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Operational activities of the United Nations
for international development cooperation:
follow-up to policy recommendations of the
General Assembly and the Council

Implementation of General Assembly resolution [75/233](#) on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report provides a thorough analysis of the implementation of General Assembly resolution [75/233](#) on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, since its adoption in 2020. The report also provides an update on the progress made in implementing the mandates of Assembly resolution [72/279](#) on the repositioning of the United Nations development system.

In 2023, the world took stock of a solemn promise made in 2015. In the political declaration of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly adopted in September 2023 (see Assembly resolution [78/1](#), annex), there was broad recognition among Member States that the world had changed drastically since the first Sustainable Development Goals Summit in 2019 and since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. With only 15 per cent of the targets on track to be met, Member States noted the need to undertake immediate course correction and acceleration of progress, lest the world remain beset by continued poverty, widening inequalities and multiple, interlinked crises.

That promise can still be realized. Member States have pointed the way with high-impact initiatives to support six targeted areas in which urgent transitions are needed: (a) food systems transformation; (b) energy transitions and access; (c) digital connectivity; (d) education and skills gaps; (e) decent jobs and social protection,

* [A/79/50](#).



including health care; and (f) the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. These are to be accompanied by “engine rooms” that can scale up development support services to strengthen the policy and regulatory environment in countries, build market-ready pipelines, and convene partners and stakeholders who can contribute to the results expected and arrange the appropriate mix of finance to achieve the transitions. The focus is on key transitions as accelerators, supported by robust “engine room” capacities. When combined, the transitions and “engine rooms” related to means of implementation offer the rescue kit for which the world has been asking.

The repositioned development system is ready to support this critical pivot. The present report details how the development system has worked to realign coordination mechanisms, working modalities, tools, expertise and resources to make a concerted push as we near 2030.

Progress is palpable. Survey feedback from Governments, resident coordinators and United Nations country team members shows that the direction of travel remains positive regarding the results of the reforms in ensuring better support for national priorities, as well as perceived enhancements to alignment with national plans, better coordination of policy support, joint planning, more cohesive communication efforts, and shared office spaces in some countries. The repositioning continues to yield an astonishing return on investment, with United Nations Sustainable Development Group entities reporting an unprecedented \$553 million in efficiency gains in 2023, a 37 per cent increase in one year. Agencies are redirecting these resources back into support at the country level. Efforts to diversify the funding base are also starting to yield results, with an additional \$1 billion in non-core funding being provided by the private sector.

Nevertheless, to scale up support for acceleration towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals using the transitions at the scale, pace and ambition expected, much more will be required from Member States and United Nations teams alike. At the centre rests the need for acceleration of the promises, but changes to behaviours and funding patterns are still required. These shifts must be underwritten by different business management and programmatic tools and cycles, which can strengthen the ability of the United Nations development system to deliver in a coherent and coordinated manner. Shifts in the nature of funding provided to the system will also be critical. Addressing declines in core funding and ensuring adequate and predictable funding for the resident coordinator system, as well as increased resources for pooled funds, will make or break our ability to deliver transformative support.

Against this backdrop, intensive consultations with Member States and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group began in October 2023 to re-energize the funding compact. The streamlined and more strategic funding compact is being presented alongside the present report (see [A/79/72/Add.2-E/2024/12/Add.2](#)). The present report also provides status updates on system-wide efficiencies and strengthened results-based management, including the full operationalization of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group System-wide Evaluation Office.

The present report is intended to inform the discussions of the Economic and Social Council at its operational activities for development segment in May 2024, and the General Assembly in conducting its 2024 quadrennial comprehensive policy review at its seventy-ninth session. The review and the oversight of its implementation through the Council remain integral to strengthened delivery of development cooperation in country. The forthcoming review will provide vital policy guidance needed to strengthen the United Nations development system’s support for accelerated action on the Sustainable Development Goals.

The present report is intended to inform Member State oversight of the United Nations development system and facilitate accountability, including on the implementation of corporate policies against sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. The report reflects findings designed to track progress in meeting the mandates of the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review. It draws on a reservoir of data, including surveys^a and insights from evaluations and other assessments conducted in 2023, to provide evidence-based analysis on progress and challenges.

On the basis of these findings, the report also sets out specific follow-up actions and recommendations by the Secretary-General for consideration by Member States.

^a Four surveys were conducted in late 2023 and early 2024 by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. They include a survey of host country Governments, which was completed by 73 per cent of countries, and a survey of Governments that make voluntary contributions to the United Nations development system, which received 71 responses. A survey of resident coordinators was completed by all 129 resident coordinators, while 808 United Nations country team members from 46 entities took part in a survey of country teams. A survey of headquarters of United Nations development system entities drew responses from 30 organizations which account for 97 per cent of all spending on operational activities for development. The information management system administered by the Development Coordination Office was also used extensively as a source for the present report.

I. Introduction

1. In September 2023, the Sustainable Development Goals Summit issued a wake-up call and a rescue plan to reverse lagging progress on the Sustainable Development Goals before it is too late. A strong political declaration reaffirmed the universal nature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the shared responsibility for its implementation. In that declaration, Member States welcomed the efforts of the United Nations development system to reform itself and committed to fully supporting the system, including the resident coordinator system and the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund.

2. The data in the present report continue to provide abundant evidence that the process of repositioning the United Nations development system has borne fruit. As the world seeks to accelerate progress, we can confidently say that the United Nations development system is ready to maximize the benefits of changes made and scale up action in the remaining years leading towards 2030. At its core is a reinvigorated resident coordinator system, fully consolidated at the heart of the Secretariat of the United Nations and with links solidified across the United Nations system. The reforms undertaken have enabled improved alignment of United Nations planning documents, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, with national needs and priorities. Last year, 96 per cent of Governments considered that United Nations country teams were effectively responding to national priorities for Sustainable Development Goal delivery. At the same time, ninety-four per cent considered activities under the Cooperation Frameworks to be closely aligned with their needs, an increase from 81 per cent in 2019, when the reforms were still in their early stages. Nurturing and expanding these achievements in the coming years, while ensuring that all hands are on deck for implementation, will be a crucial test of the relevance and effectiveness of our United Nations development system.

3. There is no doubt that the path ahead will be complex. To succeed, we must pivot to a new phase of pace, scale and impact with regard to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. A “business as usual” approach or piecemeal progress will not suffice. The United Nations development system is moving – incrementally but steadily – from a sectoral to a more integrated approach. It is increasingly ready to act on the key areas of transition that can lift and underpin the realization of sustainable development, and is placing greater attention on helping countries mobilize means of implementation, a longstanding call of developing nations. A greater focus on these “engine rooms” should bring the system’s assets further together to prioritize support for the development of capacities and shifts in policy and regulatory frameworks, the design of bankable project pipelines, the mobilization of finance and capacity-building in country.

4. With reforms largely consolidated, it is our common duty to ensure that we permanently adapt and fine-tune system-wide action to respond swiftly to needs on the ground. Some dimensions still require priority attention. For example, operational alignment across United Nations development system entities must be further strengthened, with greater alignment of business models, country configurations and skill sets to the priorities enshrined in each United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. The coming year will also see further consolidation of our work to generate efficiencies across the United Nations development system and strengthen accountability, including through closer monitoring of the reform checklist on the implementation of reforms to the system¹ and the full operationalization of the System-wide Evaluation Office.

¹ The checklist on the implementation of the reform of the United Nations development system is a direct response to a request by Member States in General Assembly resolution 76/4 to the chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group. The checklist provides a series of metrics that entities are encouraged to use in reporting to their governing bodies, to facilitate oversight of the implementation of the United Nations development system reform agenda.

5. We also remain fully committed to continuous strengthening of oversight by Member States of the United Nations development system, including the resident coordinator system. The many points raised regarding enhanced oversight during the recent exchanges with Member States on funding for resident coordinators are welcome. The Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group continues to lead engagement with the President of the Economic and Social Council and the Council's Bureau to ensure that the operational activities for development segment is fully conducive to robust oversight.

6. A major concern remains the funding of the United Nations development system. Despite efforts by many Member States, funding continues to fall below the immense needs of the 2030 Agenda. It also continues to be provided in a manner that does not incentivize, and at times harms, a more strategic and collaborative response. In 2023, Member States provided 71 per cent of the funding for the Organization's development activities, but most of those contributions remained heavily earmarked for specific projects and deliverables. Core funding for development-related activities dropped to 18.3 per cent in 2023, from 21.4 per cent in 2022, remaining well below the target of 30 per cent set in the 2019 funding compact. Voluntary contributions for the resident coordinator system again fell short in 2023, confirming that the current funding model may be inadequate in the medium to long term.

7. Against this backdrop, and in view of the intrinsic volatility of voluntary funding for the resident coordinator system, I have submitted a proposal to the General Assembly for the conversion of a portion of funding from the regular budget (see [A/78/753](#)). A renewed funding compact is also presented (see [A/79/72/Add.2-E/2024/12/Add.2](#)) to strengthen the partnership between United Nations entities and Member States, with a mutual aim of fostering a United Nations development system that is ever more effective, collaborative and efficient. The re-energized funding compact is designed to offer a set of commitments to guide funding decisions, and in turn to further strengthen results reporting, transparency, visibility and accountability.

8. The situation facing us is crystal clear. Over the past four years, a more effective, cohesive, transparent and accountable United Nations development system has emerged, offering integrated, system-wide solutions for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. The reforms have yielded astonishing returns on investment, with \$553 million in efficiency gains in 2023. This evolution is under way as the development system comes together, strengthens existing capacities and relationships, and explores new partnerships and frontiers. Nevertheless, if the world is to turn the tide and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in the six years that lie ahead, the system will also have to leapfrog and maximize the benefits of the changes we have made together since landmark General Assembly resolution [72/279](#). Working together, we can succeed. The United Nations development system stands ready.

II. Driving Sustainable Development Goal acceleration with a repositioned United Nations development system

A. Pivoting to a new phase of action: pace, scale and impact

9. Responding to calls by Member States in the quadrennial comprehensive policy review in 2016, the United Nations development system has undergone a process of deep transformation to better support countries and accelerate progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The reform has prioritized strengthening leadership for development, empowering country teams to translate global commitments into effective country-level action, shifting to integrated policy advice and seamlessly leveraging and delivering expertise from across the United Nations development system. However, to deliver the accelerated and ambitious actions that Member States asked for in the political declaration of the high-level

political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly in September 2023, the system will need to be focused and strategic, and to make full use of all changes and new tools ushered in by these reforms.

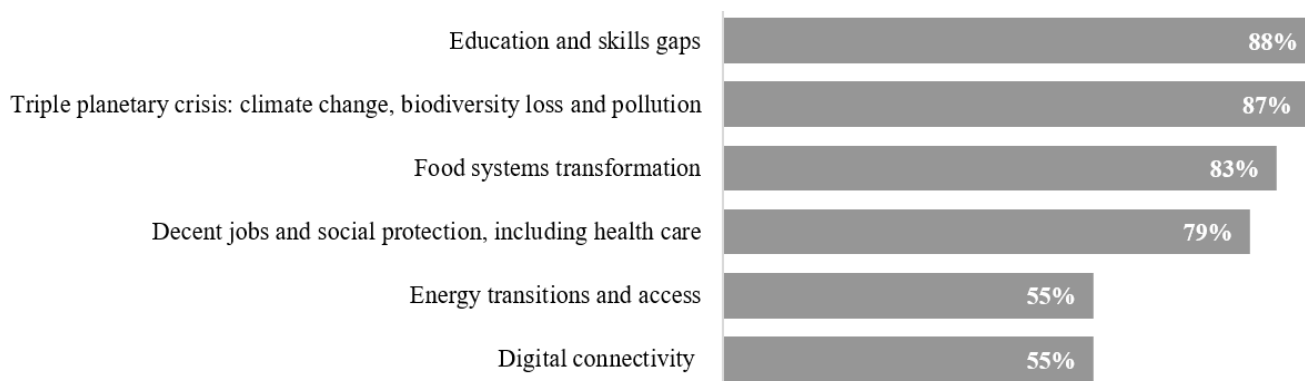
Sustainable Development Goal transitions: investment pathways for acceleration of achievement of the Goals

10. In line with the political declaration, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group has clarified key areas of support for countries to make progress on sustainable transitions in interconnected areas in which scaled-up investments can have catalytic and multiplier effects across the Sustainable Development Goals. These areas include: (a) food systems transformation; (b) energy transitions and access; (c) digital connectivity; (d) education and skills gaps; (e) decent jobs and social protection, including health care; and (f) the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, as described below.

11. Overall, resident coordinators and United Nations country teams are well positioned to help unlock the transformations needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. To be fully effective, however, resident coordinators will need – more than ever – to draw on available United Nations expertise from across the globe to provide tailored support to countries in advancing these transitions. Key to this will be leveraging four “engine room” capacities articulated around means of implementation: (a) enabling shifts across policy and regulatory frameworks; (b) identifying pipelines of market-ready national projects; (c) convening partnerships for financing these initiatives; and (d) building institutions and capacity at scale to steer and sustain the transitions.

12. By harnessing the power of the United Nations development system’s knowledge, networks, expertise and ability to convene stakeholders, we will work closely with Member States to mobilize action and forge partnerships to propel faster advances. The 2023 survey of programme country Governments showed that the majority (75 per cent on average) rated support from United Nations country teams on the six highlighted areas as effective (see figure 1).

Figure 1
Governments that rated the support of United Nations country teams in the following areas as effective



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of Governments, 2023.

13. In the next quadrennial comprehensive policy review cycle and beyond, a key objective for the United Nations development system will be to lift the “engine room” capacities in every country. Integrated strategies and policy support that prioritize long-term, sustainable development have proven to be more impactful than fragmented, small-scale projects, which continue to predominate. To scale up financing, the United Nations will have to maximize its convening role to help

Governments attract public and private investment, diversify funding mechanisms and forge innovative partnerships. Institutional strengthening will remain fundamental in supporting Governments and public institutions to lead this process, with the participation of civil society and the private sector.

Four “engine room” capacities to support acceleration of achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

14. Regarding the “engine room” capacities designed to help countries overcome the bottlenecks common across the Sustainable Development Goals, we have a good foundation on which to build. Most Governments agree that the United Nations supports cross-sectoral policies and regulatory frameworks (86 per cent), identifies scalable public and private investment opportunities (75 per cent) and builds public institutional capacity (79 per cent). The level of agreement was lower regarding United Nations support for convening a “deal room” of diverse stakeholders to focus on the financing mix for the Sustainable Development Goals (see table 1). There are clear opportunities to strengthen the United Nations development system capacity to convene a more diverse financing mix.

15. However, surveys by small island developing States and countries with very small programmes (under \$20 million) had a lower appreciation – on average, between 7 and 12 percentage points lower – of the system’s capacities to support countries across the four “engine room” capacities. This shows that despite the progress made through the review of multi-country offices and other mechanisms of support for small island developing States, we still have a long way to go to better service this critical grouping of Member States representing just over one fifth of the United Nations membership, which remain extremely vulnerable on many fronts.

16. Also noteworthy is that Governments, including those of small island developing States, frequently singled out limited funding and capacity as obstacles to adequate support across the four “engine room” capacities. They called for greater United Nations support in building national data capacity and delivering more sustained technical assistance, private sector engagement and support in developing and implementing Sustainable Development Goal financing mechanisms.

17. Globally, resources need to align with the transitions. A first step has been to prioritize the transitions in the revised strategy of the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund, but a wider effort will be required moving forward.

