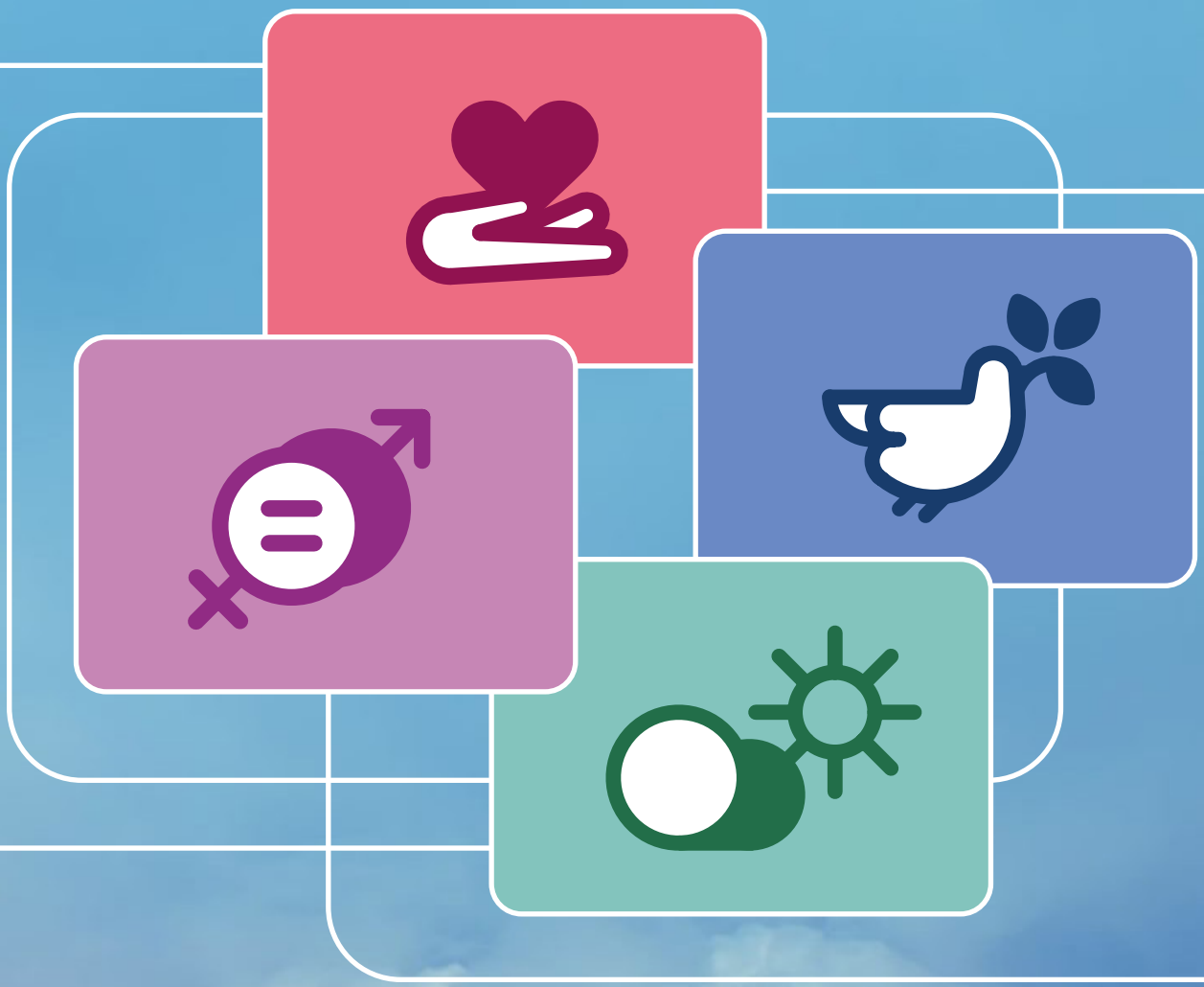
Independent Evaluation Office
United Nations Development Programme



FORMATIVE EVALUATION OF **THE UNDP FUNDING WINDOWS**

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Design: Phoenix Design Aid

Independent Evaluation Office
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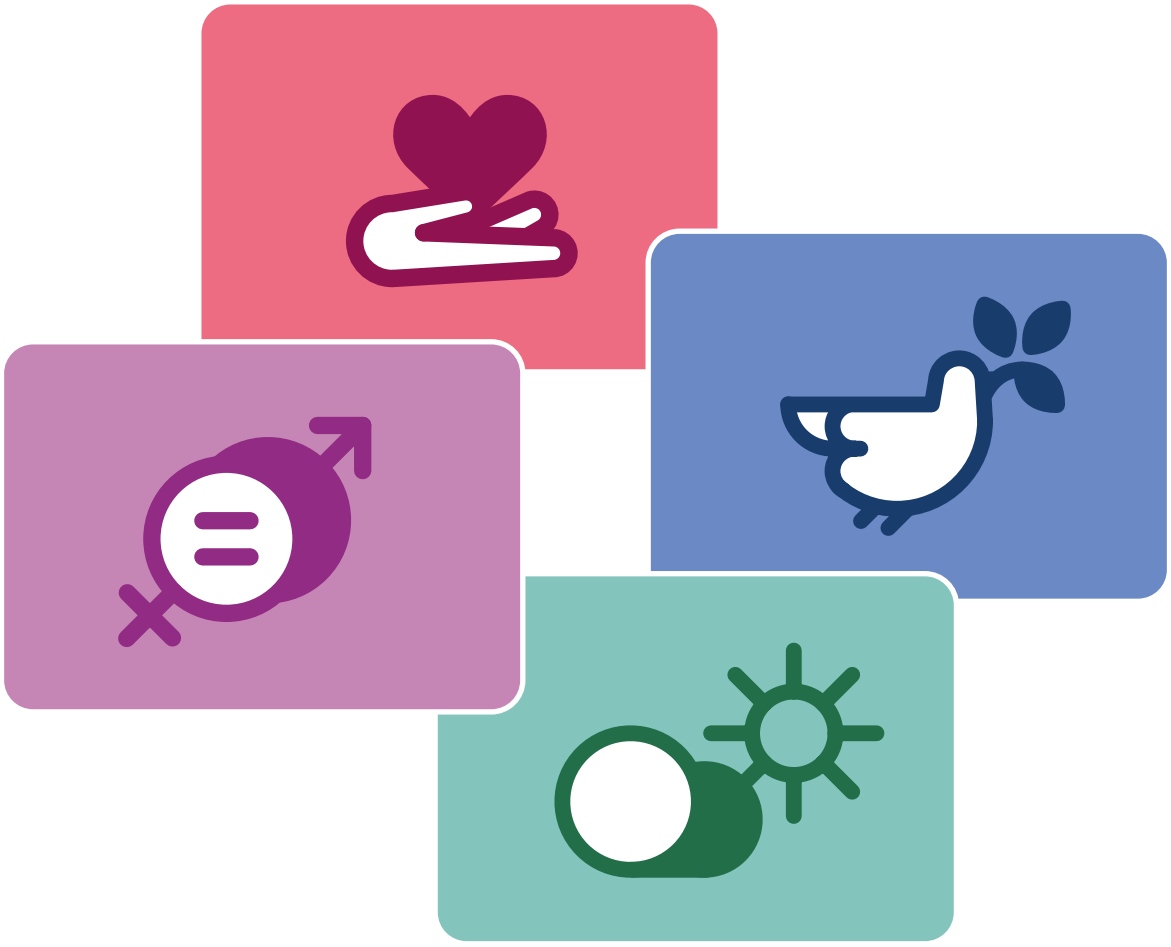

FORMATIVE EVALUATION OF **THE UNDP FUNDING WINDOWS**

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FOREWORD

The global landscape of development finance has undergone profound changes in recent years. While official development assistance expanded, contributions to the United Nations Development System remained largely flat, and its most flexible form of funding – core resources – sharply declined. Fiscal pressures, changing geopolitical priorities, and domestic constraints in donor countries have further tightened the space for predictable financing. As most resources continue to be tightly earmarked for specific projects, achieving strategic, coherent and agile responses has become increasingly challenging.

The 2019 United Nations Funding Compact, along with thematic instruments such as the UNDP Funding Windows, represented a valuable response to this context. They were designed to rebuild trust between donors and United Nations entities, offering more predictable and flexible financing in exchange for stronger coherence, transparency and accountability across the System.

These benefits have not fully materialized, however. Contributions have helped UNDP to achieve its strategic objectives, but the Funding Windows did not meet their financial targets. Progress has been limited, and not just in UNDP. Across the United Nations system, fully flexible core resources continued to represent only a small fraction of operational funding, well below the 30 percent target set for 2027.

As UNDP approaches the close of its Strategic Plan 2022–2025, this evaluation offers a timely opportunity for reflection. It comes at a pivotal moment for both UNDP and the broader multilateral system, when questions of purpose, relevance and adaptability are more pressing than ever.

The dynamics of development are in transition. Countries in the Global South are taking on greater leadership of their own development agendas, while emerging donors, private philanthropy and innovative financing mechanisms are reshaping global cooperation. As traditional aid models are redefined, critical questions arise: How can the UNDP Funding Windows continue to serve as catalytic instruments for change? How can they attract new partners while maintaining the principles of multilateralism and shared accountability?

This evaluation seeks to provide guidance and insight. By examining past experiences, identifying lessons learned and offering recommendations, it aims to help UNDP strengthen the Funding Windows as tools for predictability, coherence and collective impact. More than a review of numbers and targets, this report is an invitation: to reflect, to learn, and to chart a course for development financing that is responsive to today's realities and tomorrow's possibilities.

I hope that readers will engage with the findings and consider how, together, we can advance the Sustainable Development Goals through financing mechanisms that are strategic, flexible and fit for the challenges of our time.

Isabelle Mercier
Director
Independent Evaluation Office, UNDP

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FIGURES

TABLES

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BERA	Bureau for External Relations and Advocacy
BMS	Bureau for Management Services
BPPS	Bureau for Policy and Programme Support
CB	Crisis Bureau
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
ExO	Executive Office
FW	Funding Window
GEWE	Gender equality and women's empowerment
GMA	Governance and management arrangement
GMS	General Management Services
GPCR	Governance, peacebuilding, crisis and resilience
GPN	Global Policy Network
GRES	Gender Results Effectiveness Scale
HDP	Humanitarian-development-peace (nexus)
HQ	Headquarters
IRRF	Integrated Results and Resources Framework
LNOB	Leave no one behind
MPTF	Multi-partner trust fund
NCE	Nature, climate and energy
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
P&I	Poverty and inequality
POPP	Programme and operations policies and procedures
RBM	Results-based management
ROAR	Results-Oriented Annual Report
SOPs	Standard operating procedures
TEG	Technical Engagement Group
TOR	Terms of reference
TTF	Thematic Trust Fund
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WFP	World Food Programme

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Term	Definition
Allocation	Distribution of financial or other resources to specific projects, countries, regions or thematic areas based on strategic priorities, donor preferences, or institutional mandates.
Budget	Planned allocation of resources to carry out specific mandates, programmes and operations within a defined timeframe.
Contributions	Financial or in-kind support provided by donors, governments or institutions to fund development interventions, programmes or projects.
Core funding	Fully flexible, unrestricted funding provided by Member States to support UNDP institutional sustainability and strategic priorities.
Delivery rate	Proportion of the budget that has been spent or delivered in relation to the total allocated budget for a project or portfolio.
Earmarked / Tightly earmarked	Funds designated to specific projects or budget lines.
Expenditure	Disbursement of funds to acquire goods, services or works following the provisions of project/ programme budgets.
Flagship initiatives	Multi-country, strategically aligned projects introduced in 2024 to consolidate Funding Window allocations and enhance thematic coherence.
Flexible / Pooled / Unearmarked	Funds dedicated to a thematic window without restrictions.
Funding Windows (FWs)	The primary UNDP thematic funding mechanism for non-core resources, designed to offer flexible, softly earmarked, or earmarked contributions aligned with strategic priorities.
General Management Services (GMS)	Overhead costs in addition to direct project costs. These costs are incurred by an organization as a function and in support of activities, projects and programmes.

Term	Definition
Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Window	Window dedicated to advancing gender equality and women's rights by supporting transformative programming.
Global Policy Network (GPN)	An integrated platform established by UNDP that connects global expertise, knowledge and resources to provide responsive policy advice, technical support and innovative solutions to accelerate progress toward the SDGs.
Governance, Peacebuilding, Crisis and Resilience (GPCR) Window	Window dedicated to democratic governance, conflict prevention, crisis response and disaster risk reduction, especially in fragile and conflict-affected settings. It is uniquely structured with four sub-windows—Democratic Governance, Conflict Prevention, Crisis Response and Disaster Risk Reduction—allowing for soft earmarking.
Nature, Climate and Energy (NCE) Window	Window dedicated to addressing climate change, environmental sustainability and energy access.
Poverty and Inequality (P&I) Window	Window dedicated to poverty reduction and inequality mitigation that promotes inclusive growth and social equity.
Softly earmarked	Funds restricted to sub-themes, regions and/or countries (e.g., Conflict Prevention, Sahel region, South Sudan).
Sub-Windows	Thematic subdivisions within a Funding Window, currently used only in the GPCR Window.
Thematic Trust Funds (TTF)	Predecessors to the Funding Windows, issue-specific funds that were consolidated into broader Windows in 2016.
Third-party cost-sharing	Contributions earmarked for specific projects, often bilateral, with detailed reporting and higher transaction costs.
UN 80 Initiative	A UN-wide reform effort launched in 2025 to modernize the United Nations on its 80th anniversary. It aims to streamline mandates, strengthen coherence and improve efficiency to make the UN more agile and better able to address global challenges.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Funding Windows (FWs) are the principal UNDP mechanism for mobilizing flexible, thematic resources to complement declining core funding. This formative evaluation, conducted by the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, provides the first comprehensive assessment of the FWs, covering 2019 to mid-2025, with the aim of informing strategic direction as UNDP transitions to its 2026–2029 Strategic Plan.

The evaluation took place in the context of sharply declining global official development assistance, while the needs to achieve the 2030 Agenda remained immense. The UN Funding Compact sought to rebalance financing relationships by incentivizing flexible funding in exchange for greater transparency and results-based reporting. Thematic funds, including the UNDP FWs, offered a middle ground between 'core' and 'tightly earmarked' project funding, but faced challenges that this evaluation sought to uncover and address.

Key findings

The FWs were well aligned with UNDP strategic objectives, and had a broad geographic reach, supporting 135 country offices. The introduction of 25 flagship initiatives in 2024 enhanced thematic coherence but caused operational delays and confusion among donors and country offices. Limited funding for the Poverty and Inequality and Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Windows raised concerns about their added value.

Financially, the FWs stood at US$133 million in 2024, representing 3 percent of total programme resources, well below the 7 percent flexible funding target UNDP had set for itself. Contributions were heavily reliant on 15 OECD-DAC donors, with no success to date in mobilizing resources from programme countries, philanthropies or the private sector. Meanwhile, the share of tightly earmarked funds increased to 69 percent, undermining the intended flexibility and strategic agility of the FWs.

FW resources have catalysed innovation, rapid crisis response and additional resource mobilization. Many interventions were catalytic, but some funding allocations served primarily as gap-fillers for longer-term programmes, limiting transformative impact. Attention to Leaving No One Behind and gender equality has been inconsistent across the Windows.

Governance structures were in place (Steering Committee, Advisory Group, Technical Engagement Groups), though their agility, strategic oversight and donor involvement were moderate. but affected its efficiency Despite improvements in external communication, the multipurpose nature and unclear value proposition of the FWs hindered resource mobilization and donor diversification.

Lessons and conclusions

A comparator organization study, conducted as part of this evaluation, and conversations with donors, highlighted several lessons including: Simple and transparent messaging and structures build donor confidence; Evidence of project-level attribution and alignment with strategic outcomes need to be balanced to enable donor visibility; Co-creation and donor participation in thematic fund governance drive trust; Innovative, challenge-based approaches can attract non-traditional donors; Flexibility within boundaries ("smart earmarking") increases contributions without undermining coherence; and Strategic intent must guide allocation decisions to overcome internal politics.

The evaluation concluded that the FWs are a critical complement to core resources, but were underutilized due to unclear identity, excessive earmarking and limited donor diversification. Internally, the FWs were coherent with UNDP strategic plans, but attempted to serve too many functions, diluting their profile and complicating operations. Programme effectiveness was highest for catalytic, short-term interventions; whereas long-term initiatives were less suited to FW funding. Efficiency in operations and communications was adequate, but constrained by fragmented guidance and cautious resource mobilization.

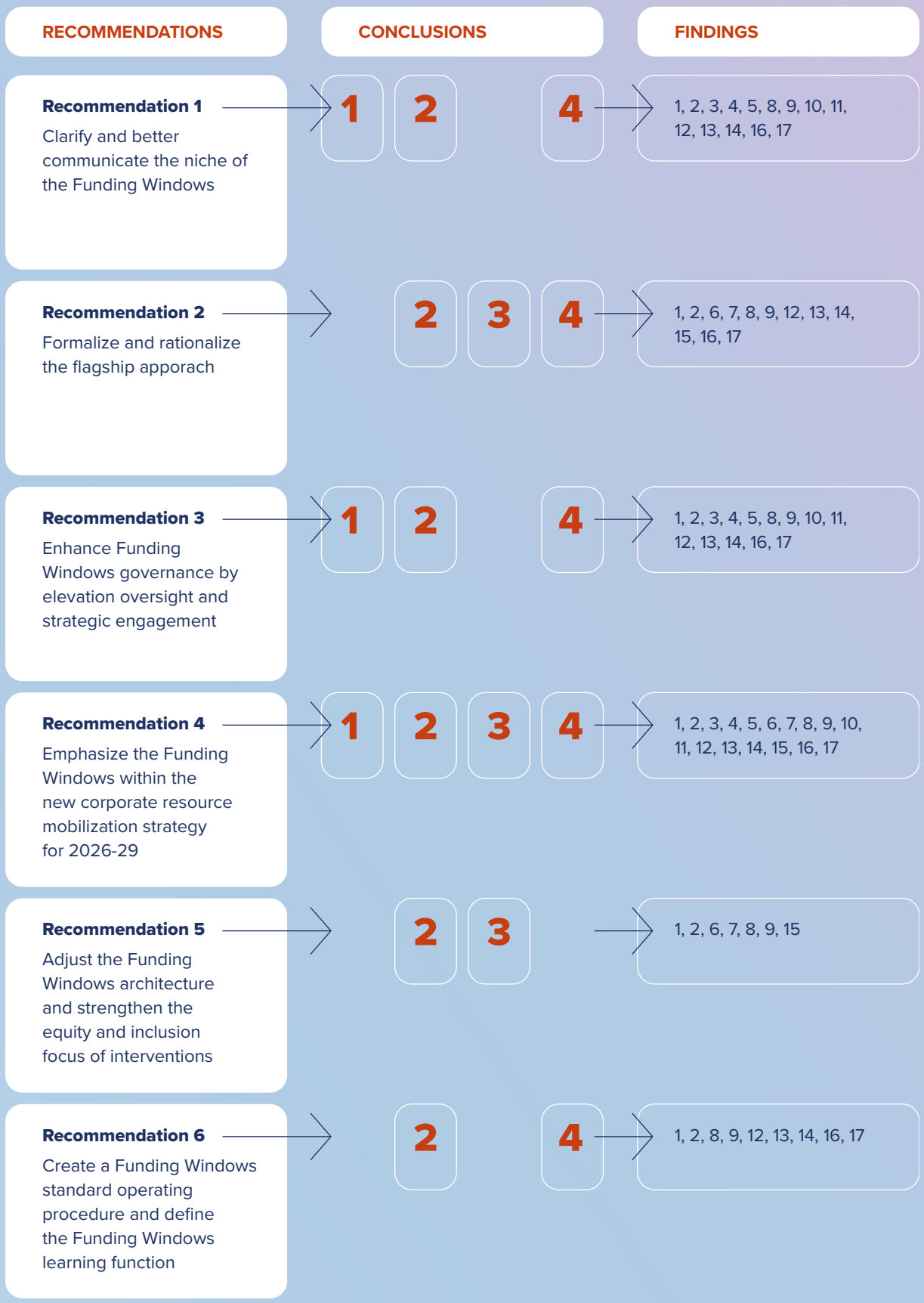
Recommendations

To maximize the impact and relevance of the FWs, the evaluation recommends clarifying and communicating their niche, rationalizing the flagship approach, and enhancing governance through elevated oversight and risk management. Resource mobilization should be prioritized and diversified, with a clear link to broader corporate efforts. The FW architecture should be streamlined, with reinforced commitment to gender and inclusion, and standard operating procedures and learning loops should be established to foster knowledge exchange and transparency.

