronger Parliamentary Institutions project, the CSOs engaged in monitoring transparency and governance reforms, often with limited resources and technical capacity.

[69] For example, uncertainties surrounding the future financing of LAGs within the ENPARD and concerns about the financial sustainability of VET colleges illustrate this issue.

[70] For example, the FRLD project had success with LED models in certain municipalities, but no clear strategies were put in place to replicate these models across the country.

[71] Limited engagement with the private sector was noted across several projects, such as Supporting Public Administration Reform and the FRLD, which constrained opportunities to scale innovations beyond initial pilot stages. The absence of private sector partnerships reduced the potential for expanding these initiatives to broader contexts, limiting their overall impact.

[72] This was particularly evident in the Stronger Parliamentary Institutions project, where turnover in parliamentary staff and the political volatility in the country affected the retention of trained personnel and the sustainability of reforms.

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