Table 1

Resident coordinator and United Nations country team support for four “engine room” capacities to advance the Sustainable Development Goals

	<i>Supporting change in national cross-sectoral policies and regulatory frameworks</i>	<i>Identifying national opportunities for public and private investments at scale</i>	<i>Convening a diverse group of stakeholders focused on the financing mix</i>	<i>Building the capacity of public institutions</i>
Governments agree the United Nations is:	86%	75%	63%	79%
Resident coordinators agree the United Nations country team contributed to:	93%	66%	86%	94%
United Nations country team members agree the resident coordinator led the country team in:	84%	60%	68%	74%

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs surveys of Governments, resident coordinators and United Nations country teams, 2023.

Note: Survey of government questions refer to the resident coordinator and United Nations country team. Resident coordinator questions refer to the United Nations country team. United Nations country team questions refer to resident coordinator leadership in United Nations country team support.

18. Looking more closely into the key transition areas, we note a few encouraging developments.

Food systems

19. Under the leadership of the Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, on my behalf, the United Nations development system has supported robust and sustainable food systems, including through the United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub under the oversight of the three Rome-based agencies – International Fund for Agricultural Development, World Food Programme (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) – and hosted by FAO in Rome. Established following the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit, the Hub supports the coordination of United Nations entities on issues related to food systems transformation. In July 2023, the Hub organized the United Nations Food Systems Summit +2 Stocktaking Moment in Rome, where 108 countries (out of 126 with national pathways) presented voluntary progress reports. The Food Systems Stocktaking Moment culminated in the launch of the Secretary-General’s call to action for “Accelerated food systems transformation: making food systems work for people and planet”, which outlines key food systems objectives, including securing fiscal space and access to resources to accelerate food systems transformation and provide immediate relief to developing countries, aligning national pathways and agricultural policies with the updates of national determined contributions and the climate goals contained in adaptation plans by 2025 and promoting the security of global food systems.

20. In collaboration with the secretariat of the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund, the United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub supports integrated programming on food systems transformation, which will be provided thanks to support from a broad donor base. This initiative is aimed at cultivating robust partnerships to address crucial financing challenges at the country level.

21. United Nations entities are positioning sustainable food systems as a priority transition for acceleration of the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and integrating related activities into core areas of work, assisting 127 Member States in taking concrete steps across the board. The United Nations development system has a role in delivering upon the priorities set out in the statement of the Secretary-General at the Food Systems Stocktaking Moment and the call to action for accelerated food systems transformation. This includes supporting food systems to increase incomes, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, bolster resilience, improve nutrition, increase water efficiency and enhance human, animal and ecosystem health. Similar objectives were reinforced by Member States in the groundbreaking Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems and Climate Action emerging from the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Energy transitions and access

22. An estimated 675 million people are still without access to electricity and 2.3 billion without access to clean cooking in 2021. One in 10 people worldwide still does not have access to electricity, a gap associated with deficits in nearly every area of development, from health care to income to gender equality. If no additional efforts are made or measures put in place, nearly 660 million people, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa, will be without access to electricity in 2030, and 1.9 billion people will be without access to clean cooking, with almost 6 out of 10 of those without access residing in sub-Saharan Africa.

23. The United Nations development system has been supporting Member States in transforming their economies towards accessible, clean and renewable energy systems as a cornerstone of their sustainable development pathways. In 2021, the system launched the United Nations energy compacts, under the coordination of UN-Energy, which is co-chaired by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Sustainable Energy for All, as a platform for voluntary country-level commitments to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 7 by 2030 and net-zero emission by 2050. At the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit, the energy compacts mobilized \$1.3 trillion in commitments to drive actions to accelerate green energy transition by 2030 at the country level. Through the energy compacts, the entities of the United Nations development system drive progress and support to Governments and other relevant stakeholders in supporting the capacities and policies of developing countries to enhance electricity access, clean cooking, energy efficiency and the transition to renewable energy, and to mobilize financing and investment.

24. The United Nations system, under the leadership of the resident coordinators, is also supporting collaborative efforts on energy transition, such as just energy transition partnerships. In 2023, Indonesia and Viet Nam presented their investment plans under such partnerships at the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework on Climate Change, and South Africa continued to make progress on implementation of such a partnership, while a new partnership was announced for Senegal. Resident coordinators and United Nations country teams are actively supporting Governments in the implementation of the partnerships.

25. The 2023 progress report on energy compacts highlights that, since the compacts began in 2021, they have enhanced electricity access for 129 million people and provided clean cooking to 22 million people. From 2021 to 2023, the compacts mobilized \$105 billion. Over \$1 trillion has been pledged for future investments, with 80 per cent coming from the private sector, underlining the value of the compacts in leveraging finance for gains related to energy and multiple other Sustainable Development Goals. The energy compacts can also serve as a guide to United Nations country teams and help mobilize financial flows to developing countries in support of clean energy through enhanced multi-stakeholder and international cooperation.

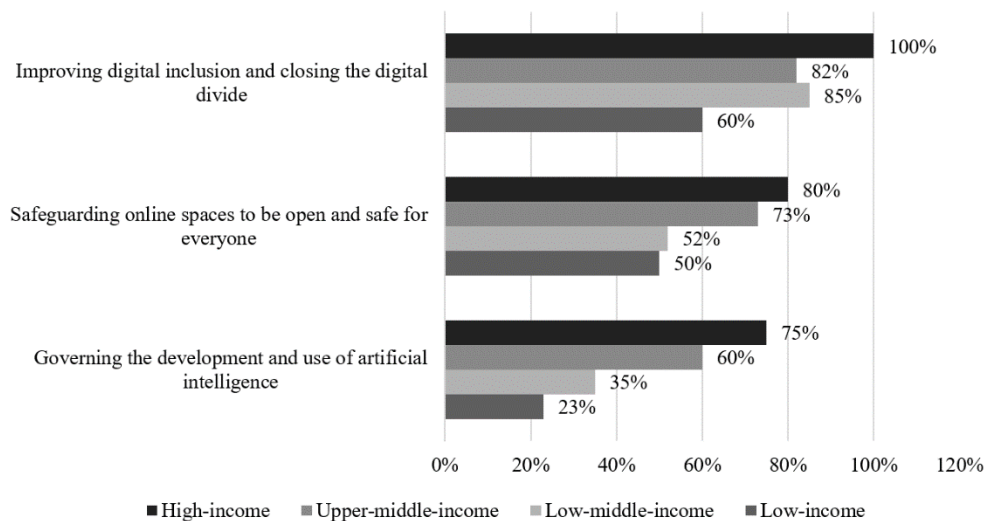
26. Under the leadership of resident coordinators and through the policy expertise of UNDP and other United Nations country team entities, the United Nations supports the efforts of developing countries to update and implement ambitious economy-wide nationally determined contributions, with clear targets and financing to transition away from fossil fuels and scale up renewable, efficient and clean energy. The 2023 survey found that 28 per cent of host Governments thought that United Nations country teams could do more to support energy access and affordability. Several high-profile international initiatives currently under way indicate the potential for linking energy and sustainable development, such as the effort led by UNDP to expand mini-grids and improve power supplies in rural communities in 21 African countries.

Digital connectivity

27. Digital technologies can be a powerful catalyst of other important transformations, including with regard to social protection, education and skills gaps, food systems and energy access. They could accelerate progress on two thirds of Sustainable Development Goal targets. Nevertheless, universal connectivity remains a distant prospect for 2.6 billion people, in particular for women and girls, in low-income countries. At the same time, the pace and reach of technological advancement surpasses the ability of governance systems to keep up.

28. The 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review recognized the importance of improving digital inclusion. Seventy-nine per cent of Governments that requested support in digital technology and cooperation expressed satisfaction with the effectiveness of the United Nations country team in improving digital inclusion and closing the digital divide. This was followed by satisfaction with support for safeguarding online spaces (61 per cent) and governing the development and use of artificial intelligence (42 per cent). High- and upper-middle-income countries expressed more satisfaction than low-income countries (see figure 2).

Figure 2
Government feedback on the effectiveness of United Nations country team support in digital technology and cooperation



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of Governments, 2023.

29. Resident coordinators reported a slight improvement in support received by country teams from entity headquarters for digital transformation, up 5 percentage points from 2021 to 50 per cent in 2023. Several resident coordinators indicated a need for more capacity-building from regional and headquarters offices. To enable country teams to offer comprehensive value propositions on digital transformation, efforts need to be scaled up and accelerated. For instance, the Regional Collaborative Platform for Europe and Central Asia brought together 22 United Nations entities to coordinate actions and support country teams on digital delivery, including through a United Nations digital development toolbox.²

30. The Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund, with its specialized window for digital transformation, will support country teams, under the leadership of resident coordinators, to help drive digital transformation in countries. Proposals are currently undergoing final evaluation and quality assurance, with plans to implement joint programmes in the first half of 2024.

31. The High-Impact Initiative on Digital Public Infrastructure and the Sustainable Development Goal Digital Initiative, both led by UNDP and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) with the support of multiple other entities, is a prime example of operationalizing our shared vision on digital cooperation. This initiative,

² United Nations Digital Transformation Group for Europe and Central Asia, “UN digital development toolbox: guidelines, frameworks and tools supporting the United Nations development system delivery on digital in Europe and Central Asia”, version 1.2 (May 2023).

outlined in Our Common Agenda policy brief 5³ and building on the Road Map for Digital Cooperation (A/74/821), is aimed at helping to develop rights-based and people-centred digital public infrastructure solutions in 100 countries by 2030. The 2023 launch successfully mobilized \$400 million and introduced the first global digital public infrastructure safeguards framework.⁴ Progress and plans related to the framework will be showcased in the lead-up to the 2024 Summit of the Future, including through the deployment of the Safeguards Resource Hub.

32. Since its launch in 2021, the Partner2Connect Digital Coalition has mobilized \$36 billion in 138 countries to foster meaningful connectivity in the hardest-to-connect communities. Thirty-one per cent of pledges are directed towards least developed countries and 21 per cent support women and girls. In 2023, the coalition mobilized \$7 billion, a 51 per cent increase from prior years. Further, the Universal and Meaningful Connectivity dashboard⁵ was launched in July 2023 to help countries track progress towards the aspirational connectivity targets for 2030 and is now available in over 220 countries and economies.

33. The speed and reach of artificial intelligence are unprecedented, and so are its governance gaps. Universality means that every country and community must have access to artificial intelligence and the digital and data infrastructure it requires. It is an opportune moment for the United Nations development system to step up its collective efforts to foster effective artificial intelligence governance and promote equitable opportunities for all countries, leaving no one behind.

34. The establishment of my High-Level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence in 2023 marked a major step towards international governance of artificial intelligence. The body's interim report⁶ includes recommendations on the inclusive international governance of artificial intelligence for humanity. It frames governance as a key enabler for harnessing the benefits of artificial intelligence for the Sustainable Development Goals. A final report will be published ahead of the Summit of the Future following extensive stakeholder consultations.

35. Over the next quadrennial review cycle, the United Nations development system must intensify efforts to support Governments in bridging digital divides and achieving a just digital transition. This includes enhancing digital infrastructure connectivity, improving digital literacy, building capacities and access to new technologies, promoting an open, safe and secure online space, and closing the gender divide. Agreement on a global digital compact at the Summit of the Future can strengthen global action to tackle the digital divide, enhance abilities to deliver stronger national and international governance of artificial intelligence and reinforce a human-centred approach to digital cooperation.

Education and skills gaps

36. With progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 4 severely off track, societies becoming more and more divided, and digitalization and other forces disrupting the world of work, now is the time to fundamentally rethink educational systems and to accelerate the shift to making lifelong learning, knowledge and skills a central plank of every country's vision for a better future. This is the primary recommendation of the United Nations policy brief on "Transforming education", released in 2023, which builds on the national commitments to education transformation submitted by 141 countries at the Transforming Education Summit in 2022.

³ United Nations, "Our Common Agenda policy brief 5: a global digital compact – an open, free and secure digital future for all", May 2023.

⁴ See www.dpi-safeguards.org.

⁵ See datahub.itu.int/dashboards/umc/?e=USA.

⁶ See www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/ai_advisory_body_interim_report.pdf.

37. The United Nations development system is working to support government efforts in this area at all levels. In 2023, some 89 per cent of all surveyed resident coordinators indicated that their host country had requested support in expanding access to inclusive and equitable quality education. A vast majority of Governments (92 per cent in 2023, up from 88 per cent in 2021) reported that United Nations country teams effectively supported countries on that issue. For example, in Jamaica, the first public expenditure review of the education sector, carried out by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in collaboration with the World Bank in 2021, had led to increased national education budgets over the past two years. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has also been strengthening teachers' capacity with regard to using digital platforms to provide innovative and distance-learning opportunities. In 2023, over 59 per cent of surveyed Governments chose Goal 4 as one of the five areas in which the United Nations contribution had been especially significant in the past two years, the second highest score after Goal 3, on health.

38. The United Nations system must continue to evolve its offer to respond to the changing nature of education. In 2023, only 59 per cent of Governments perceived the work of United Nations country teams as effective in promoting lifelong learning opportunities and only 56 per cent of host Governments affirmed that United Nations country teams effectively supported their country in improving digital literacy. Two key United Nations initiatives are aimed at supporting Governments in securing the content, connectivity and capacity to unlock the potential of digital teaching and learning. The Giga initiative, a collaboration between ITU and UNICEF, has mapped over 2.1 million schools in 140 countries to date and helped connect more than 5,500 schools in 20 countries. To equip teachers and learners with appropriate digital learning content, the Gateways to Public Digital Learning initiative is helping to strengthen national digital learning platforms and policies. In addition, the United Nations has published policy guidance on steering the human-centred digital transformation of education, while artificial intelligence competency frameworks for teachers and students will be released in 2024. There is also a need to significantly enhance the collective offer of the United Nations in the area of skills, in particular as it relates to the needs of a rapidly changing economy and the associated energy, digital and food transitions.

39. These and broader efforts to enhance the United Nations offer on education transformation at the country level must be scaled up in the years ahead. This will be a key feature of critical meetings convened this year by UNESCO, the Sustainable Development Goal 4 High-level Steering Committee and others aimed at taking stock of progress made in the past two years on transforming education and accelerating action and achievement of the education-related targets of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

Decent jobs and social protection

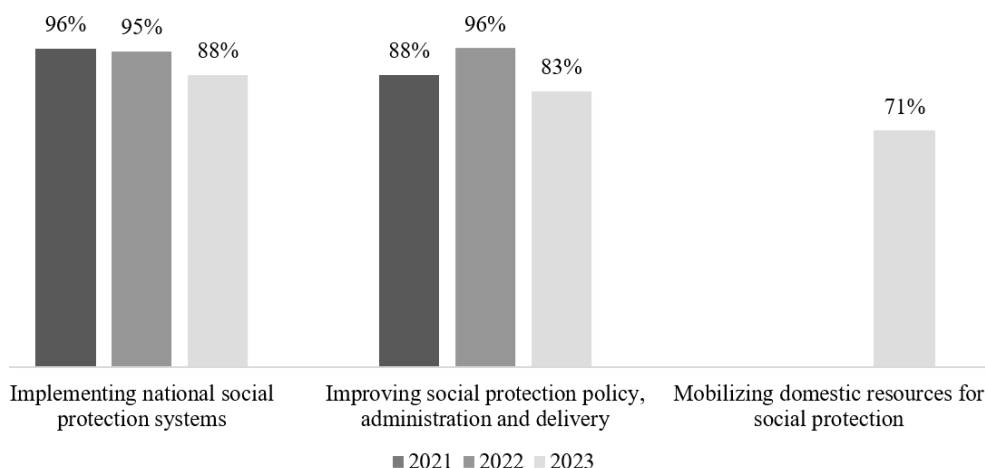
40. The need for inclusive, resilient social protection systems and fair working conditions has become even more evident over the past four years, marked by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, economic turbulence, widening inequality and accelerating climate change impacts. More than 4 billion people worldwide still lack social protection of any kind.