Forward outlook

As UNDP enters a new strategic cycle, amid global uncertainty and funding constraints, the FWs must evolve to remain relevant, resilient and attractive to a broad range of partners. This requires a sharper identity, more inclusive governance, innovative funding models, and a renewed focus on equity and catalytic impact.

Pathway from findings to recommendations:



Source: IEO developed.

CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of a formative evaluation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Funding Windows (FWs), conducted by the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office (IEO).

The evaluation was the first comprehensive effort to gather and analyse evidence about the FWs. It aimed to provide the UNDP Executive Board, management and other stakeholders with an assessment of their strategic positioning, performance and organizational arrangements.

The findings, conclusions and recommendations generated by the evaluation are expected to influence the strategic direction of the FWs to sharpen their profile, enhance the catalytic effects of the initiatives they fund, and increase institutional efficiency in the context of the UNDP Strategic Plan 2026-29.

The report will be discussed at the UNDP Executive Board First Regular Session in February 2026.

1.1. Overview of the UNDP Funding Windows

The FWs were established in 2016, building on the UNDP Thematic Trust Funds (TTFs). They were expected to reduce the fragmentation of multiple TTFs through consolidation into four broad Windows.[1]

The FWs were conceived as the primary vehicle for voluntary thematic contributions to the work of UNDP, allowing UNDP to remain agile in a climate where core funding to the organization was declining, and most resources were tightly earmarked to specific projects through third-party cost-sharing agreements. In exchange, UNDP committed to providing donors with full transparency, strong oversight, lower transaction costs and greater opportunities for engagement.

UNDP Funding Window objectives

- Fill a critical gap of flexible resources for UNDP, to complement core funding – i.e., resources allocated by donors to thematic areas of mutual interest. This was incentivized by lower General Management Services (GMS) at 7 percent.
- Boost UNDP programmes by allowing an injection of resources to be deployed in a short timeframe, alongside technical accompaniment for integrated ways of working.
- Help systematize donor outreach by providing a single conduit to liaise with partners and channel contributions.
- In line with the UN Funding Compact, provide donors with effective oversight, greater coordination of contributions, and enhanced visibility.

Source: UNDP (2024) Funding Windows – UNDP pooled thematic funds.

In 2019, the FWs underwent two major change processes. First, an independent review was undertaken. In response, the FWs were redesigned to align more closely with the UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-21, including through the creation of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) FW in 2021 (see Figure 1).

[1] Trust funds were ultimately seen as fragmented and less conducive to integrated programming. Joint Inspection Unit, "Policies and Procedures for the Administration of Trust Funds in the United Nations System Organizations". JIU, Geneva 2010.

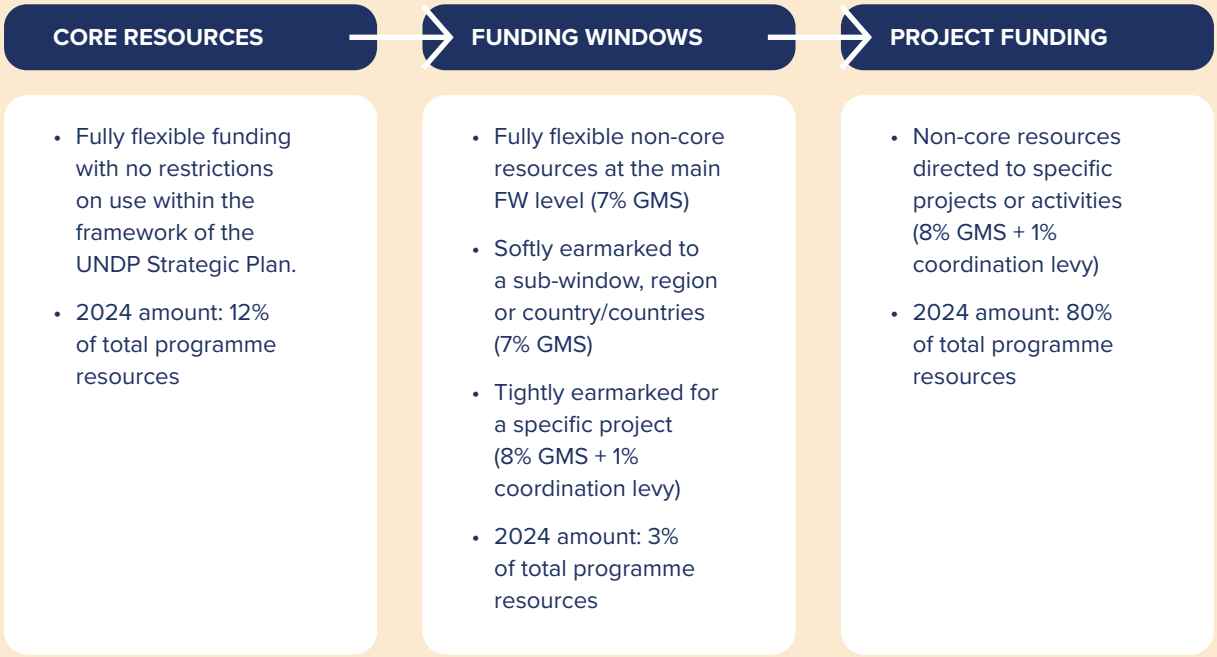
Figure 1
Funding Windows and sub-Windows

Source: Funding Windows Secretariat.

Second, to bridge the gap in contributions compared to the TTFs, UNDP opened the possibility to channel tightly earmarked resources through the FWs. To incentivize donors to provide flexible contributions, UNDP applied a lower General Management Services (GMS) fee of 7 percent to fully flexible contributions to a main FW, or softly earmarked contributions to a sub-window, region or country. These changes were intended to enhance coherence and counter a continuous shift towards the least flexible funding sources (see Figure 2).

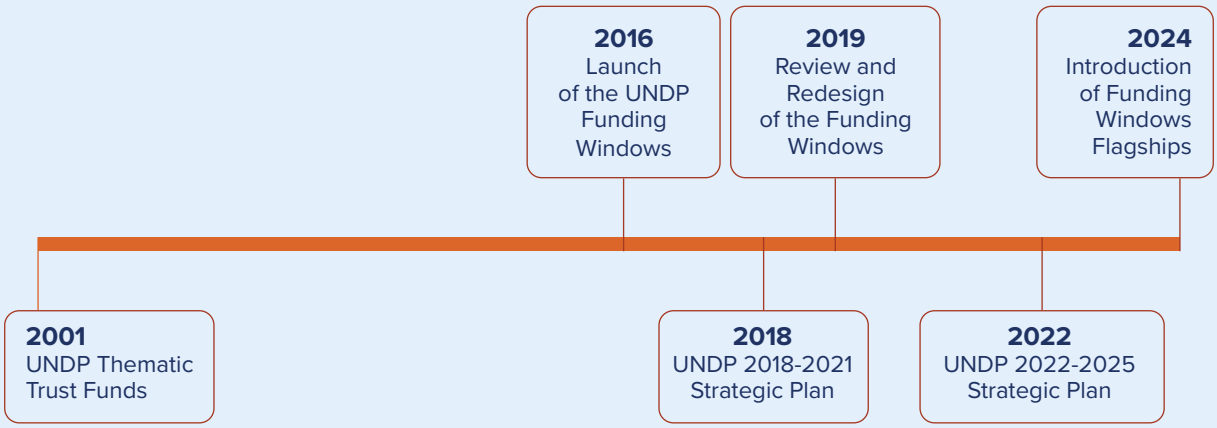
In 2024, UNDP introduced FW flagships (see Figure 3). These were either derived from UNDP global and regional projects, or newly established to enhance coherent programming and UNDP global strategic positioning and thought leadership. This marked the beginning of a shift – from allocating flexible funds to country, regional or global projects, to aligning FW allocations with selected global priorities.

Figure 2
Positioning of the Funding Windows within UNDP funding channels (from most to least flexible)



Source: IEO developed. Financial data from UNDP 2022-25 Strategic Plan Integrated Results and Resources Framework. Project funding includes third party cost sharing, vertical funds and government cost sharing.

Figure 3
Evolution of the Funding Windows



Source: IEO developed.

Funding Window governance and management arrangements (GMAs)

Throughout the period under review, the FWs have been overseen by an internal high-level Steering Committee, convening annually, composed of Deputy Directors and chaired by the Associate Administrator.

The FWs were jointly managed by the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS), Crisis Bureau (CB), Bureau for External Relations and Advocacy (BERA) and Bureau for Management Services (BMS), in coordination with the regional bureaux. These units were responsible for core functions, including partner engagement and resource mobilization, fund allocation and administration and support for programme implementation. The FW Secretariat, located in the BPPS and CB Joint Directorate, supported operational coordination, including preparing calls for proposals, fund disbursement, financial and results reporting, external communications and organizing meetings.

Each FW was accompanied by a Global Policy Network (GPN) substantive lead: BPPS managed the Nature, Climate and Energy (NCE), Poverty and Inequality (P&I) and GEWE FWs; and BPPS and CB co-managed the GPCR FW (see also Figure 1).[2] GPN experts provided technical advice.

An external Advisory Group, chaired by the BERA Deputy Director, was composed of contributing and potential FW partners. This group met annually and, starting in 2025, is expected to meet twice per year. Additionally, UNDP put in place one Technical Engagement Group (TEG) per FW, to serve as platforms for technical dialogue between UNDP and partner technical experts.[3]

[2] BPPS for the democratic governance sub-window; CB for the crisis response, conflict prevention and sustaining peace, and disaster risk reduction and resilience sub-windows.

[3] In 2022, participation in the TEGs was expanded to include non-contributing Member States.

1.2. Evaluation scope, approach and methodology

The evaluation assessed the coherence, effectiveness and efficiency of the FWs at global, regional and country levels. It covers the period 2019 to mid-2025, with some attention to earlier strategic decisions for background (see Annex 1 for the Evaluation Terms of Reference). Within the limitations acknowledged below, the evaluation:

- Assessed the appropriateness and coherence of the UNDP corporate approach to thematic funding, and compared the FWs with other agency-specific (UN and beyond) and inter-agency UN thematic funds.
- Traced the contribution of the FWs to results in the achievement of the UNDP Strategic Plan 2022-25 Directions of Change (structural transformation, leave no one behind [LNOB], resilience), and gender equality.
- Assessed the adequacy of institutional systems and capacity in support of the FWs, including governance, partner engagement, resource mobilization, reporting, learning and external communications.
- Determined avenues for adaptation and/or expansion of the FWs.
- Provided forward-looking lessons and recommendations.

Evaluation analytical framework, approach and questions

The evaluation was designed to be formative (with some summative elements), and focused on learning. It occurred in the first half of 2025, as the FWs were evolving towards clearer thematic identity (rollout of the flagships) and the funding landscape for international development was in significant turmoil.

All IEO evaluations follow the same rigorous analytical steps to derive findings, conclusions, lessons and recommendations. Evaluation reports are peer-reviewed both internally and externally, and require a management response by UNDP. For this evaluation, an Evaluation Learning Group was also formed, composed of UNDP staff, who gathered at relevant points to provide feedback on the process, emerging findings and areas for recommendations.[4] IEO also ensured the engagement of the FW Advisory Group at pertinent moments of the process.

The evaluation was guided by questions clustered around three criteria: coherence (internal and external); effectiveness; and efficiency. In the absence of published impact pathways for the FWs, it reconstructed a theory of change that illustrated the intended chain of change, and provided a basis for assessment (see Annex 3 and 4). The principal evaluation questions are set out in Table 1 below.[5]

[4] See Annex 2 for the ToR for the Evaluation Learning Group.

[5] See Annex 3 for the evaluation sub-questions.

Table 1
Principal evaluation questions

Evaluation Criterion	Principal Evaluation Questions
Internal Coherence	How clearly were the FWs organized? How internally coherent were the FWs with UNDP evolving strategic plans and priorities, including programme integration and systems strengthening and architecture?
External Coherence	How compatible were the FWs with the UN Funding Compact and to what extent has the pooled financing mechanism of the FWs contributed to increased UN coherence? How did the FWs compare to other single-agency and inter-agency thematic funds?
Effectiveness	To what extent were results achieved through FW support, for both intended and unintended stakeholders, and how do they relate to UNDP directions of change? What were the main factors influencing budget utilization and the achievement or non-achievement of results? How did the FWs support catalytic results, e.g., further resource mobilization (short-term), inclusive and transformative programming (medium-term) and fostering systemic change (long-term)?
Efficiency	Has UNDP made the best use of scarce resources to expeditiously promote and manage the FWs, including with regard to oversight, monitoring and learning, operations and communications? How has accepting earmarked funding affected the efficiency of the FWs and what were the implications for coherence and effectiveness (if any)?

Source: IEO developed.

Methods for data collection and analysis

The evaluation used mixed methods to explore three lines of inquiry: (i) an organizational assessment examined the internal coherence and efficiency of the FWs; (ii) a set of 11 country studies, of which five were selected for process tracing "deep dives",[6] shed light on the catalytic effects of the FWs and their contribution to programmatic results, covering the effectiveness and efficiency criteria;[7] and (iii) a landscape analysis compared the FWs against thematic funds or similar mechanisms of six other international agencies (UN and beyond) as well as three UN inter-agency pooled funds.[8] At the same time, a foresight module contextualised the FWs in the evolving political and funding landscape (external coherence) (see Annex 5 for further details).

To assess the results achieved by FW-supported initiatives at country level, a purposive sample was drawn in consultation with the Evaluation Learning Group and FW Secretariat. Countries with high potential for yielding transferable lessons were prioritized, and consideration was given to regional spread, variety in development settings, and the volume and nature of FW resources. Table 2 shows the selected 11 cases, with further details presented in Annex 5.

[6] Process tracing is a generative approach to causality, which helps systematize textual and numeric data gained from interviews, document review and other sources into trackable mechanisms. The overarching claim tested through process tracing was that the FWs yield catalytic results. The five countries selected for process tracing were Ethiopia, Tunisia, Sri Lanka, Ukraine and Moldova.

[7] Each study traced an initiative through its life cycle from conceptualization and resource mobilization, funds allocation, operationalization, implementation, monitoring and learning, reporting and communicating, and considered feedback loops.

[8] UNFPA, UNICEF, UNEP, WFP, Gates Grand Challenges, World Bank (single agency); Joint SDG Fund, Migration MPTF, Global Disability Fund (inter-agency).

Table 2
Countries sampled for process tracing and desk review, by UNDP region and Funding Window

	Focus Country for Process Tracing	Desk Review Cases
Africa	Ethiopia (GPCR, NCE and GEWE FWs)	Burkina Faso (GPCR FW) Africa Borderlands Centre (GPCR FW)
Arab States	Tunisia (GPCR and NCE FWs)	Somalia (GPCR FW)
Asia and the Pacific	Sri Lanka (GPCR, NCE and P&I FW)	Viet Nam (NCE and P&I FWs)
Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States	Ukraine (GPCR, NCE and GEWE FWs) Moldova (GPCR FW)	-
Latin America and the Caribbean	-	Argentina (NCE and P&I FWs) Bolivia (GPCR and P&I FWs)

Source: IEO developed.

The evaluation findings were informed by a mix of quantitative and qualitative data sources, which included foresight workshops, queries to corporate systems, extensive document review, key informant interviews and focus groups, and a country office questionnaire (for the country studies). Specifically, the evaluation findings were informed by the views and insights of 320 individuals, of which the majority (208) were UNDP staff and the remainder external stakeholders.[9] All were interviewed remotely. The share of women interviewed in each category ranged from 44 percent to 57 percent (See Annex 10 for further details).

The evaluation applied multiple retrospective and prospective data analysis methods, including:

- Qualitative content analysis to identify underlying themes and meanings.
- Theory-based approaches (notably process tracing) to assess actual versus intended results and enabling/ hindering factors.
- An AI-enabled synthesis of past evaluative evidence of FW contributions, to map thematic and geographic patterns.[10]
- Foresight tools, including an analysis of trends, plans, projections and obstacles, to understand the funding landscape and provide a forward-looking perspective.
- A gender and LNOB analysis, drawing on the IEO Gender Results Effectiveness Scale (GRES) and UNDP Five-Factor Framework for LNOB, to uncover the FW contributions to addressing gender relations and questions of marginalization.

Finally, evidence was compared and contrasted, and patterns were synthesised into key findings, which were distilled into lessons, high-level conclusions and recommendations aimed at improving current practice and informing future strategic direction. Recommendations were refined through exchange with stakeholders, in the spirit of co-creation.

[9] UNDP: HQ 78; regional bureaux/offices 32; country offices 98. External stakeholders: staff members of comparators, foundations and external experts 42; current and potential donors 27; government counterparts, civil society actors and rights holders at country level 43.

[10] The IEO Artificial Intelligence for Development Analytics (AIDA) system identified 87 relevant UNDP evaluation reports published between 2019 to 2024 based on keyword searches, which were then summarized by region using UNDP Microsoft CoPilot. The summaries were verified against the original sources, complemented by human review, and triangulated with other data sources.

Limitations and mitigation

Limited evaluability: Evaluability was assessed as moderate-to-low, due to the absence of higher-level theories of change for funded initiatives and results being attributable to overlapping funding sources (e.g. 61 percent of flexible fund allocations contributed to existing projects). This reinforced the choice of a formative approach, and the evaluation worked with the best available information, acknowledging issues with quality and coverage.

Sample diversity and non-representativeness: The 52 country-level initiatives reviewed varied significantly in context, size and scope – from small seed funding to large-scale stabilization and reconstruction efforts. The sample was purposive but not entirely representative, particularly for the smaller GEWE and P&I FWs. As such, findings reflected broader system-level patterns rather than case-specific or thematic nuances. This was consistent with the evaluation aim to assess the coherence, effectiveness and efficiency of the FWs as a funding mechanism, rather than to extract thematic or country-level lessons.

Data gaps and remote access limitations: Access to fine-grained internal documentation was uneven due to staff turnover and evaluation resource constraints. In fully remote cases, the limited ability to probe evidence strength was a constraint. To mitigate this, the team added partner interviews and drew on recent independent country programme evaluations where available. Evaluators were contracted in two countries to collect data locally.

CHAPTER 2

CHAPTER 2
FINDINGS

This chapter examines six elements of performance of the UNDP Funding Windows. It assesses: the alignment of FWs with UNDP strategic objectives (Findings 1-2); their financial profile and fit with the UNDP funding model (Findings 3-5); programme performance and delivery of results (Findings 6-7); governance and partner engagement (Findings 8-9); external communication and resource mobilization (Findings 10-11); and operational management (Findings 12-17). The aim is to surface insights that inform future corporate strategy, rather than to deliver a summative assessment.

2.1. Alignment with UNDP strategic objectives

Finding 1

The FWs aligned well with UNDP strategic objectives, notably supporting the organization's positioning in governance and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus and strengthening its presence in low-income and crisis-affected countries. Limited attention to the Strategic Plan Enablers restricted the catalytic potential of the FWs. Low levels of funding for the Poverty and Inequality and GEWE FWs raised concerns about their added value.

Between 2019 and 2024, FW support fell almost evenly into UNDP three strategic priority areas, with expenditure most often tagged to structural transformation (36 percent), building resilience (31 percent) and LNOB (26 percent). Key informants agreed that the four FWs also corresponded conceptually to the UNDP priorities reflected in the 2018-21 and 2022-25 strategic plans. The 2023 FW Steering Committee decision to fully align the FWs with the Integrated Results and Resources Framework (IRRF) of the UNDP Strategic Plan further enhanced coherence, and positioned the FWs as a vehicle to achieve the objectives of the organization, rather than of a specific programme or initiative.[11]

The FWS were tightly aligned with the six Signature Solutions of the previous two strategic plans, with most FW resources benefitting the governance area, followed by P&I, environment, resilience, GEWE and energy.[12] Some of the governance-related resources were channelled through the GPCR FW, others as line items through other FWs (climate governance, etc.). This was a significant contribution, given the comparative advantage of UNDP in the governance arena within the UN System, a finding of the recent evaluation of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-25.

Another salient strategic contribution to UNDP objectives was made by crisis response and early recovery interventions in volatile situations, with a third of interventions from 2022 to 2024 addressing individuals affected by armed conflicts and violence and integrating short-term response with long-term planning to ensure sustainable outcomes. This helped to position UNDP within the HDP nexus, and external interviewees confirmed that UNDP was uniquely recognized for operating at the intersection of humanitarian relief, long-term development and peacebuilding.[13]

The Strategic Plan Enablers (digitalization, strategic innovation and development financing) were expected to help maximize UNDP development impact. The evaluation of the UNDP Strategic Plan 2022-25 found that, overall, the Enablers had been essential for maintaining the relevance of UNDP activities amid evolving contexts. However, proposals for FW allocations were not required to detail the use of Enablers until 2024. Going forward, some stakeholders, including donors, would like to see greater involvement of the FWs with the Accelerators of the UNDP Strategic Plan 2026-29.[14]

Limited financial contributions to the P&I and GEWE Windows led some stakeholders to question their added value, while others confirmed their continued validity to support UNDP strategic priorities, especially poverty reduction and combatting inequalities.[15] Some donors also questioned the comparative advantage of UNDP hosting a dedicated Window on GEWE, given that the UNDP Strategic Plan 2026-29

[11] UNDP Funding Windows Steering Committee Annual Meeting – 2023.

[12] Based on UNDP Quantum Project Budget Balance Reports, 2019-24 FW expenditure for each signature solution was: $213.4 million for governance, $130.4 million for poverty, $68.6 million for environment, $58.7 million for resilience, $11.2 million for gender, and $9.2 million for energy.

[13] The HDP nexus approach works with crisis-affected populations by addressing key root causes and decreasing the risks and vulnerabilities they face. This way of working strives to enhance the coordination, collaboration and coherence of humanitarian, development and peace actions, particularly in protracted crises and conflict settings.

[14] The UNDP Strategic Plan 2026-29 accelerators are Digital and AI transformation, Gender Equality, and Sustainable Finance.

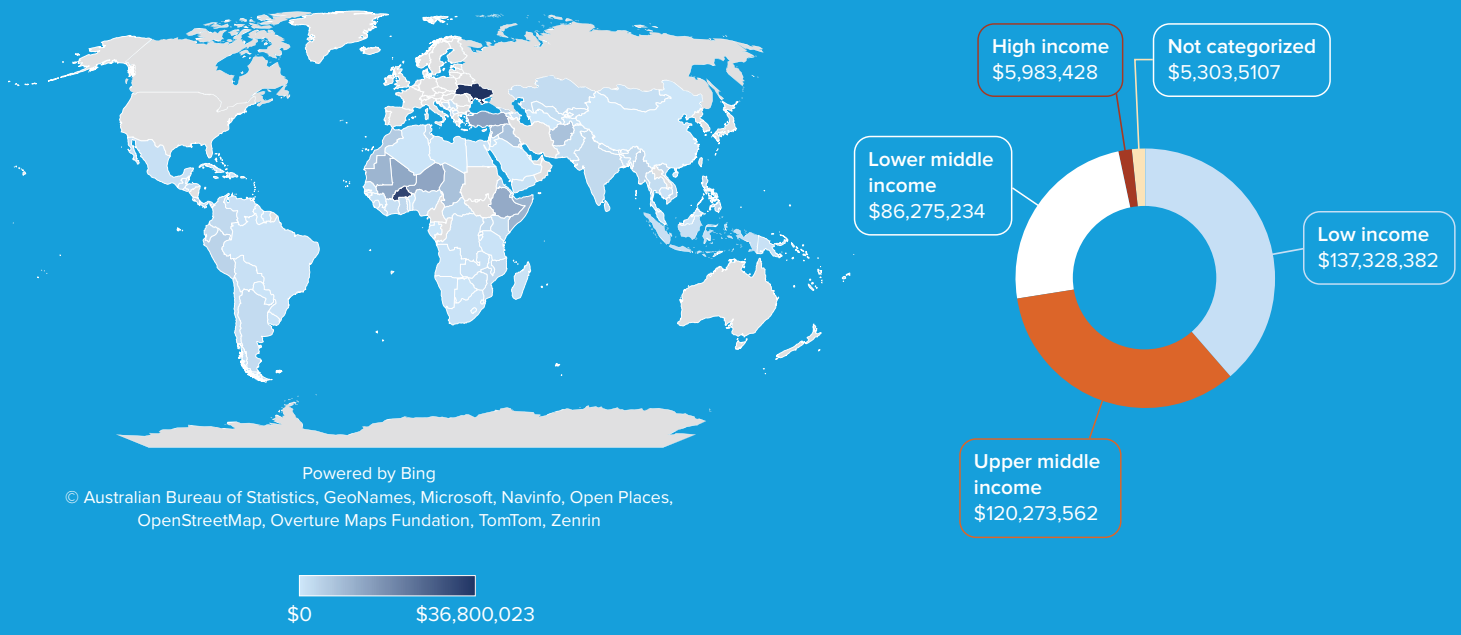
[15] The GEWE FW received $6.7 million in contributions from 2019 to 2024 and the P&I FW $26.3 million; compared to $387 million for GPCR and $269.1 million for NCE.

pitches gender as an Accelerator, rather than a strategic objective. They noted that dedicated funds for gender tend to flow more easily to pooled inter-agency funds or the thematic funds of agencies with a stronger gender mandate.

The distribution of FW expenditure across regions and countries was relatively even, after excluding two outliers (Burkina Faso and Ukraine) that received large amounts of (mainly tightly earmarked) funding. In total, of the 170 countries where UNDP operates, 135 received FW resources, suggesting that the FW Steering Committee prioritized equal distribution over strategic investment in themes, based on geographic priorities. Internal stakeholders reported tensions in how funds were allocated and limited use of the allocation criteria agreed in the FW GMAs.

A further breakdown of the data shows that, between 2019 and 2024, slightly over half of total FW expenditure (55 percent) was directed to conflict-affected and fragile countries, reflecting strong interest and demand. These allocations were mainly made through the GPCR FW and crisis response channels, managed by the UNDP CB. More resources were spent in low-income countries (39 percent), a function of the large GPCR FW. A significant share (34 percent) also went to upper-middle-income countries, due to the NCE FW focus on building capacity and strengthening systems in these countries (see Figure 4, above).

Figure 4
Funding Window expenditure by country office and income level



Source: UNDP Funding Windows Portal, data as of May 19, 2025. Mapped by IEO.

Insights from Comparator Study:
Humanitarian Thematic Funding

Across the comparators, humanitarian thematic funding consistently exceeded development-related, including for contributions from the private sector and foundations. In 2023, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Humanitarian Action Window accounted for 67 percent of UNICEF total thematic funding. Since 2019, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Humanitarian Thematic Fund has become its second largest thematic fund, with a longstanding and successful Supplies Partnership. Humanitarian trust funds attracted partners prioritizing crisis response and rapid disbursement, with a low administrative burden.

Finding 2

Since 2024, FW flagships enhanced strategic focus and increased coherence by bundling smaller-scale project work and encouraging more integrated ways of working. While they strengthened the 'thematic identity' of the FWs, they drew mixed reactions, sometimes perceived as duplicative. There was no mechanism for donors to softly earmark contributions to the flagships, and the role of the portfolio approach within flagships was not clear to partners.

In 2024, UNDP created 25 corporate flagship initiatives (see Annex 7 for a complete list) with their respective budgets, indicators and targets linked to Strategic Plan outputs. The rationale for introducing flagships was to strengthen the thematic focus of the FWs, and UNDP global thought leadership. Through more coherent and larger fund allocations, UNDP sought to achieve greater effectiveness, efficiency and aggregation of results for reporting and external communication efforts. Key informants noted that the flexibility inherent in the FWs had expanded beyond scope, and that country offices had been using the FWs in too diverse and *ad hoc* ways, which signalled the need for stronger corporate norms for greater coherence. The introduction of flagships shifted the allocation of flexible funds away from fragmented single-country projects, towards multi-country projects aligned with selected global priorities and with greater involvement of UNDP global substantive teams. Changes were less visible in flagships that were fully or partially derived from UNDP global and regional projects, as they were already multi-country. In short, flagships could be thought of as thematic work streams within each FW, governed by the usual mechanism (FW Steering Committee).[16]

Many staff and partners welcomed the shift to FW flagships, although this was not unanimous, with concern over potential duplication with existing global/regional projects. There was no institutional mechanism ensuring systematic coherence between the flagships, or with the Strategic Plan. Stakeholders also agreed that there should be fewer flagships, and that the organization was still seeking the 'happy medium' between flexibility and thematic earmarking.

At the time of writing, the UNDP FW contribution agreement did not allow for donors to contribute softly earmarked funds to flagships. While channelling funding for regional/ global projects through the FWs is consistent with their flexible philosophy and thematic nature (akin to soft earmarking to a theme), donors did not benefit from the lower GMS at 7 percent for such contributions. This was unattractive to donors, and at least one reported that they had considered reverting back to the old model of working directly with global projects, outside of the flagships, which they saw as constituting 'another layer'.

16 From the perspective of global and regional projects, the FWs were just one funding stream, supplementing third-party cost-sharing agreements and, sometimes, core resources. So, the flagships contributed to a larger whole.

Some internal stakeholders considered that this shift – from flexible funds allocated to individual country projects towards FW allocations aligned with selected global priorities – meant that UNDP country offices could no longer access FW resources to address country needs, unless 'invited' by the global substantive teams and limited to selected global priorities. Some headquarters (HQ) staff and funding partners questioned the need for the 'extra layer' of flagships altogether, asking whether the FWs could directly use global and regional projects as an organizing principle instead. Some internal stakeholders requested clarification on the added value of flagships for UNDP emergency responses, which follow a different (fast-tracked) allocation process.

The flagships were regarded as one vehicle for rolling out the 'portfolio approach'. In line with the Strategic Plan and the UNDP Portfolio Policy, new flagships (and the projects under them) were asked to employ systems approaches. Specifically, proposals were required to explain how they would support the portfolio approach "for sustainability and scaling impact".[17] UNDP recently highlighted to partners that the FWs were crucial in bringing portfolio approaches to life, and that they helped catalyse political space for change and coherence among development partners by investing in new value propositions and coalition-building.

Systems thinking was still nascent within FW programming. There was a tendency for UNDP and partners to revert to siloed ways of operating during implementation, and gaps in technical expertise and operational processes hindered the full implementation of integrated programming. The portfolio experiences assessed by this evaluation indicated that flexible funding could help to create and reform portfolios, and potentially help to understand development dynamics, support experimentation, find solutions and mobilize development partners politically and financially. However, several consulted staff and FW partners expressed a lack of clarity regarding the approach.

Besides information on the criteria guiding the design of the flagships (see Box), there was limited institutional guidance regarding the process for developing, integrating portfolio approaches within, or reporting on flagships. Neither was there any record of formal communications or approval of flagships, including on the FW intranet. Weak communication hampered institutional buy-in to the flagship process.

Moreover, the process of developing the flagships and multi-country projects in 2024 led to considerable delays in the allocation of flexible funds. This allocation was not finalized until September, including for some of the 11 cases studied, with adverse impacts for the implementation of new and multi-year country-level activities. Some country offices reported missing opportunities due to such delays.

Guiding criteria for flagship design in 2024:

(i) Country demand and global commitments;

(ii) Strategic versus incremental;

(iii) Larger investments (at scale);

(iv) Results-based;

(v) Leveraging partnerships and funding;

(vi) Tapping GPN capabilities;

(vii) Feasibility.

17 Applying a portfolio approach, multicountry proposals should demonstrate (i) potential for systems-level change; (ii) coherence across sectoral interventions; (iii) adaptive management approaches, including drawing on conflict-sensitivity and political economy analysis, 'deep listening', 'futures and foresight', and 'sensemaking' tools to better design programmes, and respond more flexibly to unpredictable and changing contexts; and (iv) investments in data and evidence-based policymaking".

2.2. Financial profile and fit with the UNDP funding model

Finding 3

The FWs regained the level of financial performance achieved by the previous TTFs, and went further in support of UNDP work on Governance, Peacebuilding, Crisis and Resilience and Nature, Climate and Energy. However, total contributions remained below corporate funding targets and, contrary to the intended FW model, most were tightly earmarked to specific projects, limiting the ability of UNDP to respond flexibly to development priorities.

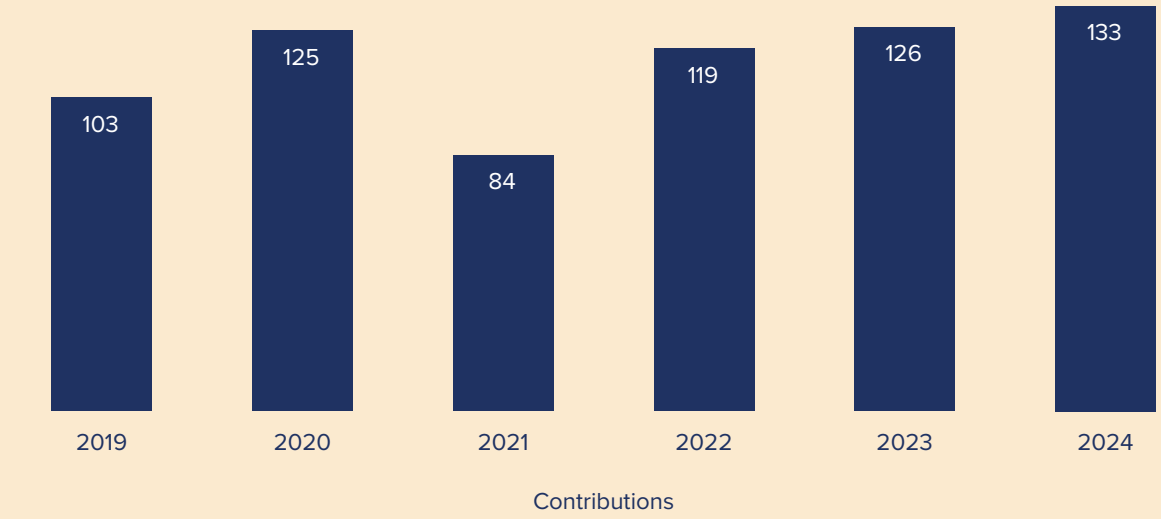
Initially, the FWs faced a decline in contributions and donor diversity compared to the former TTFs, which had attracted over $100 million annually. This recovered, as total contributions increased after 2019 (excepting a drop in 2021 following the 2020 COVID-19-related spike) and reached a high of $133 million in 2024 (see Figure 5). However, while the FWs mobilized considerable funds, there was widespread consensus that they were not reaching their full potential.

All FW contributions were included in reporting to the Executive Board against the flexible funding targets of the IRRF, even though a significant proportion were tightly earmarked.[18] FW resources made up only 3 percent of UNDP total programme resources, well below both the UNDP 2024 target of 7 percent flexible funding, and the original UN Funding Compact goal of 8 percent flexible contributions to non-core resources (see Annex 6). To reach the target set in the renewed Funding Compact 2.0 – of 15 percent by 2027 – UNDP would need to raise approximately $600 million per year (almost five times more than it currently does) (Figure 6).

[18] The UNDP IRRF is a companion to the UNDP Strategic Plan, ensuring that resources are allocated effectively, transparently, and in alignment with the organization's goals.

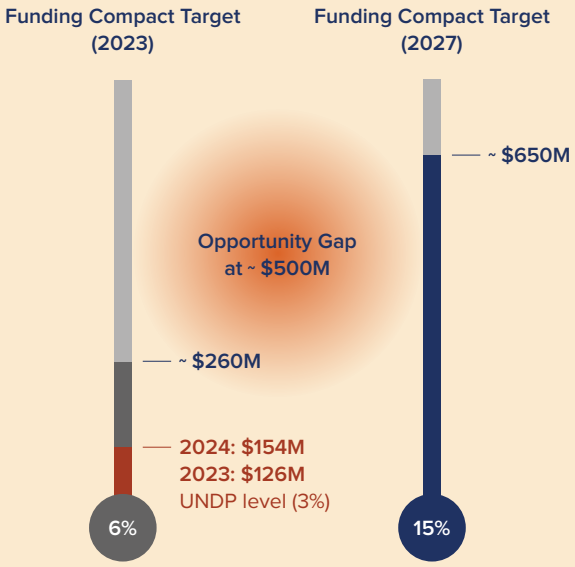
Figure 5
Contributions to the Funding Windows, 2019-2024

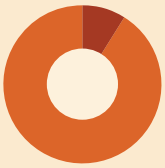
US$ million



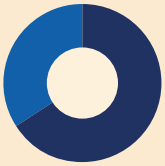
Source: UNDP Funding Windows Portal, data as of May 19, 2025.

Figure 6
Funding Window financial performance against the UN Funding Compact





UNDP FW – current funding level
In 2004 and 2023, UNDP received around US$130 million through the Funding Windows, which accounts for less than 3 percent of the total non-core budget. This is far off the target and identical to the 2017 baseline under the Funding Compact



Raised ambitions for the UN System
The Funding Compact 2.0 set the target to 15 percent of total non-core budget by 2027. For UNDP, this raises the ambition to about $650M per year, at current funding levels.

Source: Adapted from BERA & FW Secretariata

Insights from Comparator Study:
The Funding Compact and thematic funding

UNDP was not alone in struggling to scale up thematic funding. Its performance was broadly in line with peers across the UN development system. According to UN Sustainable Development Group reporting, single-agency thematic funding represented only 4.5 percent of non-core resources in 2023, down from 5.2 percent in 2022 and well below the Funding Compact target of 15 percent by 2027. Most entities, including UNICEF, UN Women, WFP and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), remained below 5 percent, with the UNFPA Supplies Partnership the only single-agency thematic fund which raised over 10 percent of non-core resources. The temporary 2021 peak of around 7 percent across the system was largely COVID-related and has not been sustained. Overall, system-wide progress under indicator 1.2 of the Funding Compact has been limited, underscoring that the challenge is structural rather than agency-specific.

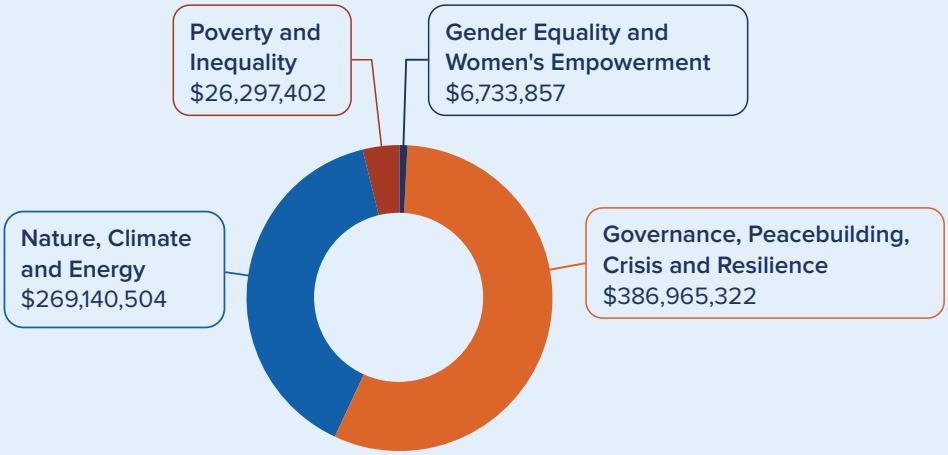
This benchmarking confirmed that the UNDP trajectory mirrored the broader UN trend: slow growth in softly earmarked thematic funding, despite policy commitments to flexibility and predictability.

The GPCR and NCE FWs attracted significantly higher contributions from a broader donor base than the two smaller FWs (see Figure 7). All but one donor contributed to the GPCR FW, and nine of 15 supported the NCE FW. In 2024 and 2025, resources mobilized for the NCE FW exceeded those for the GPCR FW, indicating a possible shift in donor priorities. The FWs for GEWE (introduced following the 2019 review) and P&I were smaller, only supported by three and two donors, respectively.

The evaluation noted a correlation between the share of earmarked resources and the size of the individual FWs. While the larger GPCR and NCE FWs saw tighter earmarking and a lower share of flexible funding (53 percent and 5 percent respectively), the smaller P&I and GEWE FWs were more successful in securing flexible funding (77 percent and 71 percent respectively), and came closest to the intended FW model. Within the GPCR FW, softly earmarked contributions to sub-windows mostly supported conflict prevention and sustaining peace. Informants reported that the reduced GMS fee of 7 percent for flexible contributions, intended as an incentive, did not influence funding decisions.