41. The 2023 survey of programme country Governments showed that a majority were satisfied with United Nations country team assistance on social protection (see figure 3). Since 2021, 93 per cent of Governments on average have rated support for implementing national social protection systems as effective. An average of 89 per cent considered support for improving social protection policy, administration and delivery as effective. For example, in Albania, under the leadership of the resident coordinator, the International Labour Organization (ILO), UNICEF, UNDP and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

(UN-Women) are supporting reforms to the country’s social protection system, connecting decision makers with United Nations-backed studies and specialized technical support. As a result, a new social inclusion protection policy has been developed to address gaps in social services funding, and to support advancements in disability, the childcare system and social housing reform. In 2023, Governments were asked, for the first time, to gauge support for mobilizing domestic resources for social protection; 71 per cent found such support to be effective. Although work is still needed, the data point to strong collaboration between United Nations country teams and national Governments in providing safety nets for the most vulnerable people.

Figure 3

Areas in which Governments rated support from the United Nations country team as effective



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of Governments, various years.

Note: Data available only for 2023 for “Mobilizing domestic resources for social protection”.

42. Entities have provided extensive support to countries through integrated policy advice in the designing of social protection floors, data collection, workforce training and capacity development. Technical assistance is tailored to local contexts. United Nations entities have expanded their emphasis on including the most vulnerable communities, such as poor women, refugees, people with disabilities, indigenous peoples and informal workers, as they often face the greatest barriers to accessing social protection.

43. Several initiatives, such as the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions and the Climate Action for Jobs Initiative, have provided much-needed relief through temporary or permanent social protection coverage. Launched in 2021 and coordinated by ILO with the support of other entities of the United Nations development system, the Global Accelerator mobilizes resources and coordinates multi-agency efforts to expand social protection. With the global jobs gap projected to affect 453 million people in 2023,⁷ it also provides assistance in creating millions of decent jobs, primarily in the green, digital and care sectors. The programme has mobilized substantial new pledges, yet intensified efforts are needed to secure sufficient and sustained funding from international, national, public and private sources, including the international financial institutions. In 2023, 42 per cent of United Nations development system entities reported collaborating to operationalize the Global Accelerator at the country level.

⁷ See www.ilo.org/global/topics/sdg-2030/WCMS_846674/lang--en/index.htm.

44. Partnering with the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund, the United Nations development system has catalysed integrated programmes that combine social protection with other essential areas, such as health, nutrition and education, to address multidimensional poverty. The Fund supports increased and shock-responsive social protection coverage and decent job creation, alongside greater fiscal space for both.

45. Despite advances, significant barriers to social protection remain. These include constrained financing, the complexities of reaching large informal sectors, rapid automation and technological advancements that threaten to displace workers and undermine job security. Another major challenge comes from climate shocks and disasters, which disproportionately affect the poor and vulnerable. Ensuring just transitions for those affected while harnessing technology's potential for job creation will be vital. The United Nations development system can also do more to assist Governments in developing strategies to formalize economic activity, recognize contributions by the informal sector, extend social protection coverage and uphold labour rights. With robust universal social protection systems, active labour market policies and training opportunities in place, we can alleviate risks to livelihoods and foster broader societal support for all key transitions.

Climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution

46. Our actions as a global community on the triple planetary crisis, including climate change, biodiversity and pollution, fall short of what will be necessary to limit global warming and keep a liveable planet. In 2021, in the Glasgow Climate Pact, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement called on all countries to revisit their nationally determined contributions and plans to mitigate and adapt to climate change. The UNDP Climate Promise has accompanied this process in over 120 countries and territories, setting revised and more ambitious climate targets.

47. At the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, as the first session to undertake a global stocktake, as mandated under the Paris Agreement every five years, Governments reached negotiated agreement on several vital issues, including: clear guidance on the next round of nationally determined contributions, due in 2025; consensus on “transitioning away” from fossil fuels while emphasizing a just and equitable approach; the curbing of methane emissions and the tripling of renewable energy capacity by 2030; and a framework on the global goal on adaptation, which introduced time-bound targets. In addition, the new loss and damage fund was operationalized. In the outcome document of the twentieth-eighth session, the linkages between climate action and other environmental agreements and conventions were also explicitly recognized, including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which underscores the need for more integrated policy and programming at the national level. At the country level, the United Nations development system will now need to support national Governments in their efforts to implement the above agreements.

48. As we look to twenty-ninth and thirtieth sessions of the Conference, the priorities are to support a high level of ambition, which is 1.5° Celsius, and aligned and economy-wide nationally determined contributions, in line with the outcome of the twenty-eighth session. In addition, the new collective quantified goal on climate finance to be established at the twenty-ninth session will be important for setting a new finance objective that goes beyond developed nations' current goal of providing \$100 billion in climate finance annually. However, reforms to the financial architecture are required to ensure that emerging and developing countries can access the finance and technology needed to support their climate and development efforts. The next step is to scale up implementation backed by sufficient finance, a process the United Nations development system will collectively support globally and nationally.

49. Given the climate emergency and the need to step up action to stay within the boundaries of the 1.5° Celsius limit, it is positive that host Governments rated climate change as among the most effective areas of engagement with the United Nations development system. Requests for policy advice have risen steadily, with 98 per cent of Governments rating United Nations support as sufficient. The few host Governments that disagreed said that they would value more integrated, coherent policy advice across entities, a direction that will likely emerge more consistently as the United Nations development system organizes around climate change as an investment pathway.

50. In 2022, I called for protecting everyone on Earth through universal coverage of early warning systems against extreme weather and climate change by 2027. Responding to this, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction are leading the implementation of the Early Warnings For all initiative, in collaboration with a broad range of partners. Thirty focus countries for fast-track support were identified in 2023. In these countries, resident coordinators are leading the organization of national-level workshops to develop national action plans that identify critical gaps in early warning systems, and implementation efforts are progressing currently to fill these gaps.

51. Also in 2022, the High-level Expert Group on the Net-Zero Emissions Commitments of Non-State Entities was established. The Group has produced a framework for the United Nations development system to establish the robustness of net-zero claims, galvanized support for net-zero targets and helped to eliminate greenwashing campaigns by non-State entities that mislead consumers, investors and regulators. The need for action on this front was reiterated to business leaders at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in 2024. The private sector has a crucial role to play in financing the global transition to green energy and, through the United Nations-World Economic Forum partnership framework established in 2019, cooperation between the private sector and the United Nations development system will continue.

52. Initiatives fostered by the United Nations development system to encourage global cooperation on climate action, including through private sector engagement, comprise the science-based targets, the Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action and the Net-Zero Asset Owner Alliance. These initiatives complement national climate networks, such as the Small Island Developing States Lighthouse Initiative, and local efforts, such as the Cities Climate Finance Leadership Alliance.

53. Forging a peace pact with nature is among the top priorities for the United Nations development system. Work is already under way, including through the United Nations Biodiversity Lab, the UNDP Nature Pledge and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Nature Action initiative. Environmental considerations should be integrated throughout the work of the United Nations development system as an inextricable element of sustainable development. Seventy-three per cent of resident coordinators reported that environmental considerations, such as addressing pollution and biodiversity loss, had been mainstreamed into other areas of programming and policy advice. A foundation of support is in place; it must be urgently scaled up.

The resident coordinator system: a catalyst for sustainable development

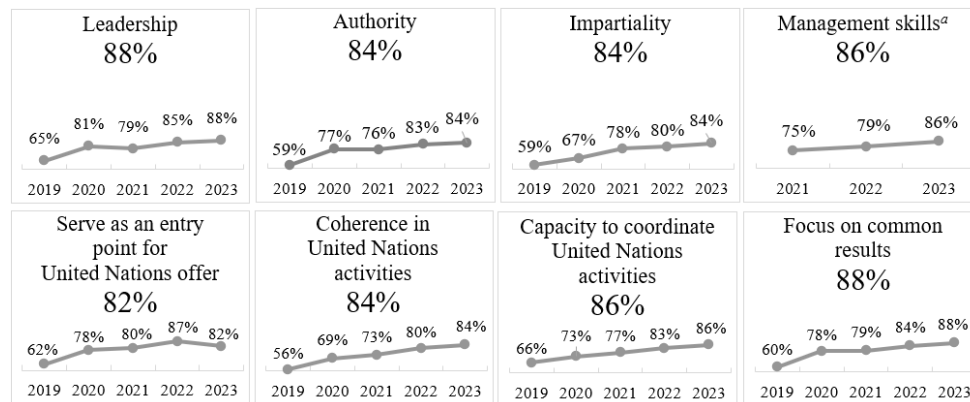
54. The new resident coordinator system has consolidated itself as the cornerstone of United Nations development system support for accelerated Sustainable Development Goal action. I am pleased to see that Member States are noting the positive dividends of the reinvigorated resident coordinator system. On average, 85 per cent of programme country Governments confirmed that resident coordinators

were stronger in delivering on key aspects of their role, including leadership, coordination and common results, and in their ability to bring the United Nations development system together (see figure 4). That is a significant increase from an average of 61 per cent in 2019.

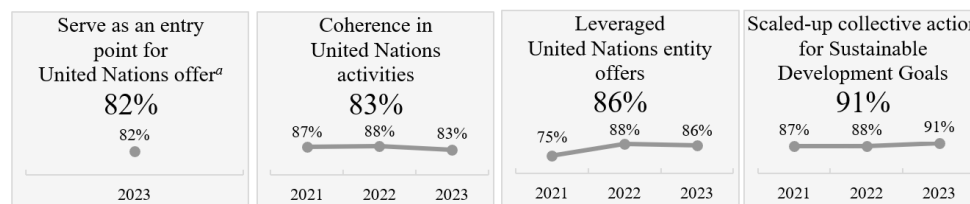
55. Host and contributing countries are both recognizing the impact of the reform, with 84 per cent and 83 per cent, respectively, agreeing there was stronger coherence and less duplication. Eighty-two per cent of countries recognized the resident coordinator as a stronger entry point for access to the United Nations development offer in countries. Contributing country Governments also agreed that resident coordinators scaled up collective Sustainable Development Goal action and leveraged the comparative advantages of United Nations entities, contributing to more effective and efficient delivery in country.

Figure 4
Strengthened dimensions of resident coordinators since the start of United Nations development system reform, according to programme country and voluntary contributing country Governments

Programme country Governments



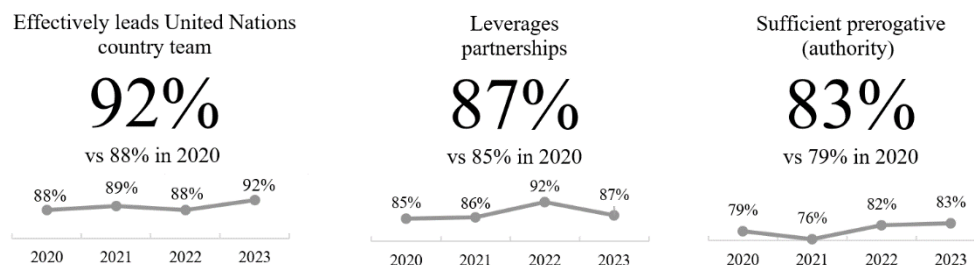
Voluntary contributing country Governments



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of Governments, various years.
 Note: For programme country Governments, this is the proportion of respondents considering that the aspect in question has increased by a great or moderate extent. For contributing country Governments, this is the proportion of respondents that agree with the statement.
^a Data for the management skills dimension for programme country Governments start in 2021. Data for serving as an entry point for the United Nations offer for voluntary contributing country Governments are for 2023 only.

56. At the end of 2023, host Governments confirmed that resident coordinators were endowed with sufficient authority, were consistently delivering on the vision to effectively lead United Nations country team support, and leveraged partnerships in support of national efforts for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (see figure 5).

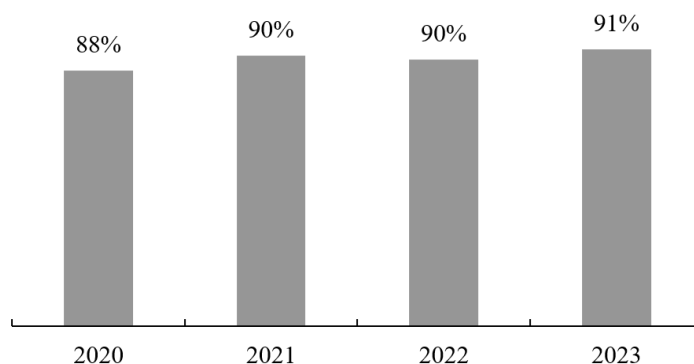
Figure 5
Government agreement that the resident coordinator effectively leads the United Nations country team, leverages partnerships and has sufficient authority



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of Governments, various years.

57. As set out in the report of the Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group on the Development Coordination Office,⁸ there is no doubt that the resident coordinator system is better placed to address the development needs and priorities of countries than prior to the reforms. The pool of resident coordinators today is more diverse and capacitated to tailor United Nations development responses to the specific needs of each country context. Governments have made it clear that resident coordinator selection and skills development are hitting the mark. Over 91 per cent of host Governments agreed, in 2023, that the resident coordinator had the right profile and skill sets, up from 88 per cent in 2020 (see figure 6). One key factor has been systematic consultation with host countries to inform the required resident coordinator profile and selection. The efforts to enhance the diversity of the resident coordinator pool are detailed in the report of the Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group.

Figure 6
Government agreement that resident coordinators have the right profile and skills



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of Governments, various years.

58. Efficient and fully capacitated resident coordinator offices deliver support to United Nations country teams to support joint analysis, planning, programming, advocacy, resource mobilization and the leveraging of development finance. In recent surveys, United Nations country team members reported that the resident coordinator offices provided effective support (see table 2) across their core functions. The effectiveness in regards of partnerships and resource mobilization was lower than in other areas.

⁸ E/2024/5.

Table 2
United Nations country teams consider support from the resident coordinator office to be effective

	2021	2022	2023
Strategic planning	90%	90%	90%
Communication and advocacy	87%	87%	89%
Data and results reporting	84%	86%	84%
Economic analysis and solutions	66%	62%	79%
Partnerships and resource mobilization	71%	77%	71%

Source: 2023 Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of United Nations country teams, various years.

59. In survey comments, United Nations country team members praised resident coordinator offices for maintaining remarkable support despite understaffing in some cases, and recognized their convening strength and strategic guidance. Programme country Governments agreed that the resident coordinator minimized duplication in United Nations delivery (79 per cent) but reiterated their concerns about the difficulties that some resident coordinators faced (see figure 8). Most resident coordinators still considered their capacity (70 per cent) and prerogative (63 per cent) sufficient for ensuring the efficient use of resources across the United Nations country team.

60. Throughout the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review cycle, information-sharing between resident coordinators and United Nations country teams improved. Sixty-six per cent of resident coordinators reported that all or most United Nations country team members involved them in key agency-specific planning, up from 39 per cent in 2019. Information-sharing was greatest with regard to the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. Challenges mostly concerned country-level budgeting and planning. That included outreach to funding partners, for which most resident coordinators (75 per cent) reported that few or no entities provided sufficient updates.