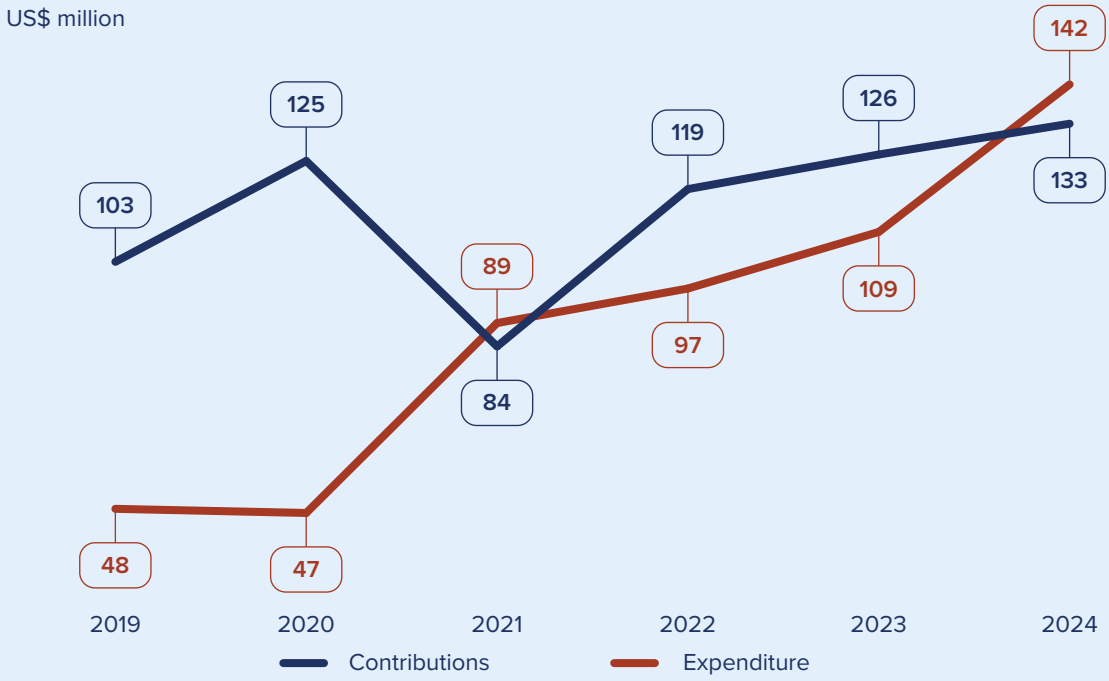
Tight earmarking appeared to slow down delivery. Fund utilization stood at 77.1 percent of total contributions in the period 2019-24 (flexible: 96.5 percent and earmarked 68.4 percent). Data disaggregated by year showed that the share of flexible funding delivery fluctuated with the creation of flagships (see finding 2), and in 2023 and 2024 lagged behind the delivery of earmarked funding. The larger, more earmarked FWs had lower delivery rates: GPCR interventions, which had the largest budget, had a total utilization rate of 71 percent (2019-24), followed by the NCE FW (68 percent for 2019-24). The two smallest and least earmarked FWs had comparatively higher delivery rates of 75 percent each. After 2021, overall delivery became more efficient, narrowing the gap between total contributions and utilization (see Figure 8).

Figure 7
Contributions per Funding Window, 2019-2024



Source: UNDP Funding Windows Portal, data as of May 19, 2025.

Figure 8
Annual contributions and expenditure, 2019-2024



Source: UNDP Funding Windows Portal, data as of May 19, 2025.

Finding 4

Over time, UNDP built a modest donor base of 15 contributors primarily from the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD-DAC). It was not able to establish effective engagement with non-traditional donors such as programme countries or philanthropic actors, leaving the FWs overly reliant on a narrow funding base and exposed to potential funding shocks. Gaps in risk management contributed to this vulnerability.

Between 2019 and 2024, the FWs relied on a group of 15 Member States from OECD-DAC, with Malta as a notable exception. The number of contributors varied each year, but gradually increased, from eight in 2019 to 13 in 2024 (see Figure 9). Over this period, Germany was the top donor, followed by Denmark and Sweden. Denmark emerged as the main provider of flexible funds, contributing 70.5 percent of the total flexible resources, while Germany accounted for 66.2 percent of total earmarked funds.

Interviews with current FW donors underscored a strong alignment between the priorities of the FWs and their partners. This shared focus was often cited as a primary reason why they chose to invest in the FWs over alternative mechanisms (of UNDP or other organizations), alongside political commitments to international standards. Donors were particularly drawn to specific thematic areas in which UNDP demonstrated both expertise and a significant operational presence worldwide.

Figure 9
Funding Windows donor contributions, 2019-2024

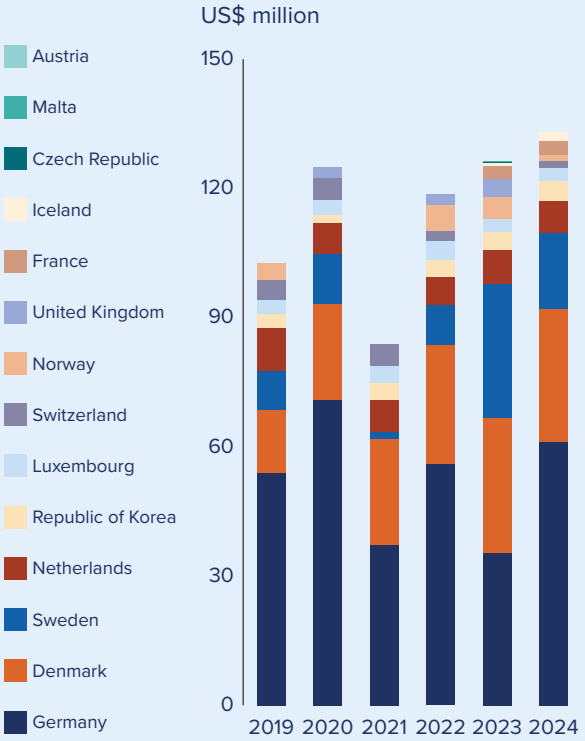
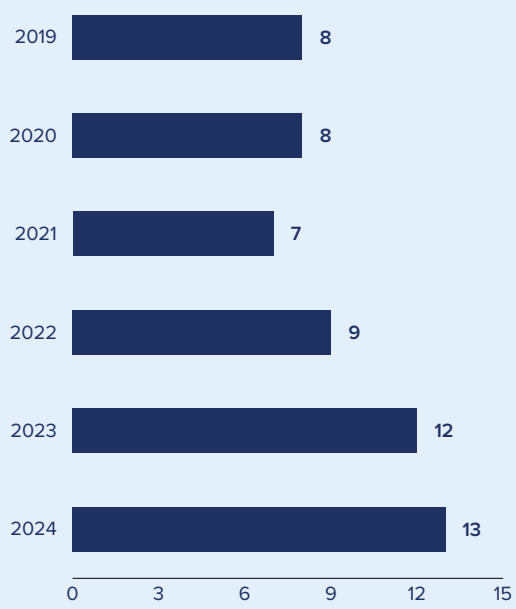


Figure 10
Number of Funding Windows contributors, 2019-2024



Source: UNDP Funding Windows Portal, data as of May 19, 2025.

Given past volatility in donor contributions, and recent indications that some donors may shift their flexible FW contributions to core funding, the current FW model is under increasing strain. Moreover, during the evaluation period, UNDP did not manage to broaden its FW donor base beyond traditional partners, constraining its ability to safeguard or grow thematic flexible funding.

Evidence indicated that channelling government financing from programme countries – now the fastest-growing source of UNDP funding – through the FWs would require further conceptual development, and steps to lower the GMS rate to 3-5 percent. Without these additional efforts, individual projects might be better positioned to attract programme country funding than the FWs, which pool funds at the global level and apply 7 percent GMS.

The evaluation only recorded one (thus far unsuccessful) attempt to secure the support of a philanthropic foundation. UNDP HQ and foundation staff indicated that several factors challenged the finalization and implementation of private partnerships, including: the broad and multidimensional development mandate of UNDP; the current packaging of the FWs; the need for speed and greater public visibility; and unclear co-investment and risk mitigation strategies. Interviewees indicated that a more structured and active risk management process – including a formal risk register,[19] integrated risk reporting and public summaries to demonstrate proactive risk oversight – would be important to bolster donor confidence, especially for new partners such as foundations and private sector actors. Their absence made the FWs less attractive.

Insights from Comparator Study:
Resource mobilization and donor diversification

Donor concentration was a systemic challenge across UN thematic funds. Most relied heavily on a small group of OECD-DAC donors, with limited success in engaging emerging donors, the private sector or philanthropic actors.

- UNICEF and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) invested heavily in national committees and partnerships, resulting in a substantial percentage of their funding coming from national committees, private sector or foundations.
- Inter-agency pooled funds (Joint SDG Fund, Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund [MPTF], Global Disability Fund) actively sought emerging donor participation, often through matching arrangements or broad consultative forums. The UNFPA Match Fund, the joint contributions of the Migration MPTF with Global South donors, and the Global Partnership for Education match mechanism are good examples.
- The World Bank Umbrella Funds strengthened mobilization through donor co-creation in governance, which increased buy-in and encouraged broader contributions. The World Bank also highlighted that collaboration between fundraisers and technical experts was key for resource mobilization, ensuring tailored engagement with donors.

[19] A risk register is a structured, continuously updated management tool that systematically identifies, assesses, monitors, and mitigates risks that could affect the performance, governance, or credibility of a funding mechanism.

Finding 5

The possibility for earmarked FW contributions expanded donor exposure and created an additional funding channel with operational advantages over third-party cost-sharing. It also reduced the strategic flexibility the FWs were intended to provide under the UN Funding Compact, limiting the ability of UNDP to flexibly steer resources in response to evolving priorities. Soft earmarking was underused as a pathway to build trust with donors who required visibility while maintaining strategic flexibility.

The decision made in 2019 (and reconfirmed by the FW Steering Committee in 2023) to allow the channelling of tightly earmarked funding through the FWs led to a notable increase in this type of contribution, including for the benefit of global projects, from about half of contributions before 2019 to about two-thirds of contributions thereafter.[20] As a result, the share of flexible funding decreased. Following the reform, flexible resources amounted to just 31 percent ($214 million, 2019-24), while earmarked funds constituted 69 percent of the total ($475.1 million, 2019-24). The trend is towards greater earmarking: In 2024, flexible contributions fell to 28.7 percent, and they are expected to fall further due to the departure of at least one major donor from the FWs.

Only eight of the 15 FW donors provided flexible contributions, three of which (Denmark, Luxembourg and Republic of Korea) consistently, and the others (Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Iceland and Malta) intermittently (see Figure 11). Other donors predominantly used the FWs to channel project funds (i.e. tightly earmarked) in place of the third-party cost-sharing agreement modality. In some instances, this was requested by UNDP, and in others by the donor. Evidence showed that channelling tightly earmarked project funds through the FWs provided an additional funding stream for UNDP, including from line ministries and thematic departments within donor agencies, which was especially important given the unpredictability of future development funding.

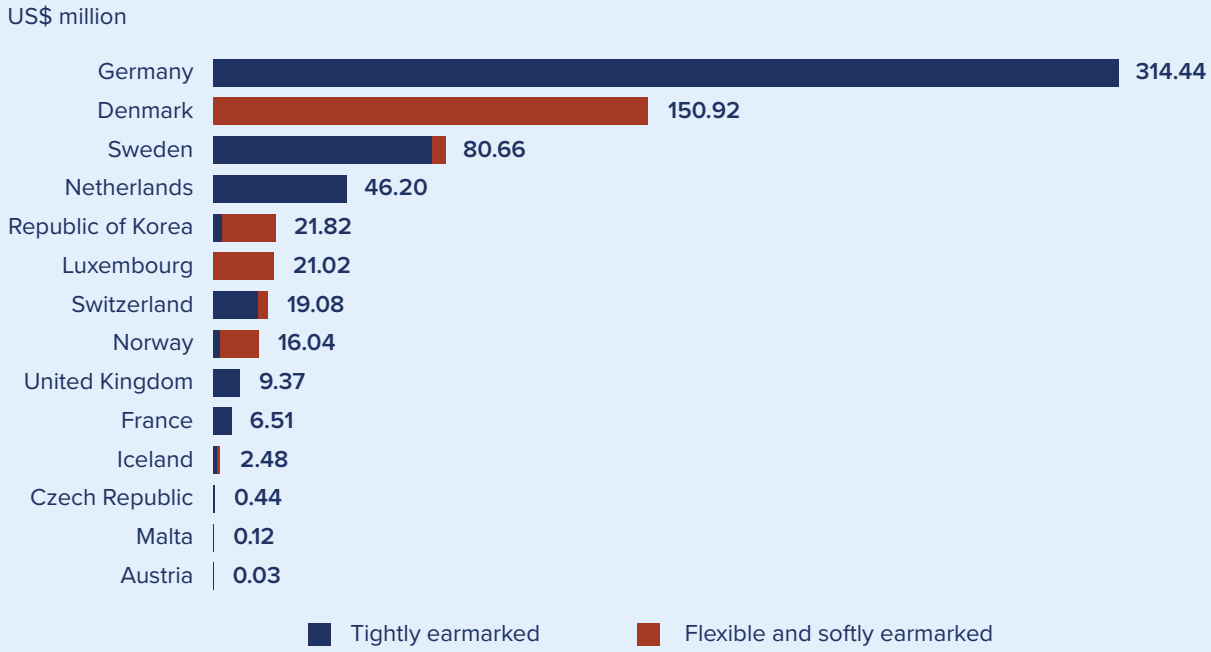
In addition to their original purpose, the FWs operated as a centralized platform for the reception, allocation and administration of earmarked funding. This approach brought operational advantages for both parties, including simpler, faster processes compared to third-party cost-sharing, reducing duplication and enabling work at scale (pooling various funding streams and issuing authorized spending limits to country offices), easier year-end rollover of contributions and an increase in overall FW volume. It enabled the sharing of responsibility and administrative burden for fund delivery between global substantive teams and UNDP country offices, who could manage the funds themselves while HQ monitored the implementation of programmatic allocations. For donors, the FWs provided structured partner engagement, greater visibility, an opportunity to contribute to higher-level objectives, and real-time financial tracking through the FW Portal.

This level of earmarking was widely criticized, however, as it called into question the spirit of the UN Funding Compact and the UNDP FWs, which were established to support thematic areas of mutual interest to UNDP and donors with minimum restrictions.[21] The evaluation did not find any evidence that tightly earmarked funds negatively affected the ability of the FWs to contribute to UNDP strategic priorities, but accepting tightly earmarked contributions ran counter to the concept of agile FWs and led to donor confusion, undermining the ability of UNDP to allocate funds based on evolving priorities and needs (e.g. to Sudan vs. Ukraine).

[20] Given its evolution from the former TTFs, the pre-2019 FWs had included legacy projects that were earmarked to varying degrees.

[21] UNSDG (2024) Funding Compact for the United Nations' Support to the Sustainable Development Goals, 2024. https://unsdg.un.org/resources/funding-compact-documents

Figure 11
Contributions by donors, flexible/softly earmarked vs. tightly earmarked, 2019-2024

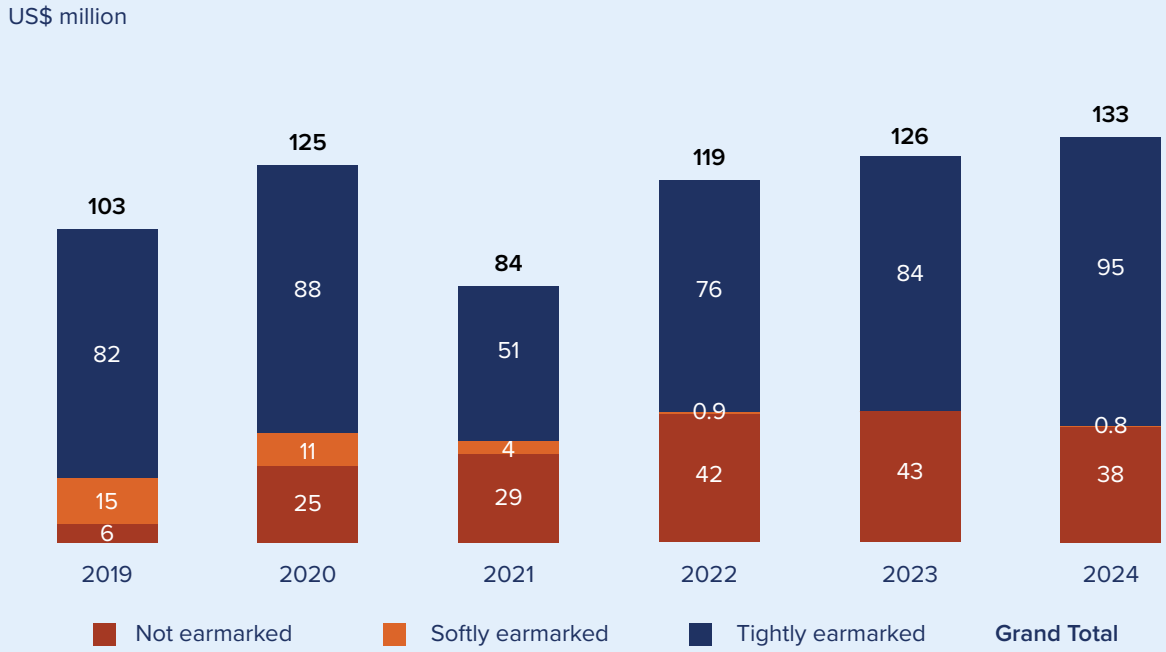


Source: UNDP Funding Windows Portal, data as of May 19, 2025. Japan (new donor in 2024) not shown in the graph.

This evaluation found that donor interests can be localized, but the FWs did not sufficiently promote the possibility for donors to softly earmark funds to a specific region or countries after allotment to a specific FW (Option 3 of the FW Contribution Agreement). Though the amounts mobilized at country level have not been significant to date, internal and external stakeholders considered country-level resource mobilization necessary in the context of dwindling resources.

Evidence from four donors (Denmark, Luxembourg, Norway and the Republic of Korea) showed that initial soft earmarking led to more flexible contributions over time, by exposing donors to the FW mechanism. Each of these donors began by contributing softly earmarked resources and transitioned, in 2020 to 2021, to providing flexible funding at the Window level (see Figure 12). Once these donors had made the shift, they generally sustained their unearmarked contributions and progressed further on the flexibility ladder. This suggests that initial soft earmarking may help build trust and commitment to more flexible funding modalities.

Figure 12
Estimated level of earmarking of annual Funding Window contribution, 2019-2024



Data Source: UNDP Funding Windows Portal, data as of May 19, 2025. UNDP Funding Window Secretariat, Fund Code Mapping, 2025. (Estimated level of earmarking was derived from the fund code mapping provided by the FW Secretariat)

Insights from Comparator Study:
Earmarking practices

The degree of earmarking tolerated by thematic funds directly affects flexibility, reporting costs and alignment with the UN Funding Compact.[22] 'Smart earmarking' – i.e., a strategic approach to allocate funding to a broad thematic or regional designation that balances the flexibility needed for effective UN operations with the specific interests of donors – can help attract contributions, including from technical ministries and emerging donors, while preserving strategic coherence. UNICEF and UNEP used clearly articulated sub-themes and earmarking limits to meet donor preferences without defaulting to projectized funding, thereby preserving alignment with agency priorities. Transparent earmarking policies also facilitated partner engagement and confidence in the case of inter-agency funds such as the Joint SDG Fund, Global Disability Fund and the Migration MPTF. For example, the Migration MPTF introduced benchmarks to prevent over-concentration on single clusters and allowed country-level earmarking, but only for private sector partners. The Global Disability Fund 2025 Strategy will allow earmarking to one of its four workstreams.

[22] See Annex 8: Typology of Earmarking for further details.

2.3. Programme performance and results delivery

Finding 6

UNDP effectively used FW resources and technical assistance to pilot innovations, respond to contextual shifts and unlock additional funding, often through modest injections into ongoing projects. Catalytic effects were not dependent on scale or volume of funding. Many interventions proved catalytic, although some allocations served primarily to fill funding gaps in longer-term programmes. Contributions to UN system coherence remained limited.

An analysis of the 11 country studies indicated that UNDP country offices often used FW allocations to experiment with new approaches and solutions, especially where no core or project (third-party cost-sharing) funds were immediately available. Technical support from the GPN was found to play a crucial role in this (see also Finding 14). An in-depth process tracing of five country-level interventions showed that they followed three distinct pathways, described here (see Annex 5 for more detail).

The first type of catalytic intervention involved recalibrating pre-existing initiatives to a more strategic level by adding financial support and/or expertise. In Sri Lanka, for example, FW support enabled the Government to conduct a respected National Citizens Survey. This strengthened the credibility of UNDP to then work on a sensitive review of the beneficiary list of the national social protection programme (Aswesuma), to ensure more effective and inclusive support for left-behind populations. In response to a request for methodology design and training materials, the country office was able to quickly adapt an ongoing FW-supported project focused on social protection. Then, working closely with the Welfare Benefit Board, they revised the survey questionnaire to make it more accessible and strengthen gender dimensions, translated it into national languages and trained trainers, ensuring that civil society was involved throughout. The resulting updated welfare beneficiary lists were widely recognized as fairer and more objective than previous versions.