61. Joint planning and programming, however, continue to be constrained by compartmentalization. Joint activities comprise less than one quarter of the budget of the Cooperation Frameworks. Recent survey data suggest that only two thirds of entities recognized reporting obligations with regard to the resident coordinator on key field activities, including planning (67 per cent) and resource mobilization (63 per cent). Acknowledging that joint programming is critical for integrated delivery, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group has updated guidance to make joint programming more flexible. However, this only addresses some of the obstacles, as many resident coordinators note that the hurdles in the process are often accompanied by limited pooled funding and incentive structures that promote inter-agency competition. These are all indications of the need for a seismic shift in joint activity budgeting and programme delivery.

62. The management and accountability framework is essential for holding the United Nations development system to account and monitors its commitments and contributions towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The framework also sets out the roles and responsibilities of, and the relationships between, the resident coordinator system and the United Nations development system at every level. While the matrixed, dual reporting model is mandated by General Assembly resolutions [72/279](#) and [75/233](#), obstacles remain to universal application across United Nations Sustainable Development Group entities. Most resident coordinators (62 per cent) reported giving performance inputs on less than one third of heads of United Nations country team agencies. While all heads of United Nations

agencies in country are invited to provide feedback on the resident coordinators, only 71 per cent of United Nations country team members gave performance inputs. I continue to count on governing bodies of respective United Nations development entities to help close this gap in accountability and monitor progress.

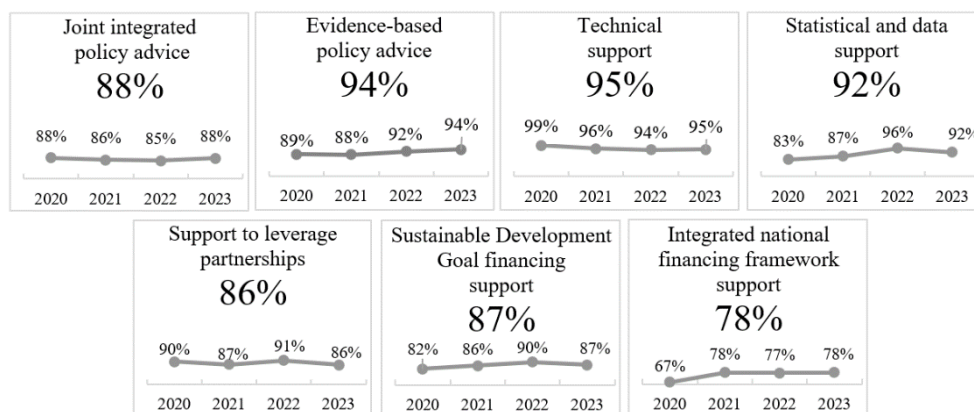
Strategic alignment to the priorities and needs of countries

63. United Nations country teams align their support for countries' national priorities and needs through the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. At the end of this quadrennial comprehensive policy review cycle, 99 per cent of countries will have transitioned to the new Cooperation Framework; all will have done so by 2027. The latest data demonstrate that Cooperation Frameworks are meeting their primary objective. Governments overwhelmingly considered United Nations activities under the Cooperation Frameworks to be closely aligned with their needs (94 per cent, up from 81 per cent in 2019) and effective at responding to national priorities and Sustainable Development Goal delivery (96 per cent, up from 92 per cent in 2020).

64. Governments (82 per cent) and resident coordinators (91 per cent) agreed that a country-level focus on common results among United Nations entities had improved. On average, 89 per cent of Governments agreed that the United Nations adequately provided key services to support them (see figure 7). Host Governments also agreed that United Nations delivery of support to countries on partnerships and financing was adequate. However, the support for integrated national financing framework development was identified as the area that was more in need of improvement. Findings from external evaluations confirm that the United Nations development system must strengthen its offer in these areas to meet increasing and more complex demands, as described further in section III.⁹ This requires a reorientation of capacity and scaled-up efforts from the system to increase efforts to cooperate and collaborate with multilateral development banks, international financial institutions and other public and private financing partners and to further align their work and modalities with the realities of today's financial landscape.

Figure 7

Programme country Governments agree that the United Nations adequately provides key services to countries



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of Governments, various years.

Note: Proportion of respondents that agreed with the statement.

⁹ Dalberg, "Updated study of capacities and functions of the United Nations development system to accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals", Mimeo, paper prepared for the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2024.

Country programme alignment with and derivation from Cooperation Frameworks are essential to facilitate accelerated delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals

65. During the current quadrennial comprehensive policy review cycle, resident coordinators have made strong efforts to ensure that entity-specific country programmes are derived from and aligned with the Cooperation Frameworks. Nevertheless, we are far from where we should be by now. Resident coordinators reported that all (16 per cent) or most (51 per cent) United Nations country team members in general solicited their feedback on alignment. At the same time, less than 30 per cent of resident coordinators considered all entity country programmes to be aligned with the Cooperation Framework. It is concerning that this alignment is not habitually occurring in country, notably as this was an area underscored by Member States in General Assembly resolution 75/233.

66. A system-wide evaluation of country programme derivation from and alignment with Cooperation Frameworks, as announced in my previous report (A/78/72-E/2023/59), is being launched now that the United Nations System-wide Evaluation Office is in place. It will provide an important basis for the United Nations Sustainable Development Group to consider the system changes that may be required to ensure that United Nations country team programmes and priorities are substantively derived from the priorities agreed with Member States in the Cooperation Framework.

67. Resident coordinators and United Nations country team members continue to rank reform measures related to the Cooperation Framework and its implementation tools, including joint workplans and common country analyses, as having the greatest impact on improving the United Nations offer to countries (see table 3). Survey results confirm that clearer policy guidance for country teams to collaborate and align programming are key factors for improving United Nations support in country.

68. Survey feedback from resident coordinators and United Nations country team members showed progress on the efficacy of joint workplans, improved coordinated communication and shared office spaces in some countries. Persistent challenges included limited funding for the United Nations development system, business models of United Nations entities being reliant on resource mobilization at the country level, and institutional or cost challenges to business operations, including common premises.

69. I am asking all members of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, under the leadership of the Deputy Secretary-General as the Group’s Chair, to take steps to further align the country programme documents with the Cooperation Frameworks. I also count on Member States to continue to engage on this topic with the respective entities and to help remove any bottlenecks to implementation, including through the entity governing bodies.

Table 3
Resident coordinator and United Nations country team member responses on measures that improved the United Nations country team country offer in the past year to a great or moderate extent

	<i>Resident coordinators</i>	<i>Country team members</i>
Cooperation Framework	84%	60%
Joint workplans	83%	69%
Common country analysis	78%	68%
Results groups	45%	37%
Strengthened resident coordinator office capacity	78%	53%
Increased global pooled resources	70%	45%
Increased resident coordinator/country team pooled resources	50%	35%
Resource mobilization transparency	64%	39%

	<i>Resident coordinators</i>	<i>Country team members</i>
Resource mobilization collaboration	58%	31%
System-wide reporting	68%	54%
Business operations strategy	54%	32%
Management and accountability framework	54%	28%

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of Governments, 2023.

Note: Percentage of respondents that selected “to a great extent” or “to a moderate extent” in response to the question.

Tailored United Nations country team configurations

70. The configuration of United Nations country teams is intended to be tailored based on the priorities and needs of each country, as captured in the outcomes agreed in the Cooperation Framework. There has been progress. In 2023, 87 per cent of Governments agreed that country team configurations were suited to the challenges of the Cooperation Frameworks, up from 81 per cent in 2021. Resident coordinators and United Nations country team members also confirmed configuration alignment (79 per cent and 83 per cent, respectively).

71. Feedback also suggested that United Nations in-country expertise to support Sustainable Development Goal acceleration was being delivered “quickly and easily”, as reported by Governments (90 per cent) and resident coordinators (86 per cent) (see table 4). Access to expertise through United Nations development system regional entities and offices had become notably easier, with 73 per cent of Governments agreeing that this was the case in 2023, compared with 54 per cent in 2019. Programme country Governments (79 per cent) agreed that the resident coordinator minimized duplication in United Nations delivery.

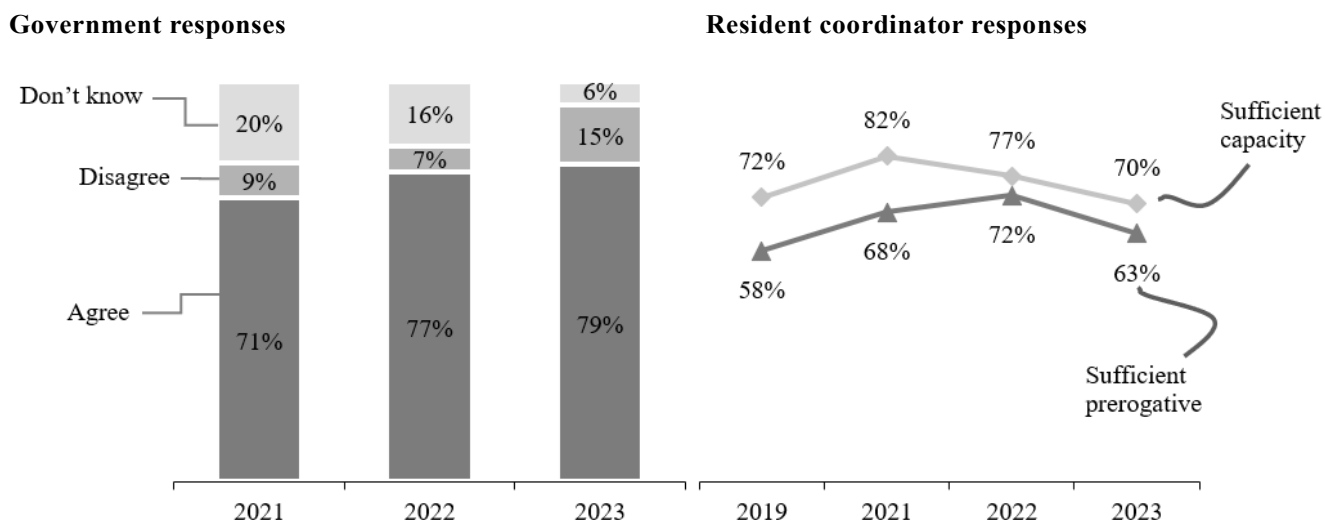
72. Nevertheless, we still have some way to go to be fully tailored – and more adaptable – to changing needs on the ground. Host Governments frequently flagged concerns about the difficulties that some resident coordinators still faced in ensuring the efficient use of resources across the United Nations country team (see figure 8). Government and resident coordinator feedback also highlighted accessibility challenges in contacting and engaging with external entities and experts, and resource constraints within the system. Resident coordinators noted, in particular, the challenges in developing and accessing a pipeline of expertise across United Nations entities when entity staffing was linked to specific projects or funding sources. I have asked the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and resident coordinators to be more ambitious and creative in approaching the issue of country configurations, in dialogue with United Nations country teams and host Governments. The Group is also taking steps to overcome challenges affecting our ability to develop and deploy pipelines of expertise in a flexible and agile manner. This is reflected as a key priority for the Group in 2024.

Table 4
Governments and resident coordinators that consider access to expertise to be easy

<i>Presence</i>	<i>Respondent</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>	<i>2023</i>
Entities with physical presence	Governments	85%	90%	90%
	Governments	51%	42%	58%
Entities without physical presence	Resident coordinators	89%	88%	86%
	Resident coordinators	66%	69%	60%

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of Governments and survey of resident coordinators, various years.

Figure 8
Government and resident coordinator feedback on resident coordinator efforts to minimize duplication of effort among United Nations agencies, ensuring the efficient use of resources



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of Governments, various years.

United Nations country team collaboration: progress and remaining challenges

73. Despite investments in resident coordinator capacity and policy tools, United Nations country teams continue to face barriers to delivering more integrated solutions. Collaboration has improved significantly, but to accelerate Sustainable Development Goal implementation at the required rate, we will need to continue to overcome fundamental issues linked to accountability and incentive structures across the United Nations system.

74. More transparent information-sharing between the United Nations country teams and the resident coordinators will be crucial for resident coordinators to identify and address potential overlaps. Enhanced reporting on United Nations activities and resource allocation will improve Member State oversight and accountability. United Nations development system entities need to do their part in supporting enhanced reporting and information-sharing through the resident coordinator.

75. In 2023, five United Nations Sustainable Development Group entities (UNESCO, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UNEP, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and FAO) reported on the full checklist on the implementation of the reform of the United Nations development system, using it as an annex to regular reporting. Nine United Nations Sustainable Development Group entities reported partially on the checklist by integrating specific checklist elements in their regular reporting: UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNICEF, WFP and the regional economic commissions. Four entities have not yet changed their regular way of reporting on the implementation of the reform and have indirectly reported on the checklist through their regular reporting on reform: UN-Women, ILO, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Twelve entities have not reported on the checklist. These include the World Health Organization (WHO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), ITU, WMO and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), as well as Secretariat entities that do not have separate

governing bodies, such as the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and entities that are part of UNDP, such as the United Nations Capital Development Fund and United Nations Volunteers. UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP will commence reporting on the full reform checklist during the 2024 annual sessions of their executive boards, as requested by those boards in 2023.

76. During the next cycle, it is critical that the United Nations development system work towards enhancing mutual accountability and effectiveness. I also reiterate my expectation that all governing bodies will request the respective agencies to provide full reporting on the checklist, and for the Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group to ensure that the Economic and Social Council is apprised of the main progress and challenges reflected in the reporting against the checklist.

77. As mentioned in my previous report, we also commissioned an independent and updated assessment of the functions and capacities of the United Nations development system to accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. The assessment found that the system is now more “fit for purpose”, while highlighting areas for improvement. The assessment confirmed, in particular, that the financial and operating models of many United Nations development system entities were not conducive to creating more flexible and tailored United Nations country team configurations.

78. To accelerate progress in aligning functions and capacities to the Sustainable Development Goals, I have asked the system to take further action under four key areas:

(a) Fulfilment of the funding compact commitments: resource allocations must shift from project funding to sustainable, predictable support for policy and expertise. This will allow us to provide long-term guidance and build local capacity, ultimately leading to more impactful development outcomes;

(b) Scaling up support for the Sustainable Development Goals will require prioritizing collective results across United Nations entities. At the country level, entities must work together towards common outcomes and Governments should encourage joint action while continuing to leverage our policy experts’ global experience;

(c) Changing the leadership mindset throughout the system should be aimed at proactive collaboration, including on joint resource mobilization, joint programming and funding distribution, all with an integrated policy support lens;

(d) Boosting United Nations country team capabilities to ensure that they have resources and skills to deliver integrated solutions may involve adapting delivery modalities and ensuring that our interventions are truly system-wide.

79. The guidance and oversight of Member States remain crucial. These reforms are successful only because they were conducted hand in hand with Member States. It is only by continuing to work together that Member States and the United Nations can bridge the gap in the few remaining areas in which the implementation of reform measures can be scaled up.

B. Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in complex settings: enhanced collaboration between humanitarian and development action and stronger linkages to peace

80. The past year has been characterized once again by crises and violence in various parts of the world. This has caused immense human suffering and significantly hampered sustainable development. Conflicts are responsible for most of the world's humanitarian needs; nearly 300 million people are estimated to require humanitarian assistance and protection this year.¹⁰

81. The best way to deal with crises remains addressing their root causes. We must respond to humanitarian emergencies while promoting sustainable development and planting the seeds of sustainable peace. Full achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals will be critical to addressing the interlinked, multidimensional root causes of the compounding global crises.

82. The 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review recognized the importance of greater cooperation, collaboration and coordination among development, humanitarian and peacebuilding efforts to efficiently and effectively address needs and attain the Sustainable Development Goals. The United Nations development system has increasingly focused on providing support to countries through a comprehensive response across these three areas of operation. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, the formulation of the next United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, for the period 2025–2029, is offering a landmark opportunity to consolidate United Nations joint support around the needs and priorities of that country. The Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian and Development Collaboration, which has been recently reconfigured, will play an important part in supporting strategic coherence in humanitarian, development and peace operations by helping respective United Nations country presences to remove bottlenecks in efforts to transition out of crisis to sustainable development.

83. Working with the international financial institutions is essential to making greater progress. The United Nations and the World Bank are now collaborating in over 50 countries, including in the areas of prevention, food security and forced displacement. In 2023, the Partnership Facility of the Peacebuilding Support Office supported collaboration between the United Nations and international financial institutions in more than a dozen country and regional settings, to enable joint data and analysis and facilitate advisory support to resident coordinators, humanitarian coordinators and United Nations country teams.

84. The Peacebuilding Fund continues to make a crucial contribution by enabling coordinated approaches across peacebuilding, humanitarian and development operations. In 2023, it approved \$202.4 million for 36 countries, including \$57 million for projects promoting the empowerment of women and youth. The resident coordinators play a critical role in coordinating United Nations country team proposals for the Fund. Contributions to the Fund dropped by 22 per cent in 2023 compared with 2022, to a total of \$131.8 million. The General Assembly recently decided to provide a portion of assessed contributions for the fund; however, voluntary contributions remain the predominant funding source.

85. The vast majority of host country Governments (93 per cent) assessed United Nations collaboration between humanitarian and development interventions as

¹⁰ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Global Humanitarian Overview 2024, 1 December 2023.

“close”.¹¹ Nevertheless, collaboration between development and peacebuilding interventions, and between humanitarian and peacebuilding interventions, continued to rank slightly lower, at 89 and 88 per cent, respectively. Resident coordinators and United Nations country team members noted comparatively greater difficulties in collaboration across these areas (see table 5).

Table 5

Ongoing work to develop coherent humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities: percentage of Governments, United Nations country team members and resident coordinators reporting close collaboration

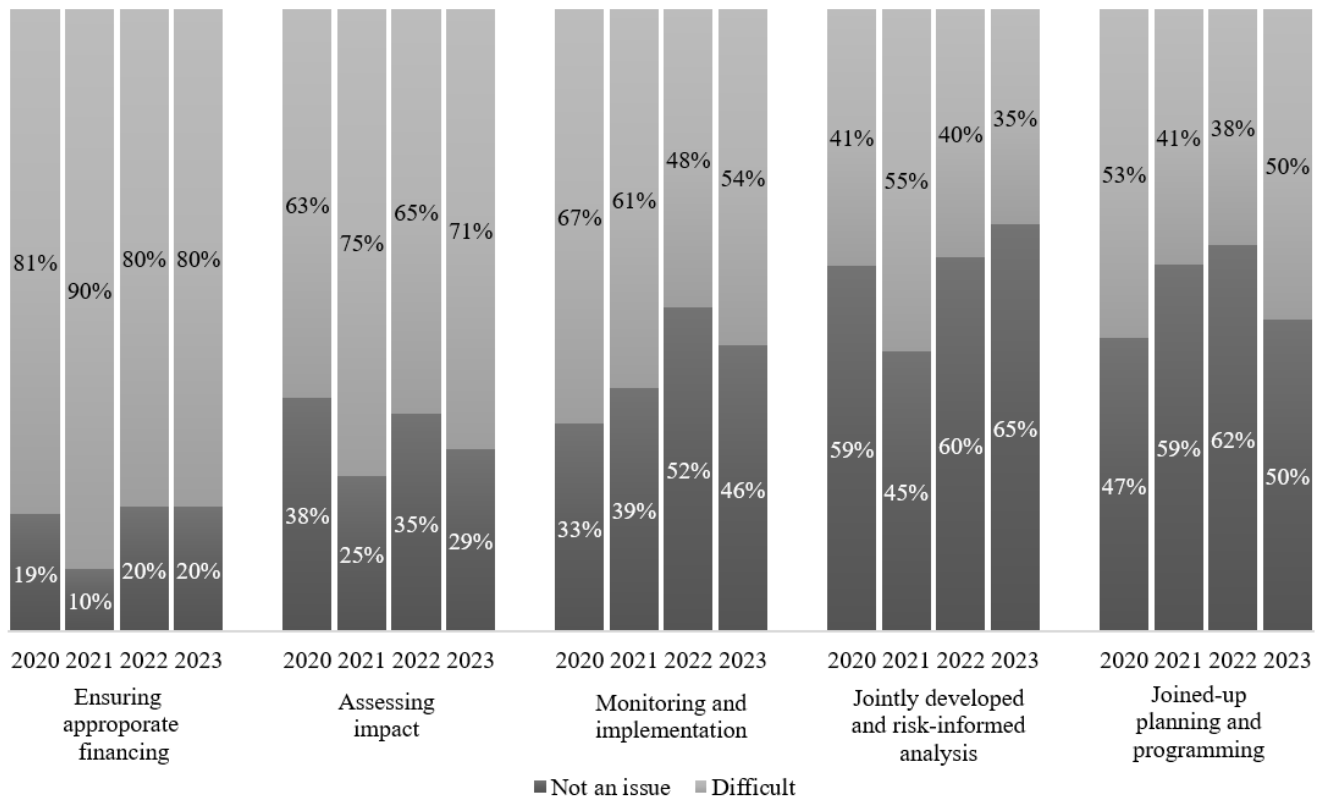
<i>Survey</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Development– humanitarian</i>	<i>Development– peacebuilding</i>	<i>Humanitarian– peacebuilding</i>
Host country Governments	2023	93%	89%	88%
	2022	93%	94%	90%
	2021
Resident coordinators	2023	85%	76%	65%
	2022	94%	90%	81%
	2021	89%	84%	76%
United Nations country team members	2023	81%	75%	71%
	2022	80%	66%	72%
	2021	83%	75%	75%

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs surveys of Governments, resident coordinators and United Nations country team members, various years.

86. In countries engaged in peacebuilding, 93 per cent of host Governments positively assessed United Nations efforts to ensure a continued focus on longer-term development and sustaining peace, 2 percentage points more than in 2021. About 82 per cent of resident coordinators agreed that United Nations country team members regularly reported to them on the Cooperation Framework in ways that ensured stronger coherence and complementarity among development, humanitarian and peacebuilding activities, 10 percentage points more than in 2021. Some resident coordinators, however, noted that information was sometimes provided too late to ensure coherence. On structural bottlenecks to collaboration, it is encouraging that United Nations entities noted decreasing difficulties in some of the areas assessed by the surveys, although there is room to improve coherence and complementarity across humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities, as highlighted in figure 9.

¹¹ Given the high number of responses of “do not know/not applicable”, the present section has excluded those responses from the analysis.

Figure 9
Assessment of the level of difficulty of various aspects of ongoing work to bridge humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of United Nations development system entity headquarters, various years.

87. A comprehensive approach to peace and sustainable development remains crucial to save lives and safeguard development gains. Joint planning and programmes are essential for coordination but will not move the needle if not accompanied by behavioural shifts across the United Nations system. In particular, there needs to be a better recognition of the value of sustainable development as the main tool for prevention and exit out of crises; these efforts must be supported and incentivized by funds that enable delivery in a coherent, complementary and strategic manner. Prevention through the accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda is a key component. This is also one of the most promising areas moving forward, with the advent of a dedicated development coordination function within the Secretariat opening up many opportunities for collaboration with the other pillars.

C. Leveraging regional cooperation, expertise and policy advice

88. The regional collaborative platforms have been established as part of the repositioning of the United Nations development system to effectively pool regional expertise to support the specific needs of each country and to ensure coordinated coherent action in areas that transcend country borders. The annual reports produced systematically by such platforms provide a comprehensive picture of the regional work of the United Nations development system. A snapshot of some of the work is set out below.

89. The Regional Collaborative Platform for Asia and the Pacific established the Asia-Pacific Regional Networking Group of Food Systems, providing a coordinated platform for United Nations organizations to pool resources for food systems transformation. On education, it supported 32 countries in translating national commitments into actionable steps and refining action plans and implementation strategies for educational system transformation. On climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, it established a regional network on biodiversity conservation to enhance collaboration and coordination for biodiversity conservation across countries.

90. The Regional Collaborative Platform for Arab States initiated an inter-agency capacity-building programme for social protection, which engaged more than 300 participants. It also completed a comprehensive mapping of adaptation and mitigation strategies in 22 Arab states, providing a baseline for current climate action at the regional and national levels to enable better analysis and planning.

91. The Regional Collaborative Platform for Europe and Central Asia ensured coordinated support to States participating in the Food Systems Stocktaking Moment in July 2023, including the preparation and submission of voluntary progress reports. The Platform also provided training on the integration of migration issues in the Cooperation Frameworks for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

92. The Regional Collaborative Platform for Africa helped advance policies and strategies under the six transitions, for instance, through support for the design of essential food systems strategies in Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya and South Sudan, as well as the integration of food system acceleration in the Cooperation Frameworks of Madagascar, Malawi and Mozambique. The Platform also supported the set-up of an innovative aerial photography tool that detects buildings in South Africa to facilitate the upgrading of informal settlements. In Uganda, the Platform supported the Uganda Bureau of Statistics in peer reviewing and improving indicators generated from the Uganda demographic and health survey, contributing to quality indicators for monitoring Sustainable Development Goal progress in the health and socioeconomic sectors.

93. The Regional Collaborative Platform for Latin America and the Caribbean received 52 requests for support from across the region, including many aligned with key transitions. In response, it provided support in the areas of climate change and resilience, equitable growth and financing for development, governance for peace, justice and strong institutions, and human mobility.

94. The proportion of resident coordinators who reported that the regional collaborative platforms had supported the country teams in terms of Sustainable Development Goal monitoring and reporting increased for the third year in a row, from 41 per cent in 2021, to 54 per cent in 2022, to 57 per cent in 2023. However, the regional architecture continues to need active efforts to become optimal. Last year, it was concerning that only a small majority of resident coordinators reported that their country teams had benefited from the technical expertise and normative and policy expertise of the platforms. While resident coordinators reported improvements in the support received from the platforms, the fact that a third of these improvements were considered "minimal" remains concerning, especially in the light of the continued deterioration of United Nations country team perceptions of support from the platforms in 2023 compared with 2022 and 2021. The Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Chair will continue to work with every platform to identify adjustments that could be made to continue to enhance the support provided by them to the country teams.

D. Achieving efficiencies across business operations to maximize the impact of the United Nations system

Furthering the evolution of business operations

95. Across the United Nations development system, there continues to be progress in the reform of business operations. The results clearly indicate the system's commitment to achieving efficiencies contributing to cost avoidance but also to making improvements in business agility, including environmental sustainability and social inclusion.

96. The latest data, detailed below, indicate that in 2023, United Nations Sustainable Development Group entities reported an unprecedented level of total realized efficiency gains in the order of \$553 million.¹² This achievement corresponds to a 37 per cent increase from 2022 levels (\$405 million) and is more than the \$310 million annual savings originally estimated across all workstreams of the efficiency road map.¹³

97. These promising figures are the result of entity-specific initiatives as well as system-wide efficiencies that have been agreed upon by United Nations Sustainable Development Group entities in the revised efficiency road map (2022–2024), which focuses on business operations strategies, common premises, common back offices and global shared services.

98. All United Nations country teams now have business operations strategies in place. Their implementation in 2023 led to a significant increase in reported efficiency gains for this specific component, amounting to \$125 million (an increase of 49 per cent from 2022 and 19 per cent above the \$105 million projected for 2023 in the efficiency road map). In 2023, there was increased participation from entities at the country level and improved reporting, including in complex settings. Some countries were unable to report owing to intense ongoing conflicts, including United Nations country teams in Ukraine and the Sudan.¹⁴ The largest cost efficiencies under United Nations country team business strategies come from services related to common administrative services, such as management of common premises, accommodation services, and travel services, representing 45 per cent of the total savings. Among United Nations country teams, those in Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen account for 27 per cent of such efficiencies, generating \$9 million, \$16 million and \$9 million in benefits, respectively.

99. The past years of implementation of efficiency efforts also indicate that some collaborative practices – such as joint long-term agreements, joint procurement and joint recruitment panels – result in faster processes, less labour-intensive operations and less expensive sourcing. The focus in 2024 will be on the systematization of good practices leading to high cost-efficiency, and on the design of shared services tailored to complex contexts where considerable efficiencies could be achieved thanks to large operational set-ups. While these services will remain active in the coming years, as efficiencies are realized at an increasing rate, they will naturally stagnate and decline with time as the system becomes more efficient.

100. Despite the long-term nature of construction and renovation projects, efficiency gains of \$5 million were realized in 2023 from the implementation of United Nations common premises. These are a key enabler for all other common services at the country level. Of the 66 priority locations for project support identified by the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, five projects were completed in 2022, and

¹² Member States can also access the efficiency dashboard to see all efficiency-related data summarized in the present report, as well as more detailed reports by all United Nations country teams.

¹³ Followed the revised United Nations Sustainable Development Group reporting methodology.

¹⁴ In addition, Benin and the Gambia did not complete the business operations strategies annual review on time for the present report.

eight in 2023.¹⁵ Forty-three projects are ongoing, while the remaining 10 have been identified but not yet initiated.

101. As at March 2024, 31 per cent of United Nations buildings were common premises and housed 54 per cent of United Nations staff, compared with 30 per cent and 55 per cent, respectively, in 2022. Significant progress was made with respect to major new initiatives, such as the inauguration of a new United Nations House in Senegal and the progress in building “One United Nations” premises in Cairo.

102. The implementation of common back offices, while very promising, is not yet advancing at an optimal pace. In 2023, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group prioritized five countries for attention before scaling up to a larger set of countries. Supported by streamlined methodology and governance structures, United Nations entities in Kenya successfully launched the first common back office in Nairobi at the start of 2024. The common back office, hosted by the United Nations Office at Nairobi with additional services by UNICEF and WFP, offers 101 services to over 3,400 staff members across 25 United Nations organizations and over 60 offices in Kenya. This is a dramatic streamlining of operations for all stakeholders, including the host country, vendors, staff and other organizations.

103. For common back offices currently being designed in Brazil, the United Republic of Tanzania and Viet Nam, technical evaluations were completed in 2023 and preparations are under way for a phased launch in the first half of 2024. The completion of the United Nations House project in Dakar will also enable the launch of the Senegal common back office. The United Nations Sustainable Development Group has agreed to proceed with the next set of common back offices in 2024. Through a process of continuous improvement, the experiences gained from the current initiatives will inform continued adjustments and simplification of the design, technical evaluations and implementation of common back offices in order to increase momentum and cover more countries from 2024 onwards.

104. In 2023, internal entity-specific initiatives amounted to \$391 million in efficiency gains, marking an increase of \$81 million from 2022. These efficiencies were driven by implementing corporate initiatives such as automation, the centralization of location-independent functions in finance and procurement, increased transaction processing from global service centres in field locations and the negotiation of major contracts based on aggregated operational needs. Bilateral initiatives across entities achieved an additional \$34 million in efficiency gains, a notable increase of \$25 million over the \$9.1 million reported for 2022.