The second pathway involved proof of concept interventions to test novel approaches. In (upper) middle-income countries in particular, UNDP used FW resources to pilot innovative approaches.[23] Moldova stood out as a strong technology innovation case, where an energy sandbox demonstrated its potential as a framework for scaling new technologies in the energy sector. Among other innovations, the same project helped to deploy and test smart electricity meters, which generated cost savings and helped to improve grid management. Other examples included an insurance system to protect both wildlife and cattle herders in Argentina from jaguars, and the electric conversion of tuk-tuks in Sri Lanka. Interventions of this type usually led to additional resource mobilization and scaling.

The third catalytic intervention type was noted in early recovery settings and responses to contextual changes. Rapid crisis response allocations were typically implemented together with broader UNDP initiatives, involving the delivery of significant ‘hardware’ (infrastructure, cash-for-work, livelihoods support) alongside capacity- and peacebuilding. In Ethiopia, for instance, FW allocations built resilience to climate-related shocks that aggravated human-made crises, involving capacity-building for climate change adaptation, early warning systems and sustainable agricultural practices.

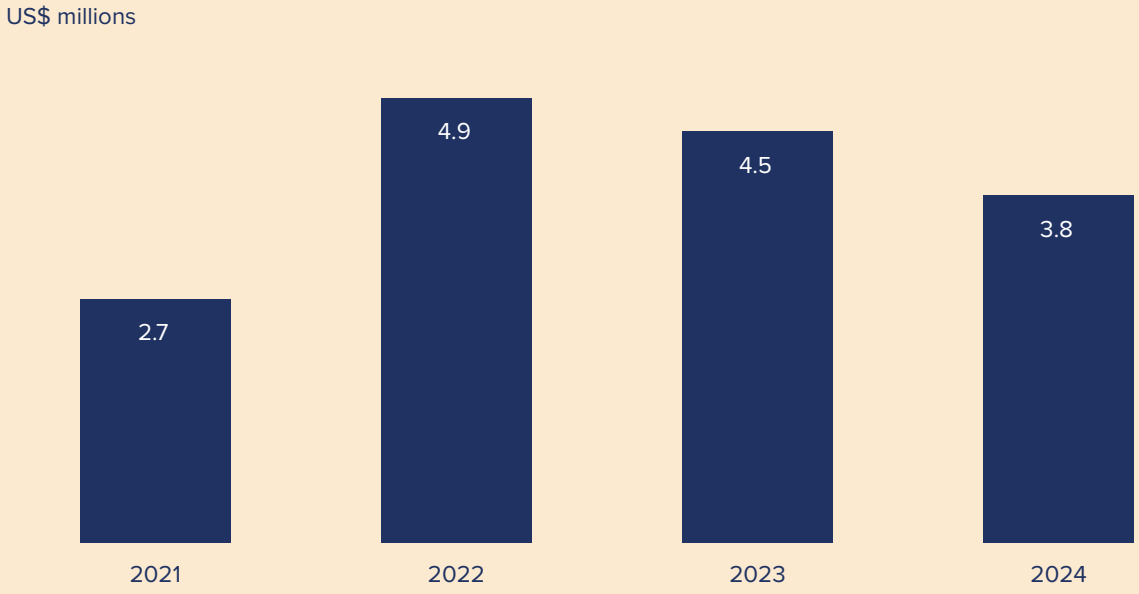
[23] This is noteworthy given that proposals for FW allocations did not formally require attention to the UNDP strategic plan ‘enablers’ (of which innovation is one) until 2024.

In Tunisia, after political changes in July 2021 restrained democratic space, the FWs enabled UNDP to formulate and launch a new portfolio of interventions combining a limited governance component on rule of law and anti-corruption with economic development initiatives. Likewise, FW support was instrumental in radically repositioning the Ukraine country programme after the 2022 invasion, making it one of the largest in UNDP. The FWs played a critical role in rapidly mobilizing resources for Ukraine's early recovery efforts (social infrastructure, veteran support, energy, mine action), effectively channelling unspent end-of-year donor funds for this purpose. The associated technical accompaniment received from global and regional substantive teams through the GPN was instrumental, and helped to reposition UNDP offers.

In several of the processes traced in depth, FW contributions determined to be 'catalytic' represented a small percentage of project resources. This suggests that catalytic effects are not dependent on the scale or volume of funding. More important determinants of success were *how* the funds were allocated within an intervention, and the context conditions that enabled change over continuity.

From a financial standpoint, UNDP reported that every dollar invested in flexible thematic resources mobilized an increased, but fluctuating, amount: from $2.7 in 2021 to $3.8 in 2024 (see Figure 13). While the evaluation could not independently verify these figures, it found FW funding to be an important driver of local resource mobilization in about half of the sample countries. In Ethiopia, for example, the $4 million FW investment in the Peace Support Programme was directly followed by additional resource mobilization of $13 million, which helped to stabilize Northern Ethiopia, restore basic services and build trust between conflict-affected communities and government institutions.

Figure 13
UNDP self-reported resource mobilization per dollar of flexible contributions*



*Figures based on UNDP reporting and not independently verified by the IEO.
Source: Funding Windows Annual Reports 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024.

It was not straightforward to ascertain the cause-and-effect relationship between initial FW investments and subsequent resource mobilization by UNDP on related themes. The evaluation tested this link and concluded that, in some cases with a conducive donor environment (e.g., Moldova, Ukraine), the FWs acted as a *contributing factor* – rather than a driver – of additional resource mobilization. In Sri Lanka, the successful completion of the welfare beneficiary assessment did not lead to funding for UNDP, but did help to unlock significant International Financial Institution financing for the national *Aswesuma* programme.

Not all projects reviewed were catalytic. Some helped with "gap filling", i.e. finding a short-term source of funding to fill an occasional programmatic gap. This was especially true for process-heavy governance projects and community development initiatives, as they did not maximize the flexibility offered by the FWs and were less immediately catalytic. While relevant, they required longer-term support and engagement from UNDP, partners and donors, and were a poor fit for the FWs as currently designed and implemented.

Finally, the FWs were conceived as instruments aligned with the UN Funding Compact, which was designed to promote a more coherent, collaborative and effective UN development system. Projects funded through flexible resources were expected to include a strong component of partnership with UN agencies and others. Overall, evidence of FW contributions to UN coherence was limited, partly due to the high share of tightly earmarked funds. Collaborative practice and systems alignment were not systematically assessed.[24] Senior stakeholders noted untapped potential for FW-financed initiatives to strengthen collaboration with other UN agencies. Recent FW annual reports highlighted promising examples of joint programming, such as partnerships with the International Organization for Migration, World Food Programme (WFP) and UNICEF within the HDP nexus.

Finding 7

Decreasing attention to LNOB and gender equality, and the small size of the related FWs, hampered the transformative potential of flexible funds as drivers of inclusive, rights-based development. Given growing global inequalities and the pro-poor mandate of UNDP, this was a missed opportunity for more consistency.

Attention to LNOB by the FWs fluctuated over the evaluation period. It was initially limited, then improved, but showed signs of decline in recent years. From 2019 to 2021, FW annual reports merely highlighted the importance of LNOB integration, and provided examples. In 2022, when LNOB became a corporate priority (as a 2022-25 Strategic Plan Direction of Change), LNOB principles became a selection criterion for the allocation of flexible funds. After an initial surge, in recent years fewer projects targeted the most at-risk populations, with only 8 percent of FW expenditure tagged to LNOB in 2024, compared with an average of nearly one-third since 2019.[25]

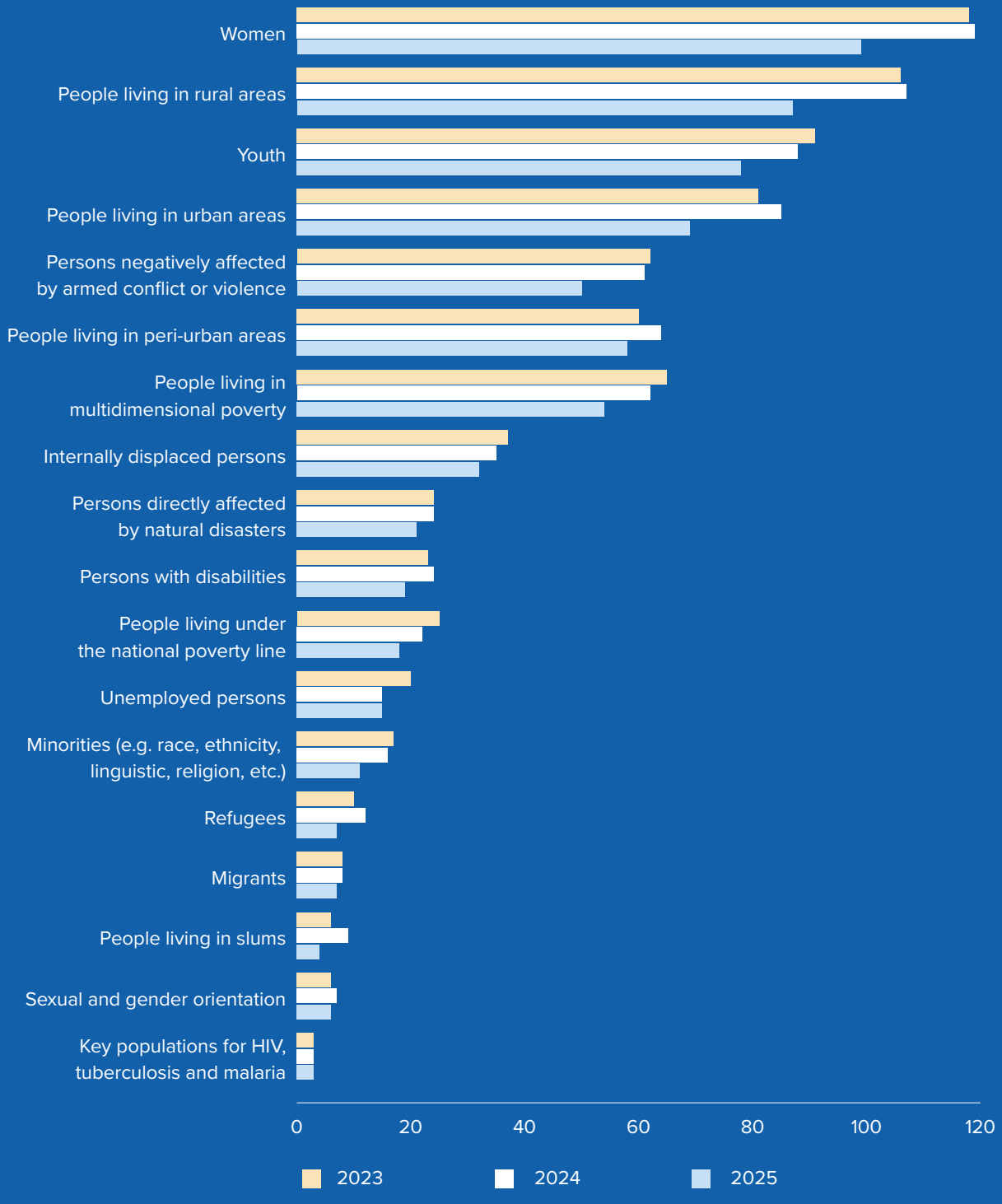
The corporate LNOB marker demonstrated that flexible FW allocations mostly targeted women and youth, those affected by armed conflict or living in multidimensional poverty, and different geographical vulnerabilities (see Figure 14). The number of projects targeting people with disabilities increased, mirroring organization-wide trends. Overall, FW allocations and reporting paid little attention to intersectionality or the UNDP five-factor LNOB framework, indicating gaps in alignment with corporate guidance.[26]

[24] E.g. in the form of: (a) joint or co-implemented outputs with other UN entities; (b) co-financing or complementary financing arrangements that leveraged FW resources within broader UN frameworks (e.g. Joint SDG Fund, MPTFs, or UNSDCF results groups); and (c) the extent to which FW investments strengthened the UNDP integrator role in joint planning, pipeline development, and resource mobilization.

[25] UNDP Funding Windows (2025) Funding Windows Annual Report 2024. UNDP Funding Windows Portal and project financial tagging to Strategic Plan outcomes.

[26] The five factors are: socioeconomic status; vulnerability to shocks; geography; governance; and discrimination. UNDP (2018) What Does It Mean to Leave No One Behind? A UNDP discussion paper and framework for implementation. https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/Brochure_LNOB_web.pdf

Figure 14
Left behind populations targeted by Funding Window flexible contributions, 2023-2025



Source: UNDP IEO Quantum project marker, data as of June 23, 2025. Annual project marker data for 2019, 2020. 2021 and 2022 are not available.

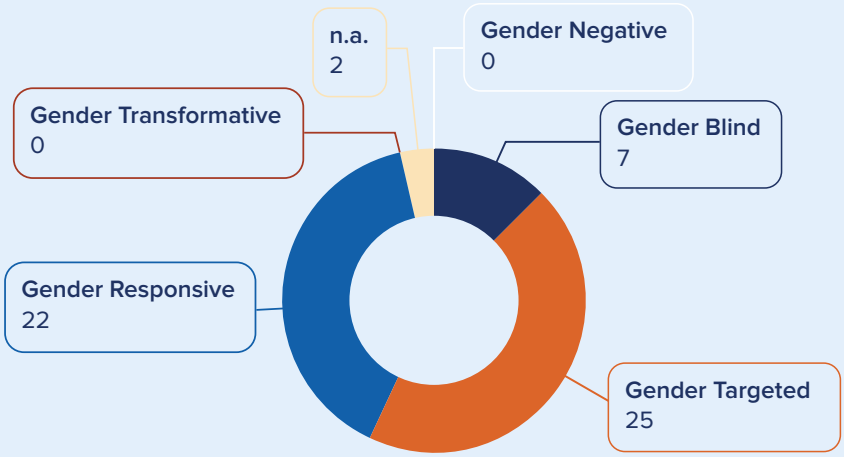
The current tagging system may have underrepresented the full extent of LNOB contributions. Several FW-supported projects in the country sample showed evidence of promoting sustainable change for marginalized populations, including: the inclusion of the 'new poor' in social protection schemes in Sri Lanka; the establishment of hubs to support the reintegration of war veterans to society in Ukraine; ensuring access to justice through networks of paralegals, including for cases of gender-based violence, for underserved communities in Burkina Faso and Moldova; facilitating access to loans and expanding off-farm and non-farm income opportunities for women through self-help groups in Ethiopia; and economic empowerment of ethnic minority women in Viet Nam.

These examples demonstrate how the FWs intervened at various levels of the UNDP 5-factor framework for LNOB: socioeconomic status (Sri Lanka), vulnerability to shocks (Ukraine), governance (Moldova, Burkina Faso) and discrimination (Viet Nam). Geographic disparities were also addressed: a few of the sampled projects operated in underserved, marginalized geographic areas, with the Africa Borderland Centre a good example.

However, several sampled projects did not implement the LNOB dimension fully, or at all, even when noted in the project documents. For example, the Social Cohesion, Security and the Rule of Law project in Burkina Faso, (under challenging circumstances following a military coup) made no progress on planned work with the National Human Rights Commission to document human rights abuses or strengthen governance in the mining sector. Other examples include the justice dimension of UNDP support for the Just Energy Transition Plan in Viet Nam, or the 'Strengthening Gender-Inclusive and Democratic Processes in Sri Lanka' project, which reported no results on improvements to gender-sensitive economic governance.

The FWs set high standards for work being gender transformative (at *design*). The FW Gender Marker required 15 percent of interventions *across the board* to explicitly advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as their primary purpose (GEN3). Compliance with this requirement was mixed. Excluding the GEWE FW, the target was only met twice: by the GPCR FW in 2022 and the P&I FW in 2023 (20 and 24 percent respectively). Flexible allocations performed better than earmarked ones in meeting the standard at design. To improve compliance with the Gender Marker, the UNDP gender team and the FW Secretariat organized awareness-raising sessions and began updating guidance and tools. UNDP staff expressed concern that compliance with the GEN3 commitment was more complex for multi-country projects.

Figure 15
Gender results effectiveness of sampled projects (n=54)



Source: IEO developed, based on GRES.[27]

In terms of *results*, nine of the 10 projects sampled for this evaluation responded to the distinct needs of women or helped them to access services. Using the GRES, 41 percent of FW-funded initiatives were classified as '4 – gender responsive' by the evaluation, since they demonstrably addressed the differential needs of men, women or marginalized populations; see Figure 15. Nearly half of sampled projects were classified as '3 – gender targeted', in that they helped to expand governmental services to women and marginalized populations. Seven projects were assessed as '2 – gender blind' and none as '0 – Gender negative. None of the projects, including those sampled from the GEWE FW, were classified as '5 – gender transformative'. This indicated good gender-sensitive programming, with room for improvement towards more transformative results.

The UNDP Strategic Plan 2026-29 no longer features LNOB as a 'Direction of Change', or gender equality as a stand-alone 'Signature Solution'.[28] Given the low financial performance of the GEWE and P&I FWs, many stakeholders – internal and external – expressed concern that UNDP might close them down. They were also concerned that the FWs would drop the specific objective of fostering equity and inclusion in favour of a broader mainstreaming logic, which has known shortcomings.[29]

[27] UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, The Gender Results Effectiveness Scale: A Methodology Guidance Note. https://erc.undp.org/pdf/GRES_English.pdf

[28] In UNDP Strategic Plan 2026-29, Gender Equality is one of three accelerators, along with Digital and AI Transformation and Sustainable Finance.

[29] UNDP IEO (2015), Evaluation of UNDP contributions to GEWE.

2.4. Funding Window governance and partner engagement

Finding 8

Despite the introduction of stronger Governance and Management Arrangements, the FW Steering Committee (and UNDP Executive Board) provided limited strategic and operational oversight for the FWs, restricting strategic guidance, institutional visibility and political support. The structures were largely appropriate, but the efforts did not correspond to the magnitude of challenges (introduction of flagships and the current resource mobilization environment).

UNDP strengthened the FW GMAs following the 2019 review, by establishing: a high-level internal FW Steering Committee to govern the FWs; new Terms of Reference (TORs) for the Donor Advisory Group; and a TEG for each FW. The GMAs were last revised in 2022, and thus do not reflect the introduction of the flagships in 2024.

The Steering Committee met only once a year, and decisions on FW allocations were made through a no-objection procedure, although members received frequent email updates from the FW Secretariat and Joint Directorate.

Annual meetings of the Steering Committee provided members with updates on FW contributions, project allocations and expenditure, partner engagement and resource mobilization activities, and revisions to FW processes. While there was room for discussion, opportunities for strategic dialogue and operational oversight were limited. This restricted the ability of the Committee to guide the long-term development and positioning of the FWs, including timely follow-up on decision points regarding, for instance, broadening the donor base beyond Member States, preparing thematic offers, aligning the FWs strategically, and applying a portfolio approach. Substantive discussions on key issues (such as preparation for Executive Board sessions and Advisory Group meetings, the introduction of the flagship approach, strategic investment of FW resources, risk management or expectations related to the present evaluation) were not recorded in the meeting minutes. Overall, stakeholders expressed that the Steering Committee lacked the agility and proximity that they expected, noting that they did not meet often enough, and its membership (at deputy director level) was too senior, often facing competing priorities.

The UNDP Executive Board, which approves and oversees implementation of the UNDP Strategic Plan, paid limited attention to issues and decisions related explicitly to the FWs. This was a missed opportunity, as the Board's approval of IRRFs and the annual Structured Dialogue on Financing the Results of the UNDP Strategic Plan have consequences for flexible non-core resources. Consequently, several HQ staff and partners suggested that greater Executive Board involvement in FW-related matters – such as risk management, UN reform, strategic planning and resource mobilization – could enhance oversight, attract new partners and foster stronger engagement with programme countries.

Insights from Comparator Study:
Executive Board engagement in thematic funding

Across UN entities, Executive Boards generally played only a marginal role in the governance of single-agency thematic funds. References to thematic funding were limited and, when they did occur, were usually framed within structured financing dialogues rather than as prominent standalone agenda items. This pattern was consistent across agencies.

Finding 9

UNDP engagement mechanisms for FW partners were relatively advanced, but with limited opportunities for strategic input and lack of clarity around their purpose and value.

There is ample evidence of the importance of involving funding partners in strategic direction, and that donor willingness to contribute to thematic funds is directly influenced by their confidence in governance.[30] Interviewees for this evaluation indicated that FW partners do not seek to control allocations, but to be strategically involved and informed. The expectations of some donors were shaped by their experiences of working with inter-agency funds.

Donors were not part of the FW Steering Committee, in line with most other agency-specific thematic funds. However, in 2020, new TORs were issued for the FW Advisory Group which aimed to strengthen strategic dialogue between UNDP and funding partners. Attendance at the annual Advisory Group meetings consistently reached the quorum of two-thirds of members.[31] However, interviews with partners and direct observation revealed some dissatisfaction stemming from the low level of substantive consultation and partner influence over the FW structure and strategy in this forum. Meetings instead focused on financial updates, promoting UNDP results and achievements, and providing opportunities to ask questions and share views.