105. Global shared services have proven to be a major driver of entity-specific and bilateral efficiency gains, accounting for \$200 million in total. The main entities reporting such savings include WHO, UNICEF, WFP, UNOPS, UNDP, the United Nations Secretariat, UNSCO, IOM, UNFPA and FAO. A concerted effort is being made to broaden the use of global shared services across the system. For example, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, recognizing this potential, has prioritized 11 more mature service offerings for expansion to a larger base in 2024. This includes the United Nations fleet focused on vehicle leasing, the United Nations booking hub focused on carpooling, accommodation, and medical services administration, and the UN Web Buy Plus focused on procuring goods, including vehicle procurement.

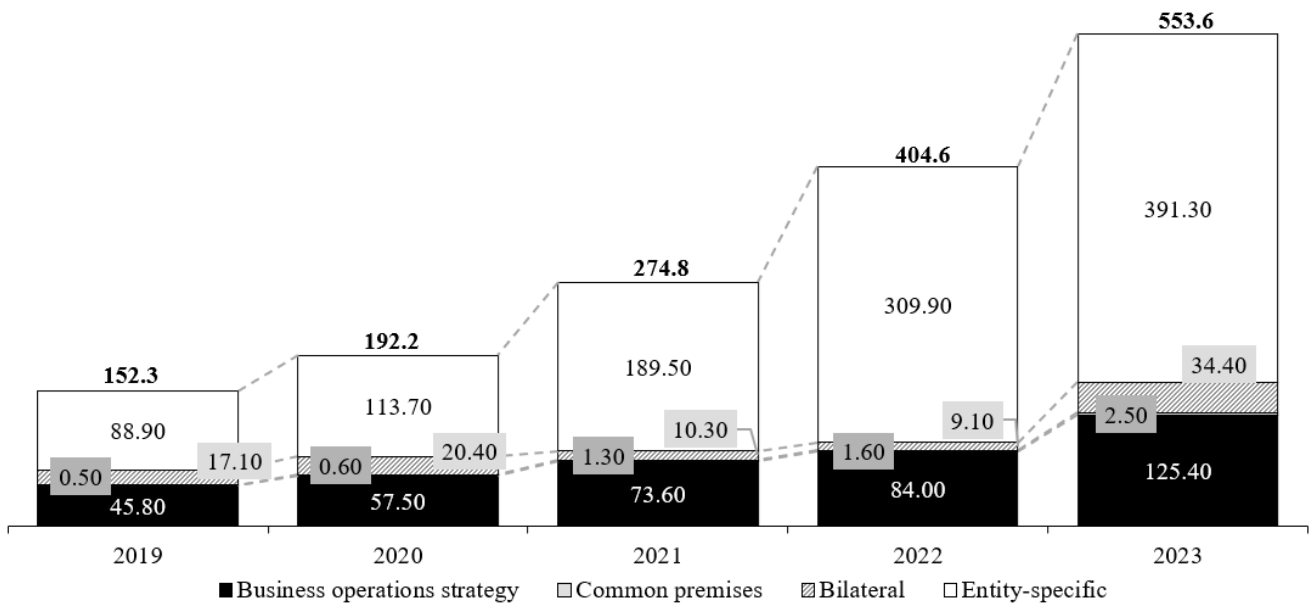
106. Beyond the monetary figures relating to these initiatives, high-impact common services have been pursued across countries, including adopting green energy solar products, talent-mapping focused on persons with disabilities and sourcing through gender-responsive procurement. Drawing on our vision for a United Nations 2.0 that

¹⁵ Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia, Ethiopia, Iraq, Mali, Morocco and United Republic of Tanzania.

is better able to support Member States with cutting-edge skills and a forward-thinking culture, the system is also looking at ways to better integrate modern skillsets in data, digitalization, innovation, foresight and behavioural science into their operations. In this regard, some 64 per cent of United Nations country teams reported leveraging data ecosystems in their capacity-building support to Governments. Many applied digital approaches (57 per cent), innovation techniques (53 per cent), foresight (39 per cent) and behavioural insights (29 per cent). With the implementation of measures to realize our vision of United Nations 2.0, it is anticipated that these percentages will increase.

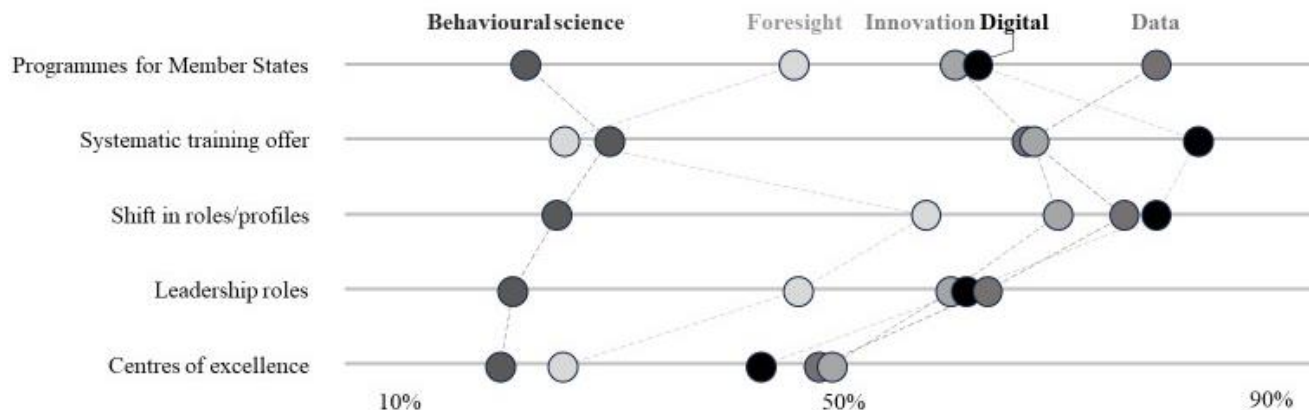
Figure 10
Efficiencies reported by year, as at 8 April 2024

(Millions of United States dollars)



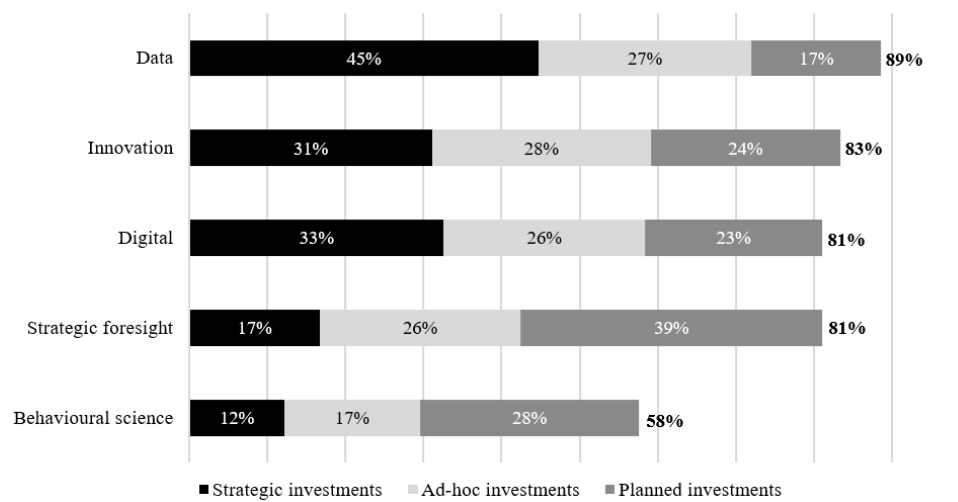
Source: United Nations Sustainable Development Group Business Innovations Group, 2024.

Figure 11
Percentage of United Nations development system entities that have key resources for change, by skill area



Source: Our Common Agenda policy brief 11: UN 2.0 – forward-thinking culture and cutting-edge skills for better United Nations system impact, 2023.

Figure 12
Percentage of United Nations country teams that invest in new approaches



Source: United Nations Sustainable Development Group information management system, 2023.

E. Leading by example: translating commitments into action on the ground for sustainability, gender equality, disability inclusion and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse

107. The United Nations development system continues to deliver on a series of critical policies and standards that seek to strengthen accountability and improve the ability of the system to deliver for Member States. The implementation of many of these policies is also essential to ensure that the system delivers in a way that is consistent with the principles that the Organization stands for.

Sustainability

108. There are positive indications of the progress achieved across the system in the implementation of the Strategy for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System, 2020–2030. Despite some setbacks, there has been a 50 per cent increase in the number of United Nations entities with environmental management systems that meet international standards. The global efforts of UNICEF to transition to green building certifications, expand renewable energy and leverage 111 awareness-raising “green teams” have reduced its global emissions by 20 per cent. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean has developed a water management plan that, if adopted across the United Nations system, would result in a significant increase in the amount of water recycled. IOM has ended the use of plastic bags in its movement operations. Thirty-one per cent of electricity consumed by the United Nations system globally in 2022 came from renewable sources, up 9 percentage points from 2021. On the basis of the Strategy for Sustainability Management, the United Nations system is working collaboratively to measure, reduce and offset over 90 per cent of unavoidable greenhouse gas emissions. Important gaps remain, however, to ensure emission removals, charting new levels of ambition towards 2030, building on efforts to date.

109. Other areas where progress is lagging will also require more attention. From 2021 to 2022, for example, the amount of water recycled by the United Nations system remained at a disappointing 4 per cent; the average amount of waste produced per person fell by only 4 kilograms.

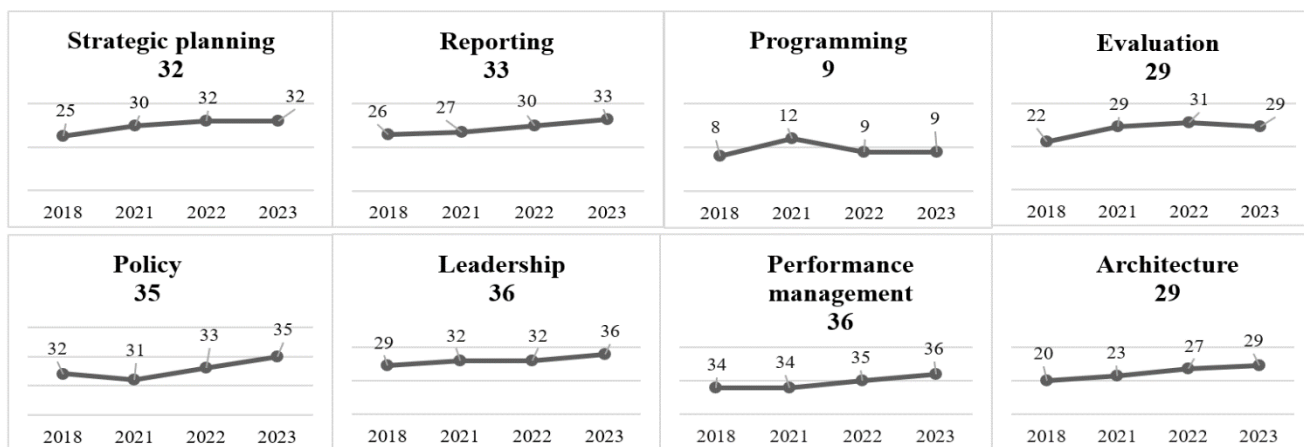
Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

110. The 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review called on the United Nations development system to accelerate gender mainstreaming through the full implementation of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and its equivalent country team performance indicators.

111. During this quadrennial cycle, Governments have identified gender equality (Sustainable Development Goal 5) as one of the top five areas in which United Nations contributions have been particularly significant. They rated development system support as effective in gender equality expertise (95 per cent) and in enhancing the collection and use of sex-disaggregated data (84 per cent, up 6 percentage points from 2021). In particular, Governments acknowledged strong support in strengthening policies, frameworks and institutions; capacity-building; advocacy; and partnerships to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment. However, despite this strong commitment to Goal 5, current data indicate that only two Goal 5 indicators and subindicators are “close to target”; eight are moderately distant and four are significantly off track. Paltry financial investments in gender equality reflect the situation. While still only a partial picture, financial statistics indicate that, of a total of \$57.65 billion, or 85 per cent, of all United Nations expenditure linked to the Sustainable Development Goals in 2022, only 3 per cent (approx. \$1.876 billion) was linked to Goal 5.

112. Reporting on the System-wide Action Plan is also encouraging. Some 28 entities met at least 75 per cent of all indicators, with 4 entities achieving 100 per cent. A total of 35 entities had a gender policy in place, 33 reported gender-related results with sex-disaggregated data to their governing bodies and 32 had strategic planning outcomes pertaining to gender equality and women’s empowerment (see figure 13). Despite this progress and Governments’ clear appreciation for United Nations support on this priority issue, several entities highlighted insufficient human and financial resources as among the most important factors stalling progress on Goal 5 indicators.

Figure 13
United Nations development system entities that have implemented the System-wide Action Plan



Source: United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), 2023.

Note: United Nations development system entities that met or exceeded the standards of the System-wide Action Plan.

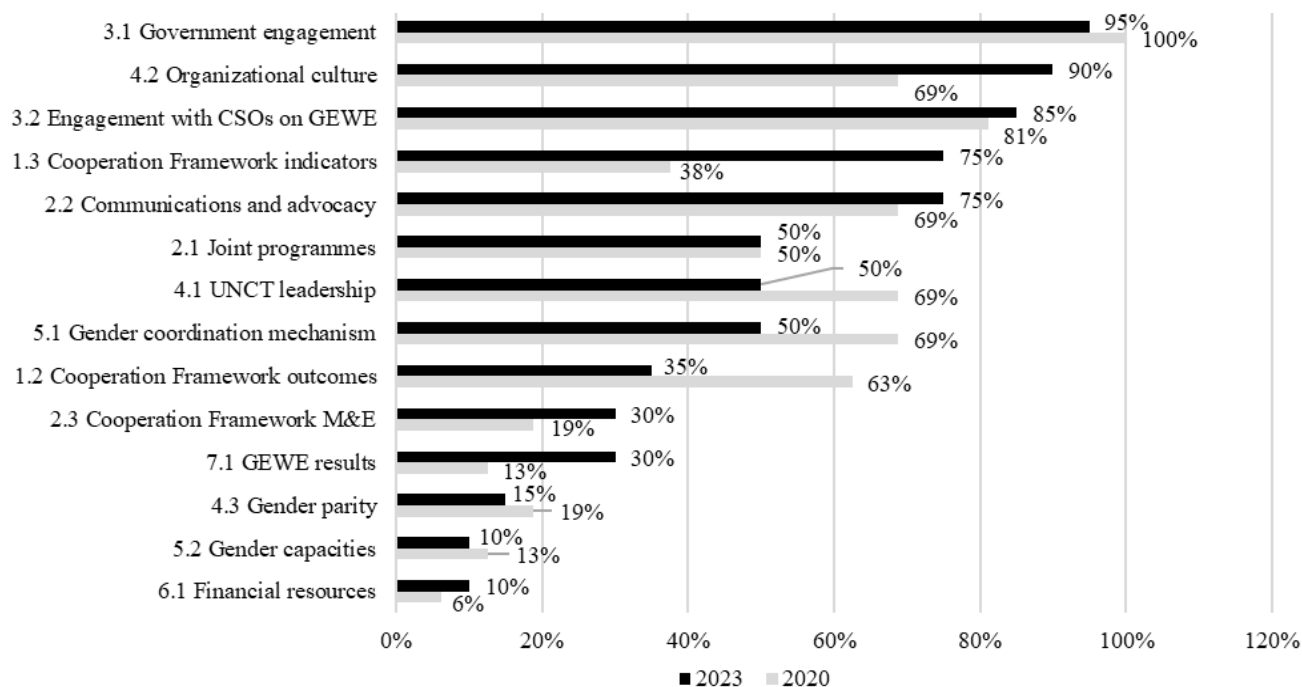
113. Financial resources have remained stagnant over the last three years. In 2023, only five entities had set a 15 per cent minimum financial target for gender equality. The gender equality marker adopted in 2023 as part of the United Nations data standard for system-wide reporting of financial data¹⁶ will track the contributions of

¹⁶ See <https://unsceb.org/data-standards-united-nations-system-wide-reporting-financial-data>.

United Nations activities to gender equality. Entities have a three-year transitional period, with full compliance expected by the end of 2025. Currently, 28 entities are using the marker. At the country level, 100 per cent of United Nations country teams with a joint workplan are applying the marker, a notable increase from 81 per cent in 2020. Yet in 2023, only 40 per cent of country teams with a joint workplan allocated 70 per cent or more of their annual funding framework to activities with gender equality as a principal or significant objective. In the next quadrennial cycle, the United Nations must go further, aiming to allocate 15 per cent to activities with gender equality as the principal objective, in line with the target set in the newly launched United Nations System-wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan of March 2024. The Acceleration Plan seeks to consolidate gender equality efforts across the system, foment a norms-based policy stance, advance gender equality through gender-transformative leadership, improve accountability for results, and bolster resourcing and partnerships. It stems from the independent review of the United Nations system's capacity to deliver on gender equality, foreseen in Our Common Agenda.

114. The number of country teams implementing the United Nations country team System-wide Action Plan gender equality scorecard has increased steadily to 97, up from 38 in 2020. Over this quadrennial cycle, engagement with Governments has remained strong and has improved with civil society. Notable progress included an increase in the number of Cooperation Frameworks measuring progress on gender equality results (up 38 percentage points), a supportive organizational culture (up 21 percentage points) and programmes making significant contributions to gender equality in host countries (up 18 percentage points). Weak performance in allocating and tracking financial resources and insufficient capacities for gender mainstreaming are of concern. Momentum should be reignited with only 36 per cent of country teams meeting at least 75 per cent of the indicators. Just half of the Cooperation Frameworks developed over the past year have dedicated gender equality results at the outcome level.

Figure 14
United Nations country team System-wide Action Plan performance, 2020 and 2023



Source: UN-Women, 2020 and 2023, comprehensive reporting.

Abbreviations: CSOs, civil society organizations; GEWE, gender equality and women's empowerment; M&E: monitoring and evaluation; UNCT, United Nations country team.

115. Ensuring that United Nations country teams have the necessary capacities to advance gender equality is crucial for their success. Among resident coordinators, 74 per cent considered their country teams to have sufficient capacity to deliver on gender equality as a core priority. In 2023, 70 per cent of United Nations country teams submitting comprehensive reports lacked a system-wide plan or gender focal point, indicating the need for additional support and resources. Many highlighted the importance of a functioning and well-resourced gender thematic group, gender adviser and/or focal point for strengthening country team capacities. These findings are in line with the findings of the 2023 independent review of the United Nations system's capacity to deliver on gender equality, which called attention to the work of gender equality being conducted by a small set of actors within marginalized spaces, and to uneven and inconsistent leadership and accountability, among other issues.

116. Achievement of gender parity throughout the United Nations system has consistently been a priority. In the system-wide strategy on gender parity, the United Nations committed to achieving parity at the senior leadership level by 2021 and across the system at all levels by 2028. Gender parity was achieved among the resident coordinators in 2018 and has been maintained since then. This commitment was reinforced through the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review, which called on the United Nations development system to redouble its efforts.

117. In our survey of United Nations development system headquarters, many indicated improvements in practices to attract, recruit and promote women; used gender-disaggregated data to inform decisions; tackled unconscious bias and enhanced accountability through better reporting and monitoring. Entities such as ITC, UNHCR and WFP have gender parity action plans. The new Acceleration Plan was launched on 8 March 2024, International Women's Day. The Plan sets out the United Nations commitment to expedite internal transformation and will be implemented by all entities of the United Nations system, with an accompanying implementation plan to monitor progress. Each entity is to convene their own gender steering committee, develop entity-specific plans aligned with the Acceleration Plan or align existing plans, and feed into a system-wide gender steering group.

118. At the field level, the recent addition of parameters to the United Nations system-wide dashboard on gender parity to capture the representation of women and men by entity and by grade in each country team should also increase transparency and accountability. The United Nations will continue to work with all entities to reach gender parity at all levels and within United Nations country teams by the end of the next quadrennial cycle.

Disability inclusion

119. At the midpoint of the period of implementation of the 2030 Agenda, it is essential to fulfil the rights of the more than 1.3 billion persons with disabilities worldwide. The United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy provides a comprehensive system-wide framework and road map for achieving transformative change. Concrete steps have been taken over the past four years, with 35 per cent of United Nations development system entities and 30 per cent of United Nations country teams now meeting or exceeding the requirements of at least 50 per cent of the Strategy's accountability framework indicators. While this share has increased from 2019, when 14 per cent of entities and 11 per cent of country teams met the requirements of at least half of the indicators, progress must be accelerated.

120. Implementation of the Strategy in other areas is increasing, but further efforts are needed. Systematic consultation with persons with disabilities is fundamental to achieving disability inclusion, yet only 31 per cent of United Nations development system entities and 37 per cent of country teams meet or exceed requirements in this regard.

Adopting non-discrimination employment statements and giving priority to reaching persons with disabilities during recruitment processes are the basis for employment of persons with disabilities in the United Nations. Although there was a 100 per cent increase since 2019, only 24 per cent of United Nations development system entities currently meet or exceed requirements for employment of persons with disabilities. Only 26 per cent of development system entities met or exceeded accessibility requirements that enable persons with disabilities to participate fully in all aspects of the Organization's work. A total of 32 development system entities have addressed disability inclusion in their strategic plans and 59 per cent of country teams have now included persons with disabilities in their Cooperation Frameworks. United Nations entities will continue to build staff awareness and knowledge regarding disability inclusion and accelerate inclusion within their operations. Engagement between the United Nations and organizations of persons with disabilities is being strengthened in relation to all aspects of the Strategy. United Nations development system entities and country teams are establishing more formalized partnerships to ensure the sustained input of these organizations in strategic planning, coordination mechanisms, accessibility assessments, programming, humanitarian assistance and capacity development.

121. The multi-partner trust fund of the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities launched seven joint programmes responding to countries' priorities as identified through situational analyses. Final reporting showed that the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund's portfolio on integrated social protection and leaving no one behind made a significant contribution to supporting a shift towards more inclusive social protection systems, extending access to new or extended social protection services to over 4 million persons with disabilities. Host countries recognized the impact, with most Governments surveyed (87 per cent, up from 81 per cent in 2021) rating United Nations country team support as effective for persons with disabilities.

Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment

122. The United Nations has a long-standing policy of zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. The 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review urged the United Nations development system to prioritize prevention and take immediate action to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. To reduce the risk of sexual harassment, members of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination have improved system-wide policies, tools and mechanisms, including strengthening investigations. In 2023, a United Nations system-wide knowledge hub was launched to facilitate information-sharing and foster collaboration.

123. Progress in enhancing accountability and transparency to prevent and address sexual exploitation and abuse is evident. 26 entities (93 per cent) are reporting annually to their governing bodies on actions taken to prevent and address sexual exploitation and abuse, up from 19 entities in 2021 (68 per cent). For instance, WHO conducts quarterly briefings for its member States and includes dedicated items at Executive Board meetings and the annual World Health Assembly. In 2023, the Development Coordination Office regional office for Asia and the Pacific, together with protection from sexual exploitation and abuse coordinators and focal points, produced a compendium of best practices from United Nations country teams to encourage knowledge-sharing and learning.

124. Resident coordinators, in collaboration with country teams, have system-wide responsibility for developing and implementing annual action plans to mitigate the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse. Resident coordinators receive mandatory briefings on their responsibilities from my Special Coordinator on Improving the United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and the Victims' Rights

Advocate. The number of United Nations country teams with an action plan on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse remained high (118 United Nations country teams) but stagnant (at 90 per cent) over this quadrennial cycle. Ninety-eight per cent of United Nations country teams have a structure in place to coordinate in-country efforts to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, as in Indonesia, where more than 500 United Nations staff were trained to integrate protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment into the work of the United Nations in the country. In 2023, 109 resident coordinators and 22 heads of entities reported on activities related to protection from and response to sexual exploitation and abuse through the annual management letter.

125. More work remains to be done. Only 39 per cent of United Nations country teams had developed and safeguarded mechanisms to empower, encourage and protect staff who report cases of sexual exploitation and abuse. Moreover, only 39 per cent of United Nations country teams have a financed position for a country-level protection from sexual exploitation and abuse coordinator. In the next cycle, we will look to ensure that more country teams have such mechanisms in place, while we continue to ask all United Nations entities to adopt new measures to better prevent, detect, report and take action against personnel. Zero-tolerance of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment remains a top priority for me and the United Nations system. In addition, the Office of my Special Coordinator is developing a toolkit for senior leaders at field level (Deputy Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (Resident Coordinators/Humanitarian Coordinators) and heads of agencies), as leadership is paramount for preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse.

126. To further strengthen the system-wide approach to sexual exploitation and abuse, an inter-agency working group, under the auspices of the Office of my Special Coordinator, has developed standardized wording on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse for inclusion in Cooperation Frameworks to be introduced in 2024. This approach will promote system-wide coherence in the engagement with Governments. The Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate launched a system-wide training module in 2023, to further strengthen the implementation of a victim-centred, rights-based approach.

III. Scaling up the means of implementation

A. The Sustainable Development Goal stimulus: increasing stability and reducing uncertainty through investments in sustainable development

127. Financing the Sustainable Development Goals is the overarching and interlinking issue that significantly influences success in achieving the 2030 Agenda. The major challenges to that end lie in mobilizing and coordinating resources. Despite notable progress since the adoption in 2015 of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the current global financial situation is of grave concern. Numerous countries face extreme debt burdens that could severely worsen their economic situation – often compounded by factors such as global crisis. Over the past 20 years, global public debt has surged fivefold, with developing countries bearing nearly 30 per cent of that load. Increasing debt burdens impede countries' investments in the Sustainable Development Goals.

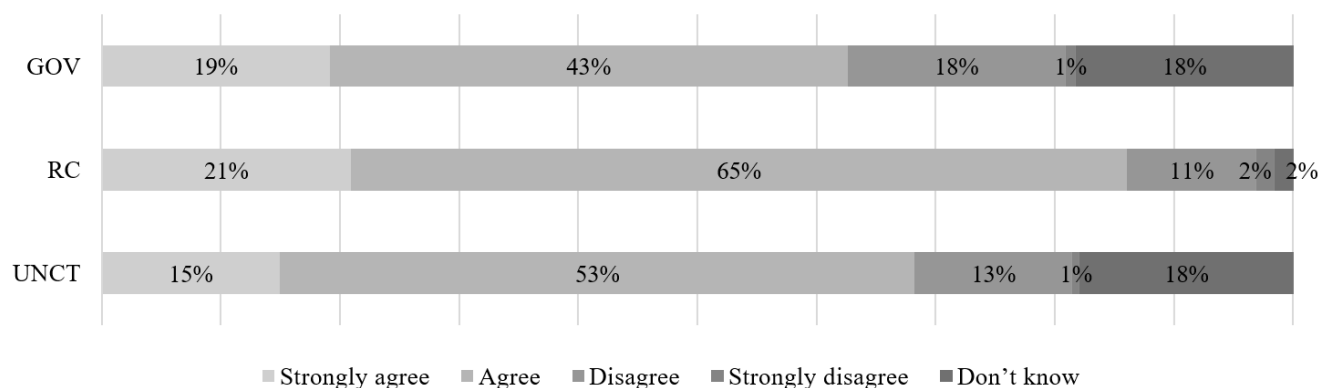
128. The situation requires a swift change of direction and a recalibration of our development financing strategies. The Sustainable Development Goal stimulus seeks to deliver this. It aims to offset the challenging market conditions that developing

countries face and accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The three areas for immediate action are reiterated: tackle the high cost of debt and rising risks of debt distress; scale up long-term affordable financing for development and climate action by \$500 billion per year; and expand contingency financing to countries in need.

129. It is imperative for the international community to collaborate to enact those changes while countries align financing streams with the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals. Such actions were endorsed in the political declaration of the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit, and the United Nations development system will do its utmost to support Governments on those priority concerns.

130. Over the past three years, a consistently high proportion (around 90 per cent) of host country Governments affirmed that the United Nations development system provided adequate support in securing financing for the Sustainable Development Goals, with a slight increase in 2023. However, in terms of progress in mobilizing diverse stakeholders to finance and advance the Sustainable Development Goals in countries, opinions vary, with Government responses indicating a need for increased efforts and enhanced coordination (see figure 15).

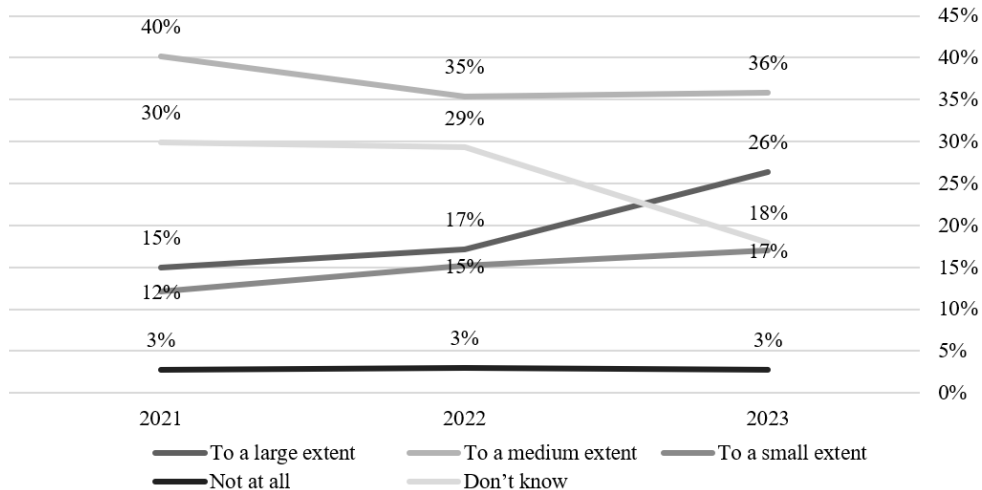
Figure 15
The resident coordinators and United Nations country teams have convened a diverse group of stakeholders focused on the financing mix to advance the Sustainable Development Goals



Source: Department of Economic Affairs Surveys of Governments, United Nations country teams and resident coordinators, 2023.
Abbreviations: GOV, Governments; RC, resident coordinators; UNCT, United Nations country teams.

131. When asked about collaboration between international financial institutions and the United Nations country teams since the repositioning of the system, 62 per cent of Governments responded that collaboration had improved to a medium to large extent, which is a notable increase compared with 2022 (see figure 16). There is still more to be done. The role of international financial institutions as government partners remains significant. Governments that chose international financial institutions as the preferred provider of external resources for development increased substantially by 16 percentage points from 2022 to 2023.