Insights from Comparator Study:
Donor involvement in the governance of thematic funds

Donor representatives are not included in most agency-specific thematic funds. The main exception is the UNFPA Supplies Partnership, which includes donors, programme governments, civil society and strategic partners in its Steering Committee and a broader Partner Assembly. This model is frequently cited by donors as good practice, contributing to higher transparency, greater donor confidence and a more diversified funding base. The World Bank umbrella funds also provide donors with a structured role in governance, allowing them to approve annual budgets and workplans and contribute to setting priorities, while stopping short of involvement in day-to-day allocations.

In addition, BPPS and CB sporadically brought together the TEGs for each FW. Feedback from HQ staff and partners indicated that the TEGs provided valuable space for technical dialogue, including with donor capital experts. Some partners viewed them as non-essential, noting risks of overloading already heavy agendas and duplicating other exchange platforms. Due to low demand and limited UNDP capacity, TEG meetings were not held annually as originally planned. While UNDP saw potential for the TEGs to raise the visibility of the FWs and support resource mobilization, doing so risked diluting their intended purpose.

[30] UNDP IEO (2018) Evaluation of UNDP Inter-agency Pooled Financing Services, Page 23. https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/11821. Dag Hammerskjold Foundation (2021) The Way Forward: Fulfilling the Potential of the Funding Compact at the Country Level. https://www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/dhf-funding-compact-2021-web.pdf

[31] Evidence is available for Advisory Group meetings since 2021.

2.5. External communication and resource mobilization

Finding 10

UNDP strengthened external communication around the FWs, including through dedicated staffing, tools and communication products. These efforts were also positively acknowledged by partners. This required balancing the domestic accountability requirements of donor countries, with an emphasis on broader, high-level outcomes.

UNDP stepped up its external communication efforts to strengthen outreach and raise the profile of FW donors, primarily those contributing flexible resources, in compliance with the UN SDG Commitment 10 and the UN Funding Compact. This included adding a full-time Communications Analyst position to the FW Secretariat and introducing FW communications plans (2023-24 and 2024-25) for the Secretariat and BERA. Key external communications products included the FW webpage, a revamped FW Portal, annual reports, pitch brochures and multi-country feature stories. Key informants also highlighted recent joint blog posts with donors and op-eds on innovative projects. UNDP continued to issue FW communications guidelines for all levels of the organization, which were reportedly disseminated through information sessions and workshops. UNDP country offices also ramped up their communication efforts, including on social media, supported by dedicated FW project communication budgets.

Most donors commended UNDP for improving its external communications, though several asked for greater public recognition and more sharing of information about the FW projects they support and their results (e.g., through country-level briefings). Some argued that donor expectations around visibility should shift toward highlighting high-level outcomes, such as broad SDG priorities, rather than those attributable to specific projects. The reported challenge was whether this approach would be sufficient to meet domestic accountability requirements. UNDP anticipated that the introduction of the flagships and a multi-country approach would offer potential for a more compelling big-picture communication approach.

Insights from Comparator Study:
Communication and visibility of thematic funding

Across the thematic funds of UN entities, visibility and communication were central to accountability and donor confidence. Donors increasingly expected clarity not only on financial allocations but also on any results attributable to their contributions. Good practice examples came from UN inter-agency funds and World Bank thematic funds, which maintained user-friendly platforms providing real-time reporting, minutes of allocation decisions and visibility tools that donors could use directly for domestic accountability.

Finding 11

UNDP resource mobilization for the FWs was constrained by an unclear value proposition, partly due to their multipurpose nature, alongside limited outreach to diversify the donor base, concerns about undermining core resources, and insufficient use of the resource mobilization expertise of technical staff. This affected the positioning of the FWs as an attractive mechanism for financing strategic priorities.

The management arrangements for the FWs set out a shared fundraising responsibility for technical staff and partnerships experts, with the Deputy Directors of BPPS and CB (technical units) responsible for co-leading overall FW resource mobilization efforts alongside BERA (partnerships team). Additionally, the Advisory Group (funding partners) provided *ad hoc* guidance, and the Steering Committee (senior management) requested resource mobilization plans. This made fundraising, in principle, an 'all of organization' effort. However, implementation of targeted FW resource mobilization priority actions was mixed.

UNDP did not clearly communicate the value proposition of the FWs or the thematic offerings underpinning them, for the purposes of resource mobilization. While various communication products highlighted programmatic achievements and financial flows, key information such as the objectives of the FWs, contribution modalities or management and governance arrangements, was not accessible. The multipurpose nature of the FWs (see Box) further blurred their identity, making them difficult to explain. Several partners, including FW Advisory Group members, struggled to distinguish the FWs from other UNDP funding channels. The introduction of flagships in 2024 added to this confusion, with one donor describing it as "another layer of jargon to the moonshots, global programmes and signature solutions".

Identity of the UNDP Funding Windows – Too many purposes?

The evaluation identified several distinct aspirations associated with the FWs in addition to, or amplifying, general expectations for UNDP activities. These included:

- Mobilize flexible resources for implementing the UNDP Strategic Plan, in addition to tightly earmarked funds and without competing with core resources;
- Sharpen UNDP strategic positioning as a thought leader through flagships and help cover the costs of UNDP global substantive teams;
- Reinforce UNDP role and positioning before, during and after crises (HDP nexus);
- Work in a coherent and coordinated manner with other UN agencies and joint UN funding mechanisms;
- Act as a catalyst for innovation, scale and transformative change at the country level;
- Facilitate implementation of UNDP portfolio approach and demonstrate integrated ways of working;
- Advance inclusive programming and effective integration of gender and LNOB considerations;
- Demonstrate organizational efficiency with results at scale within 12-18 months.

There was no evidence of prioritization, or a systematic approach to winning over new donors such as programme countries, foundations, philanthropic organizations or the private sector. Nor was there evidence of concerted efforts to raise resources for the 'underperforming' GEWE and P&I FWs.

In particular, the FW resource mobilization strategy did not clarify the comparative advantages or disadvantages of the FWs compared with other pooled funds or UNDP funding channels. As a matter of principle, UNDP aimed for the FWs to grow without negatively affecting core resources. To this end, as highlighted in documents and HQ interviews, UNDP often explored engaging different government entities and funding streams from those providing core resources, or postponed discussions about FW contributions until core resource negotiations were finalized. Interviews and hard data trends historically showed no evidence of conflict between the two streams. Looking ahead, there are indications that partners could help offset future declines in UNDP core resources by converting flexible FW resources into core resources, or by increasing flexible thematic contributions to the FWs.

Stakeholders noted that limited collaboration between fundraisers and technical experts was a distinct shortcoming. Donor representatives reported that their counterparts in capital cities were more readily encouraged to contribute by a passionate technical expert than a partnership specialist, but that both were needed to position and match donor interest with the FW activity lines. UNDP global substantive teams, regional bureaux and hubs and country offices received limited incentives or guidance to pursue FW resource mobilization, despite the option for donors to softly earmark contributions to a specific region or country. Resources mobilized by substantive teams and channelled through the FWs were reported corporately as FW fundraising. This incentivized the use of third-party cost-sharing agreements instead, so that contributions could be acknowledged against corporate targets.

Interviews, and two foresight-focused Signal Studios held for this evaluation, revealed a growing appetite in UNDP to try unorthodox resource mobilization approaches, given the crowded space for partners approached by different UN entities (and others) for the same aims.[32] Matching (with multiple partners contributing to an initiative) and challenge-based funding calls stood out as potential avenues. It was suggested that the BERA "Surge" initiative could be leveraged to identify new ways of working with an expanded set of FW partners – including philanthropies, online and diaspora giving by individuals, and private sector partnerships. Several new contribution templates were created to that end.[33] Early results from the BERA Surge workstreams showed that the FWs were increasingly promoted as part of efforts to broaden the UNDP donor base, but risk-taking by UNDP, e.g. with regard to trying out new modalities such as challenges and matching, appeared limited.

[32] See Annex 12 for the summary of ideations from signal studios.

[33] As of September 2025, a FW contributions template for civil society organizations, private-sector partners and non-governmental organizations was finalized. A template for high-net-worth-individual contributions was under development and expected to be finalized by the end of 2025.

2.6. Operational management

Finding 12

The presence of a dedicated FW Secretariat facilitated management and governance of the FWs, and was considered a good practice. The role of the Secretariat was primarily the management of the modest pool of flexible funds, which influenced cost-efficiency. However, its effectiveness was limited by leadership turnover and its placement within the Global Policy Network Joint Directorate.

The presence of a dedicated and approachable FW Secretariat was advantageous for UNDP, and highly appreciated by staff and partners. In particular, UNDP country offices spoke highly of the practical support received from the FW Secretariat during the various steps of the fund allocation process, including user-friendly project proposal and reporting templates.

In practice, the FW Secretariat closely guided and supported the governance and management of only about one-third of FW resources and associated results. For tightly earmarked funds and those allocated through UNDP crisis response mechanisms, its role was primarily administrative. Operational guidance on allocation and reporting applied only to flexible contributions.

Insights from Comparator Study:
Management capacity of thematic funds

A 2021 country-level pooled funding assessment found that specialized funds with dedicated technical secretariats performed better in terms of attracting funding and building donor trust. However, most agency-specific thematic funds (e.g., UNICEF, UNEP) integrated management into existing programme teams without a dedicated unit. Inter-agency pooled funds (e.g., Joint SDG Fund, Migration MPTF, Global Disability Fund) operated with dedicated technical secretariats, responsible for fund management, coordination across agencies and resource mobilization. An informal rule, commonly observed across UN trust funds, suggested that secretariat costs for managing thematic funds should not exceed 3 percent of total programme expenditure. This benchmark was used to signal cost-efficiency to donors and maintain credibility in fund management.

Some stakeholders questioned the positioning of the FW Secretariat within the Joint GPN Directorate, arguing that BERA and BMS were underrepresented in decision-making. A more neutral placement for the Secretariat was suggested, to improve cross-functional involvement.

A time-use survey conducted for this evaluation established that the FW Secretariat was appropriately staffed. Its costs amounted to approximately 2.6 percent of programme expenditure, indicating an adequately resourced and cost-efficient structure. Nevertheless, key informants familiar with the 2019 FW review noted that the current setup was designed with growth in mind. Some suggested that a leaner and more agile configuration would be more responsive to the unpredictable nature of FW contributions and the modest volume of flexible funds.

Concerns were also raised about frequent leadership turnover, both within the GPN Joint Directorate and the FW Secretariat, which affected consistency and institutional learning. The FW Fund Manager position had been covered in an acting capacity since March 2024.

Finding 13

UNDP improved the speed of flexible fund allocations, but the process was affected by unpredictable contributions and, due to the absence of a central repository, incomplete access to operational guidance, information and decisions. While crisis allocations were faster, the applicable operating procedures were not consistently documented.

The unpredictability of flexible FW contributions (in terms of timing and volume) hindered consistent planning, budgeting and pipeline development, requiring calls for project proposals and fund allocations to be made on a rolling basis as funds became available. This, in turn, affected operational planning and hampered fund utilization at the country level. In practice, many flexible FW allocations were made in the second half of the year, which did not match the operations of UNDP global substantive teams and country offices, resulting in poor harmonization with other corporate and programme-specific processes and timelines, and reduced efficiency.

Beyond the unpredictability of contributions, the absence of standard allocation processes for flexible funds led to delayed allocations. Some projects had lengthy proposal development phases due to extensive back-and-forth between UNDP HQ, country offices and regional bureaux. Project proposals were sometimes substantially revised in the process. From a country office perspective, designing project proposals in detail *ex ante* defeated the purpose of the FWs (i.e. flexibility) and further delayed allocations.

The evaluation also noted gaps in terms of operational guidance, standardized procedures and systematic documentation that impacted staff familiarity with the FWs and the fund allocation process. Guidance on the FWs in the UNDP Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures (POPPs) was not updated from the 2016 FW edition,[34] and key guidance materials were not centrally compiled for all staff to access, to ensure consistent application.[35] Updates on contributions and calls for project proposals were shared via email, with restricted distribution. In addition, there were no systematic records of the vetting of proposal ideas by BPPS and CB, no formal documentation of fund allocations, and no mechanism to track objections from FW Steering Committee members regarding project approvals or subsequent adaptations to project documents during implementation.[36]

On the positive side, the flexible fund allocation process accelerated significantly – from an average of 5.1 months in 2022 to 3.2 months in 2023 and 3.5 months in 2024 – meeting the UNDP commitment to the Advisory Group to keep allocation timelines within 12 to 16 weeks. The multiple calls for proposals (rather than waiting for all contributions to arrive), and the establishment of deadlines for individual steps in the allocation process, helped to speed up the process. However, in 2024, changes to the allocation process due to the flagship system delayed the first payments, with disruptive effects at country level, and several complaints were received from UNDP global projects, which finance their annual allocations through the FWs.

The allocation of flexible funds for sudden-onset crises and disasters, as well as escalating protracted crises, followed a lighter and fast process. The CB Deputy Director approved allocations directly, based on discussions in UNDP CBs and UN-wide decision-making bodies, and the FW Secretariat immediately issued allocation letters. UNDP staff emphasized the potential for swift action through existing UNDP response mechanisms for Level 3 crises, the relatively straightforward nature of crisis response activities compared with complex development projects, and the combination of FW allocations with TRAC-3 and other financial resources. However, this evaluation noted that operating procedures for FW allocations in response to crises were not fully or uniformly documented.

[34] Source: https://popp.undp.org/document/undp-funding-windows

[35] UNDP (2023) UNDP Funding Windows Business Process for Contribution Agreements and Revenue Management. UNDP (2023) Funding Windows Business Process for Award Creation in Quantum.UNDP (2024) Operating Guidelines. Project setup in Quantum for Flagship Initiatives under Funding Windows. UNDP (2024) General Guidance Note on Funding Windows Flexible Resource Allocation.

[36] During the evaluation period, there were no objections to any project proposals.

Finding 14

Global teams added value to the design of projects using flexible resources, but follow-up during implementation was uneven, given the decline in the substantive role of regional bureaux over the evaluated period. The new 5 percent technical accompaniment budget was largely welcomed, though concerns emerged about its adequacy and the resulting reduction in project management costs to UNDP country offices.

GPN technical support was essential to the catalytic nature of the FWs. Almost all country cases reviewed involved significant support from technical experts working for CB, BPPS and/or regional bureaux. By design, the FW project approval process (for flexible resources) involved reviews of each project proposal by technical experts in both regional and central bureaux.

Sampled UNDP country offices were largely positive about the 2024 decision to more systematically involve UNDP global substantive teams in the design, quality assurance and implementation of projects funded through flexible resources. This included the introduction of a 5 percent budget line for technical accompaniment costs by BPPS and CB (HQ or Hub), introduced alongside the flagships. All but one of the countries reviewed received substantial support from GPN technical experts, whose inputs added value and ensured alignment with UNDP programmatic standards.

In practice, however, GPN support was heavily skewed towards the design of interventions. This included guidance on proposal development, alignment with FW priorities, strengthening the gender lens, improving the formulation of results, and advice on integrating cross-cutting themes such as the inclusion of people with disabilities, innovation and resilience. Technical backstopping during implementation was less systematic, revealing a gap. Some country offices were critical that support stopped or declined after project approval.

At least two flagships were derived from regional projects, in which the role of regional bureaux was evidently central. Interviewees noted that the substantive role of regional bureaux had been stronger in the past, with discussions now mainly taking place between BPPS/CB (including at hub level) and country offices, with copy to the regional bureau. Tellingly, regional bureaux reported being somewhat unaware of (and uninvolved in) the move to flagships and multi-country projects in 2024, and had limited involvement in resource mobilization for the FWs.

A few UNDP business units at country and regional levels raised concerns that country office project management costs had been reduced from 12 to 7 percent. BPPS/CB stakeholders noted that the 5 percent project cap was often insufficient to cover staff or consultant costs unless pooled across projects. They also pointed to unrealistic workloads and questioned the need to provide across-the-board support, particularly for small allocations to pre-approved projects.

Finding 15

Examples such as the Africa Borderlands Centre highlighted the potential of adaptive learning through the FWs. Overall, the absence of cross-office exchange and structured learning processes around the FWs, which UNDP country offices would greatly appreciate, limited capacity to capture and scale programmatic and catalytic results.

An illustrative case of knowledge exchange came from the Africa Borderlands Centre project, which used a $2 million FW allocation in 2024 to pilot an area-based approach to strengthening agricultural production, access to finance, catalytic infrastructure, social cohesion and peacebuilding at the border between Kenya and Uganda. With technical support from the UNDP Chief Digital Office and Strategic Innovation Unit, the Centre adopted an adaptive learning approach that positioned the FWs as a channel for

innovation and real-time learning. Participants in the various learning sessions responded enthusiastically and expressed interest in continuing and replicating the approach, valuing the opportunity to share successes, mistakes and lessons. However, at the global level, there were no organized knowledge networks or structured FW-specific learning processes other than the annual FW reports, which conveyed some lessons from FW management and implementation.

With striking unanimity, country offices requested more opportunities to exchange experiences between country-level staff and with regional bureaux and hubs. Stakeholders noted that mechanisms to systematically capture and disseminate successes and lessons, whether new or existing, could further strengthen the catalytic role of the FWs. Beyond programmatic results, the evaluation recorded an interest among UNDP staff in learning about catalytic achievements such as the FW contributions to fast-tracking UNDP emergency responses, strengthening UN coherence, leveraging funding and financing, and promoting innovation. Although UNDP country offices allocated 1.6 percent of flexible FW allocations to monitoring, evaluation and learning in 2024 – more than the 1 percent minimum target – this was considered insufficient. At the time of evaluation, the FW Secretariat lacked dedicated capacity for learning and identifying good practices.

Insights from Comparator Study:
Learning and knowledge sharing

Learning is central to demonstrating catalytic effects and scaling innovations. Several inter-agency thematic funds provide good examples of how learning, accountability and knowledge management are integrated: The Migration MPTF stipulates that all joint programmes should include provisions for learning throughout the project cycle. Lessons learned and good practices are shared for wider dissemination via the Migration Network Hub – the UN Network on Migration's knowledge management and capacity-building platform – which hosts online discussion spaces, a library of user-submitted resources, an expert database and a repository of practices. The Global Disability Fund invests in peer-to-peer learning, clinics and online help desks, ensuring continuous capacity-building. The World Bank Umbrella Funds systematically link the trust funds to the Bank's knowledge products, financing advisory services and analytics.

Finding 16

The timeliness of fund utilization by UNDP country offices improved for flexible resources. Country offices consistently valued the agility of the FWs, but delayed allocations, short project durations, low incentives for timely delivery and mismatches with country capacity contributed to lower disbursement and recurring timeline extensions.

Despite delays in the allocation of flexible funds, UNDP country offices consistently praised the FWs for their flexibility and relatively fast and simple processes, which enabled timely and innovative responses when facing emerging crises and demands. The ability to revise project scope during implementation was also appreciated as a key feature of adaptive management.

The short duration of FW-funded projects emerged as a constraint to country offices in the majority of the cases reviewed. For most of the evaluated period, the planned project duration was capped at 12 months to avoid FW resources from being used to fund longer-term programmes. Following consistent demands by country offices over the years, the maximum FW project duration was extended to 18 months in 2024,

and an eligibility criterion was introduced for FW allocations: "feasibility to deliver within 12-18 months, depending on the funding amount". It is unclear how this criterion will be adapted to flagships born out of longstanding global or regional projects.

Over the assessment period, a large proportion (41 percent) of the flexible FW allocations sampled by the evaluation benefited from no-cost time extensions, which the UNDP country offices appreciated. Overall, the percentage of no-cost extensions approved by the FW Secretariat diminished from 78 percent in 2022 to 64 percent in 2023 and 17 percent in 2024 – indicating improving alignment with country-level capacity to disburse resources on time. According to some interviewees, the ease of obtaining no-cost extensions was one of the factors causing low disbursement rates: in cases when an extension of the project timeline was harder to get from one funding source (e.g., a third-party cost-sharing agreement), staff tended to prioritize delivery of the less flexible funding source.

To overcome underutilization of allocations and frequent project extensions, key informants and country office questionnaire respondents underscored the need for stronger alignment with country needs and country office capacity, standardized timing of calls for proposals, prioritization of FW allocations to ongoing (rather than new) projects, improved timing of allocations, and more flexible project durations.

Finding 17

FW annual reports strengthened transparency regarding the use of flexible resources, and reduced reporting burdens. However, the near exclusion of tightly earmarked contributions reduced the capacity of UNDP to oversee the entirety of FW-funded work. In addition, where flexible funds were combined with other funds at project level, there was a risk of over-reporting, underscoring the need for more integrated and streamlined reporting systems.

The annual reporting process for flexible funding was a noted strength of the FWs. Strong project reporting templates and well-structured annual reports by the FW Secretariat enhanced transparency, demonstrated clear returns on investment and improved traceability, though not yet against flagship indicators and targets. Collective reporting on the results of flexible funding not only increased the consistency, clarity and utility of evidence, it also reduced the reporting burden on UNDP country offices by eliminating the need for individual donor reports. This was in contrast to tightly earmarked funds channelled through the FWs and third-party cost-sharing.

Financial data for both flexible and tightly earmarked resources were reported in real-time through the online FW Portal, which was revamped in 2023 to provide greater transparency. This feature not only supported accountability and visibility to partners, but also provided easy access to well-organized financial data for this evaluation, enabling independent financial analysis. However, some HQ and partner interviewees suggested that, within this collective reporting, reports could better showcase individual donor contributions to specific FWs, to strengthen donor recognition and support partner diversification.

The bifurcated management of FW resources left an accountability gap for the FWs as a whole, as two-thirds of the FW envelope largely bypassed the established system. The programmatic and financial performance of tightly earmarked funds channelled through the FWs was reported directly to donors by project teams, as well as through the UNDP Results Oriented Annual Report (ROAR). This undermined the spirit of the FWs, which centred on the simplification of processes and single reporting.[37] In 2022, FW annual reports began to address this issue by relaying some narrative results from selected earmarked projects, improving transparency.

[37] Other UN entities introduced a red line: If a donor needs separate reporting on their contribution, they cannot use the thematic funds.

UNDP views development results as indivisible by funding stream, particularly for systems-level initiatives. This made it difficult to show how outcomes were a catalytic and strategic result of the FWs. The evaluation also noted a risk of overreporting FW accomplishments when FW resources were used alongside other funds in the same projects or programmes. Where FW allocations contributed to ongoing initiatives (nearly two-thirds of allocations[38]), FW annual reports sometimes included non-FW-supported achievements captured in ROARs and individual project reports. Key informants suggested that further streamlining reporting and improving interoperability between reporting systems could help to remedy this challenge.

[38] Flexible funding allocations are made to either: an ongoing output within an existing project document; a new output within an existing project document; or a new project document. Of the 396 flexible fund allocations made by UNDP during 2019-24: 242 (61 percent) contributed to existing projects; and 154 (39 percent) were for new projects. Source: FW Secretariat.

CHAPTER 3

CHAPTER 3
LESSONS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

This chapter presents the lessons, conclusions, recommendations and management response to the evaluation.

3.1. Lessons

The following six lessons were derived from the comparator organization study conducted as part of this evaluation, and from conversations with 20+ current and prospective donors of the UNDP FWs.

Lesson 1

Simplicity and transparency enhance donor confidence and engagement.

Plain architecture and open information flows build confidence. Donors respond positively when thematic funds are easy to explain, use a single set of rules and offer real-time transparency on allocations and results.

> *"Venture philanthropists ... emphasize measurable impacts and efficient management in nonprofit endeavours."*
>
> **Philanthropist**

> *"Every time I engage further it becomes more complex. Sub-windows, flagships, signature solutions, portfolio approach... What exactly are the FWs looking for?"*
>
> **OECD-DAC donor**

Lesson 2

Donor visibility must balance output attribution with strategic outcome alignment.

Partners seek recognition tied to broad development outcomes, not only to individual project results. Demonstrating how unearmarked support advances shared strategic goals meets the domestic accountability needs of donors, while preserving flexibility.

> *"We've consistently contributed unearmarked resources to UNDP. Our approach is rooted in multilateralism and sustainable development principles. While we recognize the value of flexible funding, it must also align with our national strategies and the priorities of our line ministries."*
>
> **Non-OECD-DAC donor**

> *"When a minister goes to a country, we always give the information on earmarked funds. We should also be able to show what unearmarked resources have done in each specific country."*
>
> **OECD-DAC donor**

Lesson 3

Co-creation and inclusive governance structures build donor trust and drive funding.

Opportunities to help shape priorities increase trust and encourage larger, less restricted contributions. Advisory bodies that combine financial oversight with genuine strategic dialogue outperform purely informational forums.

> *"I am a big fan of the FW Advisory Group. Senior UNDP management should also be there. That could attract others to give resources."*
>
> **OECD-DAC donor**

> *"The UNDP approach is to invite us to meetings. But they never proposed an approach to develop something together. Donors don't want to be seen as only a cash machine."*
>
> **OECD-DAC donor**

Lesson 4

Innovative, challenge-based funding models attract non-traditional donors.

Private sector and philanthropic actors value speed, co-investment and public profile, signalling that the FWs must offer agile, partnership-oriented modalities to engage non-traditional funders.

> *"There's no such thing as free money – it always comes with strings. If UNDP wants to engage in early-stage investing, it needs to move radically faster and work through local teams."*
>
> **Philanthropist**

> *"Communication is very important for a foundation. Value is ego-driven communication about the Foundation. Be smart how you treat the foundations in public. Don't make us disappear in a big pot."*
>
> **Private foundation**

Lesson 5

Flexibility within boundaries: 'smart earmarking' or 'negotiated unrestricted funding' increases contributions without undermining coherence.

Tightly earmarked funding reduces flexibility, but fully unrestricted funding lacks donor appeal. 'Smart earmarking' – to broad thematic or geographic designation with strategic alignment – can bridge the gap. It also helps to attract resources from technical ministries that otherwise would not be able to contribute to a broader framework.

> *"We are under pressure that our contribution is visible. When it's core and thematic funding, it's more unclear who owns this. Core is from everybody."*
>
> **OECD-DAC donor**

> *"I was surprised that others were earmarking to the level of project. It's a little bit mysterious."*
>
> **OECD-DAC donor**

Lesson 6

Internal power dynamics limit the strategic use of thematic funds.

Competition among business units and unclear roles dilute the strategic use of thematic funds. Allocation patterns driven by internal politics, rather than evidence or need, risk confusing donors and weakening the mechanism's credibility.

> *"The first set of unearmarked resources was equally distributed between the regions... internal politics rather than strategic decisions."*
>
> **OECD-DAC donor**

> *"We've taken on work that made sense strategically, but the process can be so distracting that it risks killing the core business."*
>
> **Foundation**

3.2. Conclusions

At the time of evaluation, UNDP was navigating a period of internal uncertainty and external realignment, with only five years left to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Internally, it faced looming funding cuts amid UN 80 reforms and the launch of a 2026–2029 Strategic Plan under new leadership, requiring alignment of its FW frameworks. Externally, UNDP had to adapt to geopolitical shifts, rapid digital and AI transformation, and a tightening development finance landscape characterized by declining trust in multilateralism and a shift toward partnership-based funding models. These combined pressures created an opportunity to recalibrate the UNDP FW business model.

Based on the findings and lessons presented above, the evaluation draws high-level conclusions regarding the external coherence, internal coherence, effectiveness and efficiency of the UNDP FWs.

Conclusion 1 [39]

External Coherence: The promise of the Funding Compact remained largely unfulfilled for the UNDP FWs: improved accountability did not translate into significantly more flexible donor funding. Contributions – and the number of FW donors – remained small. An unclear identity, unrestricted earmarking and insufficient risk management weakened the niche of the FW mechanism and its agility in a volatile funding landscape characterized by budget pressures and changing international priorities.

Over the past decade, the UNDP FWs established themselves as the chief thematic funding channel of UNDP, largely aligned with the UN Funding Compact and a critical complement to core resources. Yet, FW contributions and the number of FW donors increased only slightly over the assessment period, remaining well below target. From 2019-24, the FWs generated less than 3 percent of total programme resources (versus a 7 percent target) and engaged 15 donors (mostly OECD-DAC). Alignment with the priorities of current donors was strong, but a high percentage of contributions (71.3 percent) were tightly earmarked.

The UNDP FWs allowed partners to target flexible or earmarked funding to four strategic thematic areas, offering lower transaction costs for flexible funds, opportunities for engagement, and enhanced visibility for partners' contributions. In turn, the FWs increased the UNDP resource base and helped expand development results, especially in hard-to-fund or experimental areas (see conclusion 3), while making strides towards enhanced oversight and transparency (see conclusion 4).

The FWs lacked a clearly articulated value proposition to distinguish them from the thematic funds of other entities or, internally, from UNDP core and project funding channels. Without a clear identity and niche, the FWs were hard to communicate, which hampered partner trust, contributed to perceptions that they were overly complicated, and ultimately impacted the ability of UNDP to attract significant funding.

Another factor impairing FW coherence was the unchecked proliferation of tight earmarking, to the level of projects. This UNDP approach increased the volume of funds channelled through the mechanism, but diluted the purpose of the FWs, led to inflated reporting against Funding Compact and IRRF indicators, and eroded the trust of those giving flexible funds. This contrasted with the underutilization of soft earmarking to sub-windows (or flagships) and geographies, which was deemed necessary to reach

[39] Link to findings 3, 4, 5, 10, 11 and lessons 1, 2, 5, 6.

funding targets, and explicitly permitted under Funding Compact 2.0. The absence of a public risk management framework aligned with donor expectations, particularly from the private sector and philanthropies, further undermined confidence.

Fiscal constraints and shifting geopolitical priorities are driving a sharp decline in aid (up to 29 percent by 2027).[40] In this context, defining a clearer value proposition is considered necessary to attract new partners and increase the share of flexible resources. As the world moves away from traditional aid models, favouring diversified partnerships, blended finance, South-South cooperation, matching and global challenges, the time for revamping the way the FWs work and clarifying their distinct comparative advantage is now.

Conclusion 2 [41]

Internal Coherence: The FWs were coherent with UNDP evolving strategic plans, priorities and architecture. However, they responded to too many internal expectations, which convoluted the mechanism and weakened its profile. Combined with unclear guidance, internal power dynamics and limited oversight, this diminished understanding and acceptance of the FWs within UNDP. The evolving FW flagships marked an initial – but incomplete – move towards simplification.

Over the period assessed (2019 to mid-2025), the FWs mirrored the UNDP strategic plans well and consolidated alignment with the corporate results architecture. The structure of the FWs themselves was sound and adaptable, with sufficient flexibility to accommodate future organizational changes with minimal adjustment. One weakness was the lack of attention to organizational enablers (future accelerators), which reduced opportunities for SDG acceleration, experimentation and new partnerships through the FWs.

Internally, the FWs attempted to serve too many functions: from fast-track crisis response and supporting the portfolio approach, to positioning UNDP as a thought leader and funding global substantive teams. This broad scope made the mechanism vulnerable to internal politics, led to scattered and outdated guidance, and hampered internal buy-in into the mechanism. Limited transparency in decision-making further diminished clarity.

Strategic leadership for the FWs was limited: There was no dedicated engagement with the UNDP Executive Board, and the FW Steering Committee lacked agility, a clear risk management strategy or an implementation arm for strategic decisions. A major concern was the accountability gap between flexible and tightly earmarked funds. There were divergent expectations regarding the results focus, use of corporate markers, shift to portfolios and donor recognition and visibility. Strengthening oversight arrangements will be key to fully leveraging alignment and maximizing the potential contribution to UNDP strategic goals.

The flagship process, creating overarching umbrella initiatives within each Window, was a step in the right direction, consolidating disparate projects and sharpening the thematic identity of the FWs. It was, however, left incomplete, with too many flagships and unclear implementation guidance and operating procedures.

[40] OECD (2025) Global Outlook on Financing for Sustainable Development 2025. Towards a more resilient and inclusive architecture. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/global-outlook-on-financing-for-sustainable-development-2025_753d5368-en.html

[41] Link to findings 1, 2, 8, 9 and lessons 3, 6.

The FWs were surprisingly little-known within UNDP, and its multi-faceted *modus operandi* was not well understood. Simplification of the FWs and greater clarity will help complementarity and harmonization with UNDP tools. At a time when the United Nations and UNDP are going through cuts and efficiency measures and seeing the value of their work challenged, internal cohesion is essential. It is imperative that personnel and partners understand the FWs and see a clear added value with streamlined ways of working.

Conclusion 3 [42]

Programme Effectiveness: Initiatives funded through the FWs showed mixed to good programme performance. The FWs were most effective when timely injections unlocked momentum and helped position UNDP in new domains, and weaker for long-term initiatives. Results helped UNDP gain recognition in the HDP nexus area and bolstered its leadership in governance, while the declared goal of integrating LNOB and gender was only partially achieved. Earmarked resources largely fell outside of FW monitoring and evaluation processes, and opportunities for learning remained underdeveloped.

The FWs effectively contributed to development results when a relatively modest injection of resources was needed to unlock more transformative change, generate dynamism and creativity and/or position UNDP in a new domain of activity. While programme results were mixed overall, there were highly visible and catalytic achievements, while other initiatives blended into the broader work of UNDP, offering an additional budget line to fill a hole or bridge a gap.

Catalytic effects were evident, for example, when providing proof of concept for novel approaches; recalibrating pre-existing initiatives to a more strategic level by adding financial support or expertise; or in early crisis response and stabilization actions that sparked additional dynamism and resources. Some catalytic interventions generated interest from governments and development partners and/or leveraged additional resources for UNDP or a thematic area.

Achievements through the FWs were particularly salient in the areas of crisis response/ early recovery (consolidating UNDP positioning in the HDP nexus space); inclusive governance and LNOB (essential in the current geopolitical climate and a comparative advantage of UNDP in the UN family); and, to a lesser extent, climate action and green energy transition. In contrast, long-term development work, such as process-heavy community livelihoods and government capacity-development initiatives, required long-term support and engagement from UNDP, its partners and donors, and would therefore be more efficiently funded by channels other than the FW.

Contrary to UNDP ambition, programme integration was not systematic as, structurally, the four Windows (and all flagships) remained juxtaposed without clear interconnections, and ambitious designs were watered down during implementation. The shift towards fewer portfolio-based flagships enhanced coherence and integration (see conclusion 2), but its implementation created delays and operational issues. Additionally, there was concern that some of the flagship initiatives fell heavily into the above-mentioned ‘long-term development work’ category which, while perfectly legitimate for UNDP, might be ill-suited to short-term, catalytic injections of funds.

As intended, attention to LNOB and GEWE highlighted the transformative potential of the FWs, providing opportunities to leverage them as drivers of inclusive, rights-based development. GEWE-related initiatives were among the most catalytic, reinforcing the case for sustained visibility and resourcing in this area. However, effective gender mainstreaming and LNOB integration were inconsistent across the FWs, which was a cause for concern.

[42] Link to findings 6, 7, 15, and lessons 4, 6.

As an accelerator of innovation, the FWs had strong learning potential, which was underused despite staff requests for opportunities to exchange, e.g. to strengthen the catalytic role of the FWs. While substantive teams at regional and global levels provided valuable support, expecting their systematic involvement in all country-level initiatives appeared top-heavy and unsustainable.

The contributions of FW programming to UN coherence were limited, but there was significant untapped potential for FW-financed initiatives to enhance collaboration with other UN agencies. While the FWs were not designed as inter-agency instruments, they can function as connectors within the UN development system by enabling integrated, cross-agency programming around shared thematic priorities.

Conclusion 4 [43]

Efficiency: UNDP made mostly adequate use of scarce resources to promote and manage the FWs, with stronger performance noted on day-to-day operations and communications, and less success on resource mobilization activities. Fundraising was overly cautious, hampered by the unclear niche of the FWs, leaving space for experimentation untapped. Standard operating procedures (SOPs) were lacking for the FWs, most notably for the crisis response sub-window.

The dedicated FW secretariat was well-resourced, and effectively coordinated most actors and processes. Many procedures were documented and made public, support to country offices was high-quality and timely, and governance mechanisms and partner consultation fora were effectively serviced.

Existing guidance on the FWs was fragmented, highlighting the need for clearer, more cohesive resources to promote consistent understanding, facilitate access to funding, and support effective implementation. Gaps included updating the POPP and GMAs and reinforcing their application. Allocation decisions were insufficiently documented, weakening trust in the adherence to criteria. There were no SOPs applicable to all FWs, and harmonized, published procedures were lacking, especially for the Crisis Response sub-window.

Day-to-day process management was complicated by the number of actors involved, the convoluted nature of the mechanism, and the unpredictability of contributions. Placement of the FW Secretariat in the GPN Joint Directorate made it vulnerable to internal competition for resources, and excluded BERA and BMS from some decision-making.

Effective monitoring and reporting mechanisms, combined with strong communications, were one of the main selling points of the FWs. Indeed, reporting and communication were strengths for the flexible segment of the FW: reporting was rapid and coordinated, and important leaps were made towards effective accountability and impactful communications, e.g. through clear and informative annual reports. However, earmarked funds within the FWs continued to follow project logic, with direct reporting to donors, undermining coherent oversight.

The FWs were not fully marketed as an alternative to other UNDP funding modalities for fear of deflecting from core funding. While the FWs mostly mobilized from different budget lines or line ministries, UNDP was risk-adverse and overcautious in selling these thematic funds and their catalytic effects to donors. Lack of clarity around the identity and niche of the FWs (see conclusion 1), and unclear earmarking provisions, further hampered efforts. Resource mobilization for the FWs was ‘whole-of-organization’ on paper, but not in practice, with neither incentives nor guidance for technical teams and regional/ country offices to mobilize for the FWs.

It may be opportune to frame the FWs as an entry point for exploring new forms of partnership with UNDP, rather than primarily as a mechanism for deploying flexible capital at scale. Partnership building with philanthropies, individuals and the private sector received a push, but this has not yet led to contributions.

[43] Link to findings 12, 13, 14, 16, 17 and lessons 1, 2, 6.

Current and potential donors prioritized strategic alignment, influence and visibility in their funding decisions. Philanthropic and private sector funders sought co-investment and clear risk mitigation plans. Both requested assurance that their contributions advance shared priorities and were visible to (domestic) constituencies. The existing channels to consult partners (Advisory Group/ TEGs) were appreciated, but deemed more process-oriented than strategic. Thinking of the FWs as a lab for new partnerships, the accelerator areas of UNDP forthcoming strategic plan (sustainable finance, digital and AI transformation, gender equality) may lend themselves to experimentation.

In a context where donors increasingly demand simplicity, transparency and agility, the future efficiency of the FWs will depend on organizational adaptation. This includes fostering entrepreneurial and tech-savvy skill sets, simplifying processes, and adopting more flexible governance models. By rebranding the FWs as a transparent, accessible platform for partnership, rather than a traditional funding instrument, UNDP could enhance competitiveness and position itself at the forefront of the emerging development finance ecosystem.

3.3. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions above, the evaluation puts forward the following interrelated recommendations, prioritizing high-risk issues. Given the formative nature of the evaluation and consultative process with the Evaluation Learning Group, detailed implementation areas are included.

Very High Priority

Recommendation 1 [44]

Clarify the niche of the Funding Windows, to position them internally within UNDP funding modalities as the channel for flexible and softly earmarked funds and externally vis-à-vis other UN funds through a strong thematic identity. Clear messaging around this niche and the FWs' purpose, architecture and ways of working, will help align internal stakeholders and appeal to diverse donor groups, including philanthropic and private contributors.

Implementation Areas:

The FW Steering Committee should convene a consensus-building process, involving external partners through the FW Advisory Group as needed, to define a vision statement and precise strategic positioning of the FWs as distinct from core and project funding. In doing so, the committee should consider positioning the FWs as an entry point for philanthropic and private contributors to explore new forms of partnership with UNDP, rather than as a mechanism primarily for deploying flexible capital at scale. The resulting vision should be shared with the Executive Board. The FW Secretariat should update internal performance frameworks, key performance indicators and the GMAs based on the new vision statement, and make them accessible.

The FW Steering Committee should define explicit earmarking guidance, allowing only flexible and softly earmarked contributions to the FWs. Earmarking should be made possible at the level of flagship, sub-window, region and country, based on protocols co-designed with the FW Advisory Group. The risk is a lower volume of funds channelled through the FWs initially, as third-party cost-sharing agreements would be used for tight earmarking. With time, the evaluation anticipates greater clarity would lead to increased contributions from a more diverse donor base. Reporting on the Strategic Plan IRRF and UN Funding Compact targets should be strengthened to demonstrate the level and share of flexible funds.

The FW Secretariat, with BERA, should rebrand the FWs and unify external messaging through a revamped FW webpage, allowing stakeholders to view not just delivery and results, but also strategic documentation (the vision document, information on the flagship approach, the updated contribution options, the risk register, etc.). Results reporting should consider the visibility preferences of current and future partners (government, philanthropies, private sector, high-net-worth individuals and others).

[44] Link to conclusions 1, 2, and 4.

High Priority

Recommendation 2 [45]

Formalize and rationalize the flagship approach by clarifying the *modus operandi* of the flagships, reducing the number of flagships, operationalizing soft earmarking to the flagships and boosting integrated ways of working within and across flagships. This will strengthen the thematic identity of the FWs and pitch the flagships as broad frameworks that serve as entry points for donor contributions.

Implementation Areas:

The GPN Joint Directorate should devise clear flagship guidance:

- Liaising with the Steering Committee to ensure the operationalization of soft earmarking of contributions at the level of flagship, and full Steering Committee oversight of the flagships.
- Setting sunset clauses for flagships to preserve the catalytic spirit of the FWs, and publishing criteria that flagships must meet to be retained after an initial trial period, e.g. after two years, they must have garnered additional donors, expanded to additional countries, visibly contributed to implementing UNDP global and regional priorities, etc.
- Making 'integrated ways of working' mandatory for flagship initiatives and an allocation criterion, and monitoring it during implementation.
- Redefining fund allocation durations to resolve the tension between the FW investments as catalytic and short-term, and the currently continuous nature of some flagships derived from global projects.

The FW Secretariat, in collaboration with the Results-Based Management Hub, should create a robust mechanism for reporting results against flagship indicators and targets, with a focus on catalytic achievements that can be effectively communicated.

Recommendation 3 [46]

Enhance FW governance to better oversee funded initiatives, manage risks and foster high-level partner engagement. This will support accountability across levels of the organization and reinforce partner confidence.

Implementation Areas:

The UNDP Executive Group should elevate supervision of the FW to the Executive Office (ExO) under the tutelage of the Associate Administrator, for better alignment with existing accountability structures (FW Steering Committee) and clarified risk ownership, and create a direct reporting line for the FW Secretariat to that structure. It should also request the Associate Administrator to chair the FW Advisory Group for better synergy with the Steering Committee and to promote two-way, strategic engagement.

The FW Steering Committee, in collaboration with ExO, should create and seize opportunities to engage with the UNDP Executive Board on the FWs, including as a standing item during the annual structured dialogue. It should entrust an existing working-level forum with the day-to-day follow-up on its high-level strategy decisions that are outside the purview of the FW Secretariat. In collaboration with BERA, the

[45] Link to conclusions 2, 3 and 4.

[46] Link to conclusions 1, 2 and 4.

Committee should ensure a tech-enabled active risk management approach, including publishing a risk register and mitigation strategy to satisfy the needs of philanthropic organizations, high-net-worth individuals and private sector partners.

Recommendation 4 [47]

Emphasize the Funding Windows within the new Corporate Resource Mobilization Strategy for 2026-29 to bolster organization-wide buy-in for FW resource mobilization, underscore the need to raise flexible and softly earmarked resources, help diversify the FW partner base and clearly link up resource mobilization for the FWs to other corporate resource mobilization efforts. Over time, this may boost the volume of unrestricted thematic funding for UNDP programmes.

Implementation Areas:

The FW Steering Committee and BERA should conceptualize and operationalize an organization-wide resource mobilization and partnership blueprint, offering incentives to fundraise for the FWs. As an integral part of the upcoming UNDP corporate resource mobilization strategy, the blueprint should:

- Consistently promote the FWs as a preferred vehicle.
- Devise a concrete donor diversification approach, with a focus on aligning mutual interests with philanthropic foundations towards 'negotiated unrestricted funding', while safeguarding existing donor relations.
- Continue to devise and streamline bespoke procedures for receiving contributions from foundations, high-net-worth individuals and the private sector, in collaboration with the BMS directorate and the Office of Legal Services.
- Operationalize and pilot alternative ways of working (matching, global challenges, etc.) to mobilize resources for the UNDP FWs.

In collaboration with the FW Secretariat, the FW Steering Committee and BERA should create a toolbox to empower technical and programme staff for effective resource mobilization, with tailored guidance on approaching donors, including high-net-worth individuals, philanthropic foundations and the private sector. These actors should also coordinate and monitor the implementation of the resource mobilization and partnership blueprint.

Medium Priority

Recommendation 5 [48]

Adjust the FW architecture and strengthen the equity and inclusion focus of interventions to maintain strong coherence with UNDP strategic plans, align with the new FW vision statement, and ensure that gender equality and LNOB commitments are central to all FWs. This will help to safeguard past achievements, while allowing for experimentation in the fields of crisis response, equity and inclusion and beyond.

[47] Link to conclusions 1, 2, 3, and 4.

[48] Link to conclusions 2 and 3.

Implementation Areas:

Streamline architecture: The FW Steering Committee, in collaboration with the Advisory Group, should review the current FW and sub-window structures and consider: (a) moving the Crisis Response sub-window out of the GPCR FW and merging the remaining sub-windows into the main GPCR FW; (b) creating an accelerator window with sub-windows for development financing, AI and digital, and gender equality and adopting challenge-led approaches where relevant, including in support of portfolios.

Gender and LNOB integration: The FW Steering Committee, in collaboration with the Advisory Group, should decide on a future gender architecture. The Committee should either discontinue the standalone GEWE FW and prioritize funding to GEN3 outputs across all FWs, or retain GEWE as a distinct FW or as an accelerator sub-window, making it a focus of the resource mobilization roadmap, while still strengthening GEN3 outputs across all FWs. Further, the FW Steering Committee should prioritize funding allocations towards equity- and inclusion-focused initiatives, setting ambitious targets for both the gender and LNOB markers.

The GPN Joint Directorate, in collaboration with the UNDP gender team, disability inclusion team and LNOB focal points, should designate a technical champion for equity and inclusion within each FW, to troubleshoot implementation challenges relative to gender equality, disability inclusion and LNOB, particularly in difficult, conflictual contexts. The same actors should institutionalize a regular review of progress on gender equality and LNOB (equality, equity and non-discrimination), in collaboration with the FW Secretariat, to document good programming practices and incentivize implementation in this area.

Recommendation 6 [49]

Create FW standard operating procedures and foster learning to position the FWs as an injection of both funds and technical know-how, reinforce operating modalities and ensure consistency, transparency and feedback loops. This will strengthen programming, inform planning and adaptive management across UNDP, and send a clear message to partners.

Implementation Areas:

The FW Steering Committee should define a FW learning function, using existing staff capacity and in collaboration with already existing knowledge management and exchange channels at HQ and regional levels. The FW Secretariat should continue to liaise with UNDP communities of practice to foster knowledge exchange. In collaboration with the GPN Joint Directorate, regional and country offices, the Steering Committee should clarify expectations for technical accompaniment through global and regional teams, recalibrating attention towards implementation.

The FW Secretariat should develop and socialize SOPs, endorsed by the FW Steering Committee, with a focus on pipeline management and clear and simplified fund allocation processes (including for the crisis response channel). It should develop a coherent set of guidelines and e-learning tools on how to apply for, access, manage and adequately report and communicate on the use of FW resources, accessible through the UNDP intranet, to reinforce adherence to the SOPs. The Secretariat should also establish an up-to-date centralized repository of FW guidance materials, meeting minutes, calls for proposals, criteria-based vetting of proposals, funding decisions and approvals, etc., accessible to all UNDP staff on the intranet, to increase transparency.

[49] Link to conclusions 2 and 4.

3.4. Management response

Recommendation 1

Clarify the niche of the Funding Windows, to position them internally within UNDP funding modalities as the channel for flexible and softly earmarked funds and externally vis-à-vis other UN funds through a strong thematic identity. Clear messaging around this niche and the FWs' purpose, architecture and ways of working, will help align internal stakeholders and appeal to diverse donor groups, including philanthropic and private contributors. ***(Very High Priority)***

Management response:

UNDP **fully agrees** with the recommendation and acknowledges the need to strategically position UNDP Funding Windows (FWs) within the UNDP funding architecture - as a mechanism distinct from core and project funding—and externally among UN thematic funds throughout the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2026–2029.

To address this, following the development of a strategic and compelling vision of the Funding Windows in line with the new Strategic Plan (2026-2029), the FW Steering Committee will validate the approach with the FW Advisory Group to ensure it fully resonates to the expected level of ambition, including serving as an entry point for new partnerships such as philanthropic and private contributors.

The FW Steering Committee, with BERA and FW Secretariat, will unify external messaging through a revamped FWs webpage to allow stakeholders to view strategic documentation, including contribution options, risks, results and others.

The FW Steering Committee will also lead a review of internal performance frameworks and Governance and Management Arrangements to align these with the new vision as well as articulate the explicit earmarking guidance while keeping the preference towards flexible and/or soft earmarking. The FW Steering Committee will ensure that reporting on Strategic Plan IRRF and UN Funding Compact targets become integral part of results monitoring and reporting and will demonstrate the level and share of flexible funds.

Key action(s)		Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
				Comments	Status
1.1	In consultations with key stakeholders, articulate and validate a strategic vision, architecture and positioning of the FW UNDP's funding modality with a thematic identity and the preference to channel flexible and/or softly earmarked funding.	Q1 2026	FW Steering Committee		
1.2	Roll out a coherent communication approach that elevates flexible thematic funding, channeled through the FWs, along with UNDP flexible core funding. Such approach will be promoted with diverse donor and partner audiences and complemented with compelling storytelling and impact stories to increase partner engagement and funding visibility.	Q2 2026	FW Steering Committee, with BERA and FW Secretariat		
1.3	Develop and socialize explicit earmarking guidance.	Q2 2026	FW Steering Committee with FW Secretariat		
1.4	Update internal performance frameworks and the Governance and Management Arrangements that allow for reporting on Strategic Plan IRRF and UN Funding Compact targets.	Q2-Q3 2026	FW Steering Committee, with BERA and FW Secretariat		

Recommendation 2

Formalize and Rationalize the Flagship Approach by clarifying the modus operandi of the flagships, reducing the number of flagships, operationalizing soft earmarking to the flagships, and boosting integrated ways of working within and across flagships. This will strengthen the thematic identity of the FWs and pitch the flagships as broad frameworks that serve as entry points for donor contributions. *(High priority)*

Management response:

UNDP **fully agrees** with the recommendation to formalize and rationalize the flagship approach, clarify the *modus operandi,* reduce tight earmarking and increase flexible and/or soft earmarking and promote integrated programming.

To address this, the FW Steering Committee will conduct a review of the current Flagships to rationalize their number and thematic focus aiming at the alignment with the new Strategic Plan 2026-2029. UNDP will also set criteria for the establishment of Flagship which will include regional considerations, retention and discontinuation in line with the new vision of the FWs.

The FW Steering Committee will develop and disseminate revised guidance on the allocation process within the Flagships' context, emphasizing programme and thematic integration as a prerequisite for allocation. At the same time, fund allocation duration will be defined in line with the developed FWs vision.

With guidance of UNDP Results-Based Management (RBM) Hub, UNDP will create a performance mechanism for reporting results against Flagship indicators and targets that are aligned with the FWs' vision.

Key action(s)		Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
				Comments	Status
2.1	Conduct a review of the existing Flagships to rationalize the number and thematic focus and establish clear criteria for retention (incl. sunset clauses, thematic integration requirements). Review fund allocation duration and establish performance benchmarks.	Q2 2026	FW Steering Committee and FW Secretariat		
2.2	Develop, socialize and apply formal guidance on Flagships.	Q2-Q3 2026	FW Steering Committee, FW Secretariat		
2.3	In cooperation with BPPS RBM Hub, create a performance mechanism for reporting results against Flagship indicators and targets.	Q3-Q4 2026	FW Secretariat, BPPS RBM Hub		

Recommendation 3

Enhance FW Governance to better oversee funded initiatives, manage risks, and foster high-level partner engagement. This will support accountability across levels of the organization and reinforce partner confidence. *(High priority)*

Management response:

UNDP **partially agrees** with the recommendation to enhance FW governance to effectively oversee funded initiatives, manage risks and foster high-level partner engagement and maintain partners' trust.

To implement the recommendation, UNDP will maintain the FW Secretariat located in the Joint Directorate of the Global Policy Network (GPN JD) to ensure strategic direction by senior management and thematic collaboration with technical teams across UNDP's Global Policy Network. UNDP will explore ways for the Associate Administrator to engage more directly with the FW Advisory Group throughout the implementation period of the Strategic Plan 2026-2029.

In addition, UNDP will review and revise the FW GMAs to increase the oversight functions of the FW Steering Committee and its role to foster strategic engagements and dialogue with the FWs Advisory Group. Additionally, UNDP will revise the Terms of Reference for the FW Advisory Group to strengthen synergies with the FW Steering Committee towards strategic dialogue.

The FW Steering Committee will engage with the Executive Board Secretariat to identify opportunities to integrate FWs-related matters into existing Executive Board processes, including into the UNDP Structured Funding Dialogue.

Key action(s)		Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
				Comments	Status
3.1	Review and revise the Governance and Management Arrangements to increase the oversight of the FW Steering Committee.	Q1-Q2 2026	FW Steering Committee		
3.2	Revise the TOR of the FW Advisory Group to strengthen synergies with FW Steering Committee and ensure strategic engagement with existing and new partners (philanthropies, private sector, others).	Q1-Q2 2026	FW Steering Committee, with BERA and FW Advisory Group		
3.3	Integrate FW-related updates into the UNDP Structured Funding Dialogue and prepare targeted briefing materials to raise visibility and foster strategic engagement from the Executive Board.	Q2 2026	FW Steering Committee and BERA		

Recommendation 4

Emphasize the Funding Windows within the new Corporate Resource Mobilization (RM) Strategy for 2026-29 to bolster organization-wide buy-in for FW resource mobilization, underscore the need to raise flexible and softly earmarked resources, help diversify the FW partner base, and clearly link up resource mobilization for the FWs to other corporate resource mobilization efforts. Over time, this may boost the volume of unrestricted thematic funding for UNDP's programmes *(Medium Priority)*

Management response:

UNDP **fully agrees** with the recommendation to emphasize the FWs in the Corporate Resource Mobilization Strategy 2026-2029 that achieves a corporate buy-in to mobilize thematic flexible and softly earmarked resources, diversifies the donor base and demonstrates clear links between FW-focused resource mobilization efforts and the corporate ones.

To implement this, UNDP will operationalize comprehensive organization-wide resource mobilization and partnership plan for the FWs that is coordinated and monitored at all levels - global, regional, country – and an integral part of the Corporate Resource Mobilization Strategy 2026-2029.

As part of such endeavor, the FWs will be consistently promoted as a preferred vehicle for thematic flexible (non-core) and softly earmarked funding. Through collaboration with BERA and BMS, a dedicated partnership channel/mechanism and related procedures will be designed to allow receiving contributions from philanthropies, HNWIs and the private sector. Pilot innovative modalities such as challenge-based funding and matching contributions will be explored, adapted to FWs context and rolled out. Regional and Central Bureaus' global/regional teams as well as Country Offices, will be incentivized and capacitated to engage in FW resource mobilization, with the support of BERA.

Key action(s)		Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
				Comments	Status
4.1	Endorse and operationalize a comprehensive organization-wide resource mobilization and partnership plan for the FWs that is an integral part of the UNDP Corporate Resource Mobilization Strategy 2026-2029.	Q2-Q3 2026	FW Steering Committee with BERA and FW Secretariat		
4.2	Diversify resource mobilization approaches and tools such as challenge-based funding, matching contributions, etc. to expand the donor base and unlock new funding streams, including from philanthropies, private sector, other emerging partners.	Q2-Q3 2026	FW Steering Committee, BERA, BMS, FW Secretariat		
4.3	Design and roll out a dedicated partnership channel/mechanism and related procedures to allow receiving contributions from philanthropies, HNWIs and the private sector.	Q2-Q3 2026	FW Steering Committee, with BMS, BERA, FW Secretariat		
4.4	Ensure the FWs remain as a standing agenda item in the Inter-Bureau Resource Mobilization Coordination Group meetings to deliver prioritized actions to mobilize and diversify funding.	Q2-Q3 2026	FW Steering Committee, with BERA, FW Secretariat		

Recommendation 5

Adjust the FW Architecture and strengthen the equity and inclusion focus of interventions to maintain strong coherence with UNDP strategic plans, to align with the new FW vision statement, and ensure that gender equality and LNOB commitments are central to all FWs. This will help safeguard past achievements while allowing for experimentation in the fields of crisis response, equity and inclusion, and beyond.

Management response:

UNDP **fully agrees** to adjust the FW architecture to ensure strong coherence with the UNDP Strategic Plan 2026-2029 and new FW vision. UNDP also commits to ensuring gender equality and LNOB principles are central to the FWs, including all funded initiatives.

To implement this, the FW Steering Committee will undertake a review of the current FW architecture to arrive at the most optimal new architecture aligned with UNDP Strategic Plan 2026-2029. The new architecture will be validated with the FW Advisory Group to ensure it resonates with the expected level of ambition.

In addition, UNDP will institutionalize annual reviews of progress on gender equality and LNOB, document good practices and incentivize implementation in these areas. Designation of technical champions for equity and inclusion within each FW will provide targeted support to Country Offices, particularly in complex contexts and fragile countries. The FW Steering Committee will also prioritize funding allocations toward equity- and inclusion-focused initiatives, with ambitious targets set for both gender and LNOB markers.

Key action(s)		Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
				Comments	Status
5.1	Ensure gender equality and LNOB are central to all FWs by setting strong targets for LNOB and Gender Markers and institutionalizing annual reviews of gender and LNOB progress, documenting good practices and incentivizing implementation.	Q3 2026	FW Steering Committee, with BPPS, CB, FW Secretariat		
5.2	Strengthen technical leadership for equity and inclusion by providing targeted support to Country Offices on LNOB and gender sensitive programming and institutionalize equity and inclusion champions per FW.	Q3 2026	FW Steering Committee, with BPPS, CB, FW Secretariat		

Recommendation 6

Create a FW standard operating procedure and foster learning to position the FWs as an injection of both funds and technical know-how, to reinforce operating modalities and to ensure consistency, transparency and feedback loops. This will strengthen programming, inform planning and adaptive management across UNDP, and send a clear message to partners.

Management response:

UNDP **fully agrees** to reinforce FW SOPs and foster the learning to position the FWs as a strategic funding mechanism that provides funding as well as harnesses knowledge and provides feedback loops.

To achieve this, the FW Steering Committee will institutionalize the FW learning function to serve as a central mechanism for capturing, synthesizing, and disseminating lessons learned from FW-supported initiatives, thereby strengthening evidence-based programming and adaptive management. As custodian of this learning function, the FW Secretariat will work closely with established knowledge management and exchange platforms at both headquarters and regional levels, including UNDP Communities of Practice to foster cross-regional knowledge exchange. The FW Steering Committee will clarify expectations for technical accompaniment from global and regional teams. This will ensure that technical support is strategically deployed to support design and implementation of initiatives funded via FWs.

To harmonize operational modalities, the FW Secretariat will develop and implement comprehensive SOPs, endorsed by the FW Steering Committee. These SOPs will focus on pipeline management and fund allocation processes – including those for crisis response — and will serve to standardize practices and procedures across all windows and promote institutional coherence. A suite of guidance materials and e-learning tools will be developed to support staff in applying for, accessing, managing, and reporting on FW resources. These resources will be made available through the FW intranet pages.

The FW Secretariat will establish a centralized, regularly updated repository of FW-related materials, including guidance documents, meeting minutes, calls for proposals, vetting criteria, funding decisions, and approvals. Accessible to all UNDP staff via FW intranet pages, this repository will promote transparency, institutional memory, and informed engagement with the FWs.

Key action(s)		Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
				Comments	Status
6.1	Institutionalize the FW learning function to capture, synthesize and disseminate lessons learned, and strengthen evidence-based programming and adaptive management.	Q3-Q4 2026	FW Steering Committee, with FW Secretariat		
6.2	Strengthening technical accompaniment, for FW-funded projects during design and implementation phases and document cases that demonstrate improved project quality and results due to this support.	Q3-Q4 2026	FW Steering Committee, with GPN Joint Directorate, FW Secretariat		
6.3	Develop and implement SOPs on pipeline management and fund allocation, including for crisis response, aligned with revised GMAs.	Q3-Q4 2026	FW Steering Committee, with FW Secretariat		
6.4	Establish the centralized repository of FW guidance materials and documents and develop e-learning tools to support staff in applying for, accessing, managing and reporting on FW resources.	Q2 2026	FW Secretariat		

ANNEXES

Annexes to the report (listed below) are available here:
https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/25072

Annex 1: Evaluation Terms of Reference

Annex 2: Evaluation Learning Group Terms of Reference

Annex 3: Evaluation matrix

Annex 4: Theory of Change

Annex 5: Evaluation methodology

Annex 6: Overview of Funding Window indicators and targets

Annex 7: List of Funding Window flagships

Annex 8: Typology of earmarking

Annex 9: Documents consulted

Annex 10: Stakeholders consulted

Annex 11: Financial overview

Annex 12: Summary of ideations from Signal Studios

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