Figure 16
Host country Governments on how collaboration between international financial institutions and the United Nations country teams has improved since the repositioning of the system began in 2018



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs surveys of Governments, 2023.

132. Integrated national financing frameworks are an essential tool in operationalizing the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, as well as the Sustainable Development Goal stimulus, at the national level. This country-led approach is designed to assist countries in better leveraging all sources of domestic and international finance across public and private sources, uncovering critical financing gaps and overcoming existing impediments in financing the Sustainable Development Goals. Utilizing those frameworks, countries can mobilize and align additional resources, enhance the coherence across different financing policies, better manage risk in an increasingly complex financing landscape and make Sustainable Development Goals financing more predictable.

133. Supporting the development and implementation of country-led integrated national financing frameworks is therefore among the main priorities of the United Nations development system. Under the leadership of resident coordinators, UNDP has worked in collaboration with United Nations country teams and provided technical support to all 86 countries requesting assistance on integrated national financing frameworks, drawing on global methodological work. UNDP is supporting two additional countries that have embarked on frameworks since 2023.¹⁷ This highly valued support is underscored by the survey findings. Nearly 80 per cent of Governments rated the United Nations support as adequate, a steady increase over the past year. The approval rate for adequate support was especially high among low- and middle-income countries.

134. Innovative funding approaches, especially blended finance, strategically leverage development funds to attract additional investment in sustainable development by private and public investors and narrow the Sustainable Development Goals financing gap. As mandated in the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review,¹⁸ United Nations development entities, spearheaded by UNDP expertise, are actively engaging with Governments to analyse and assess viable solutions for

¹⁷ See <https://inff.org/dashboard>.

¹⁸ General Assembly resolution 75/233, para. 62.

managing existing debt or assuming new debt, including through the issuance of Sustainable Development Goals-aligned bond and debt restructuring.

135. Nothing less than a paradigm shift is needed in restructuring international economic and financial systems to support sustainable development. This calls for comprehensive reforms across various fronts, including global economic governance, sovereign debt sustainability, international tax cooperation, development banking, global financial safety nets and financial regulatory frameworks. The key elements of the needed reform and related recommendations are laid out in Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 6: Reforms to the International Financial Architecture.¹⁹

136. As we conclude the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review cycle, considerable efforts are required to secure long-term, sustainable and efficient funding to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The forthcoming quadrennial comprehensive policy review, in combination with the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, in 2025, present an opportunity to evaluate progress in accelerating Sustainable Development Goals financing and implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. The conference will be an opportunity to discuss topics such as blended financing, how to scale up debt swaps, credit enhancements or State-contingency clauses, and more coherent and representative global economic governance.

B. Bolstering and diversifying partnerships

137. Partnerships continue to encapsulate the determination to come together to solve common challenges and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. There is ongoing collaboration on the high-impact initiative to close the digital divide, as well as other high impact initiatives to propel key Sustainable Development Goals transitions.

138. Last year, host country Governments continued to rank the United Nations development system first as a partner in multiple areas of support, especially on global challenges requiring common action and national capacity-building. As reflected in the findings of the 2023 Office of Internal Oversight Services evaluation of the resident coordinator system, the system is valued for its ability to navigate complex issues requiring high levels of trust, impartiality and diversity of stakeholders. Among host country Governments, 91 per cent appreciated United Nations development system assistance in building capacities to develop partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals.

139. Over 85 per cent of United Nations development system entity headquarters have developed capacity to promote innovative partnerships to support Governments, up from 76 per cent in 2022. The United Nations development system continues to forge strong partnerships with civil society, women's and youth groups and national human rights institutions, according to the survey of host country Governments. There was also rapid progress by United Nations country teams in adopting common approaches to partnerships, with 55 per cent of resident coordinators reporting these in 2023 compared with 24 per cent in 2021. Another 39 per cent were preparing such plans, which could offer room to assess partnership gaps and strategies to close them. At the same time, only 71 per cent of United Nations country teams view resident coordinator support for partnerships and resource mobilization as effective, a decline from 81 per cent in 2022. Reversing that trend calls for their dedicated and consistent attention, including by scaling up joint resource mobilization, which requires meaningful collaboration on the part of United Nations country teams and resident coordinators alike.

¹⁹ See www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-international-finance-architecture-en.pdf.

140. Partnerships between developing countries remain an important means to facilitate knowledge transfer and enable the sharing of best development practices, complementing official development assistance. Since 2021, requests for support from the United Nations on South-South or triangular cooperation have risen steadily, from 53 to 61 per cent of host country Governments. The top three areas include health, climate change and social protection. Progress in the United Nations development system response to this demand was evident from the survey of entity headquarters. Some 81 per cent included this mode of collaboration in strategic plans, and 86 per cent integrated South-South results in corporate reporting in 2023, up from 73 per cent and 79 per cent, respectively, in 2022.

141. The 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review also recognized volunteerism as a cross-cutting means of implementing the 2030 Agenda. United Nations Volunteers provided 12,400 volunteers to 54 United Nations entities in 2023, including 218 in resident coordinator offices. Volunteers served in 169 countries and territories, representing 179 nationalities; 82 per cent were from the global South, 57 per cent were women and 63 per cent were national volunteers serving in their home countries. Encouragingly, half the Cooperation Frameworks initiated in 2023 integrated volunteerism.

C. Turbocharging the Sustainable Development Goals with science, technology and innovation

142. Many of the recent developments in the world have been driven by advances in science, technology and innovation. While 76 per cent of host Governments reported receiving tailored support to leverage science, technology and innovation, an 8 percentage point increase from 2021, support for leveraging cooperation from the global South remains insufficient, with only 49 per cent of Governments receiving such support. At the global level, 24 out of 27 United Nations development system entities include strengthening cooperation in science, technology and innovation in their strategic plans. The number of United Nations country teams working on the transformative impact of science, technology and innovation has increased steadily to 52 per cent, up 13 percentage point from 2020.

143. Throughout 2023, a United Nations inter-agency team, under the auspices of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism, worked to enhance country capacities and advance implementation of the science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals road maps. It contributed to bolstering regional partnerships through the Science, Technology and Innovation for Africa Coalition. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa and the European Commission Joint Research Centre, supported Governments in advancing road map implementation, enhancing capacity, strengthening the science-policy interface and facilitating peer learning and partnerships.

144. The Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries continues to support least developed countries by facilitating technology transfer and capacity-building in science, technology and innovation. It has completed and validated 12 technology needs assessments, with 5 ongoing in 2024.²⁰ Those assessments have identified four priority areas: agriculture and food systems; education and digital skills; health and climate resilience; and the environment. Ongoing projects are under way in Bhutan, the Gambia, the Niger and Mozambique.

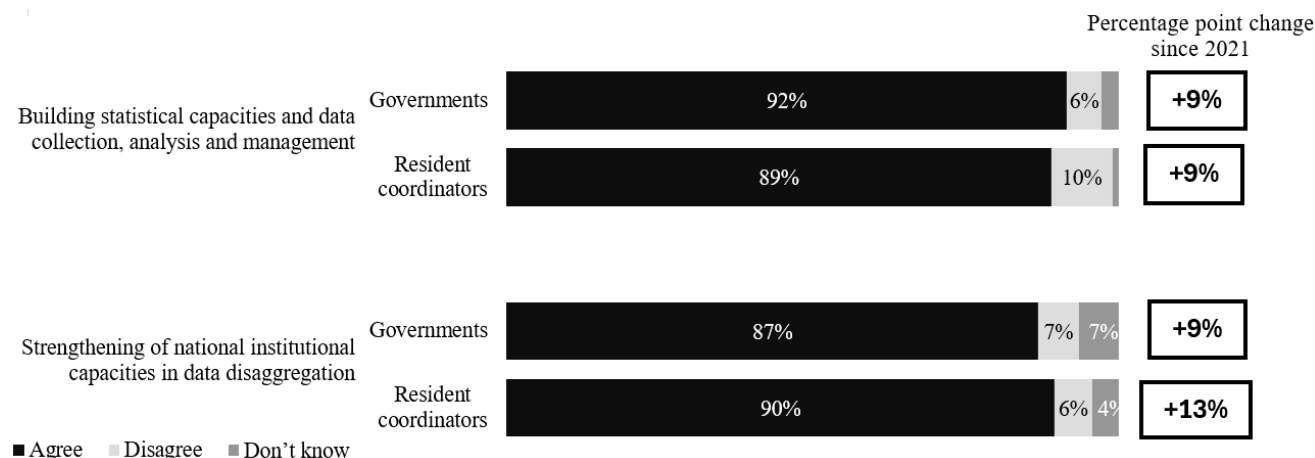
²⁰ Djibouti, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malawi, Mauritania and United Republic of Tanzania.

D. Unlocking the data dividend to leave no one behind

145. Strong data systems are crucial for effective and informed policymaking, enhancing accountability and optimizing resource allocation to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals. Research shows that a \$1 investment in data delivers an average return of \$3,216. Despite this, Governments are still faced with significant Sustainable Development Goals data gaps and underutilization of data dividends.

146. In the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review, the United Nations development system was called upon to strengthen its support in developing national capacities for development planning and the collection and analysis of data disaggregation, and addressing data gaps. In 2023, 80 per cent of contributing Governments deemed the United Nations development system’s support on data collection and analysis to be crucial, ranking it among the top two functions. In total, 92 per cent of host Governments reported receiving support for enhancing statistical capacities, and 87 per cent for strengthening national institutional capacities in data disaggregation, a noticeable increase from 2021 (see figure 17). Some 97 per cent of United Nations country teams provided support to strengthen national capacities through an inter-agency effort, up from 60 per cent in 2020.

Figure 17
Perspectives of Governments and resident coordinators on United Nations’ support on data



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs surveys of Governments and resident coordinators, 2023.

147. Numerous initiatives are ongoing in this area to bolster national data ecosystems and bridge data gaps to track the Sustainable Development Goals. At the country level, the high-impact initiative on the power of data, launched in September 2023, seeks to strengthen the coherence to the United Nations system’s support for national data systems and to take that work to the next level. With a focus on plugging gaps in national data systems, boosting financing for data and statistics, improving country-level data and strengthening political leadership on data, the initiative is already working towards national data partnerships in 15 countries, with a target of expanding to 100 partnerships by 2030.

148. At the global level, the Committee for the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System is advancing key issues outlined in the document of the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) on the system-wide road map for innovating United Nations data and statistics (CEB/2020/1/Add.1). In 2023, a second phase of the United Nations data portal project began with the introduction of the “UN Data Commons for the SDGs” platform. The upcoming United Nations

World Data Forum and the quadrennial comprehensive policy review can set clear expectations as to the role of the United Nations in the area of data and statistics, including as it relates to strengthening data systems and partnership efforts at national, regional and global levels.

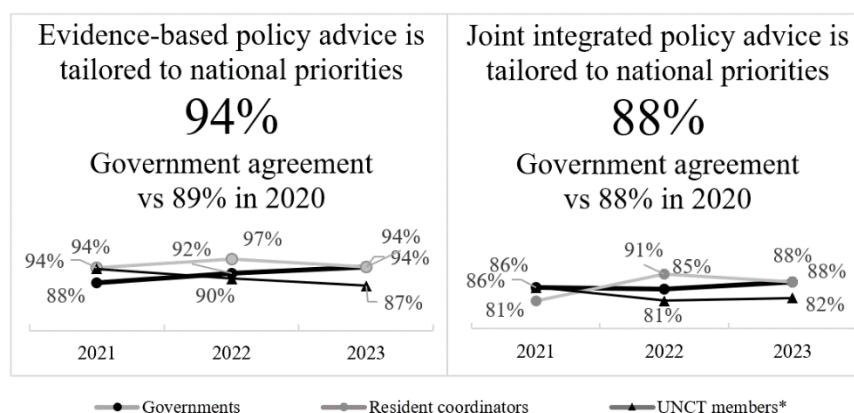
IV. Tailoring support for every country context

A. Reform as an enabler of integrated policy advice

149. As detailed in section II above, the United Nations development system reform has delivered on the mandate established by the General Assembly in its resolution [75/233](#) to continue to provide evidence-based and integrated policy advice to help countries implement the 2030 Agenda. Further details show that high rates of confirmation by Governments, resident coordinators and United Nations country teams have continued (see figure 18).

Figure 18

Government agreement that the United Nations provides tailored evidence-based and integrated policy advice



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of Governments, various years.

Note: United Nations country team member responses were to the statement “The United Nations country team now, compared with one year ago, provides better:...”

Abbreviations: UNCT, United Nations country team.

150. In the most recent survey round, most Governments identified the United Nations as the partner that can best satisfy key factors, including its alignment with national priorities (78 per cent), its willingness to collaborate with other partners (78 per cent), the fact that it is trusted by national partners (70 per cent), and its impartiality (69 per cent).

B. Strengthening resilience to disasters

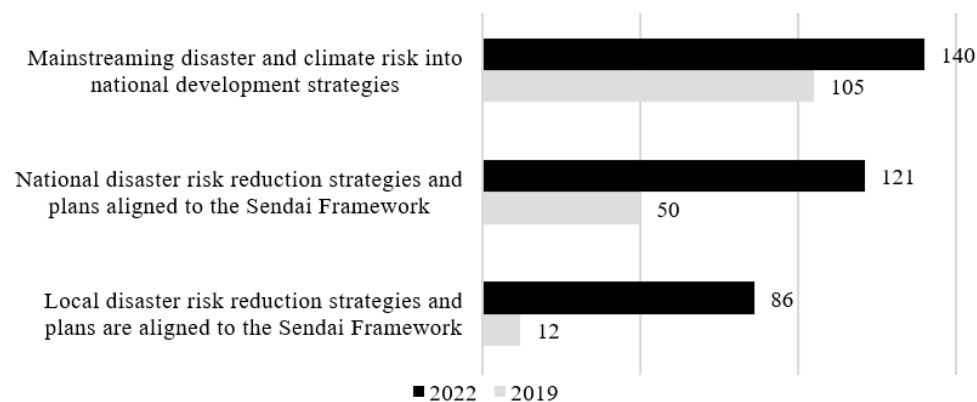
151. In the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review, United Nations development system entities were mandated to integrate the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 into their work and to align their work with the United Nations Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience. Almost universally, host Governments (98 per cent) agreed that United Nations country teams had effectively strengthened their capacity to build resilience to crises, disasters and extreme climate events. Resident coordinators echoed that

view (91 per cent), citing examples of support such as implementing early warning, adaptation and resilience programmes, and strengthening coordination mechanisms, including for post-disaster recovery coordination.

152. It is also encouraging that the cumulative number of countries supported by United Nations entities on national and local disaster risk reduction strategies has increased substantially from 2019 to 2022, making progress on the Sendai Framework indicator (see figure 19). Progress is not consistent across countries, however, and is far from adequate, especially at the local level. There remains room for strengthened integration, as only 43 per cent of Cooperation Frameworks included specific indicators to support countries in adopting and implementing a national or local integrated disaster risk reduction strategy. However, all Cooperation Frameworks signed in 2023 integrated some disaster risk reduction elements.

Figure 19

Number of countries that received support from United Nations entities in 2019 and 2022 in their national and local strategies



Source: United Nations Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience Results Framework, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Note: Cumulative number of countries.

153. At the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Early Warnings for All initiative was launched,²¹ which aims to protect everyone from extreme weather events by 2027. In its first phase, this joint United Nations effort is providing targeted support to 30 countries, with 6 having successfully finalized national road maps on the initiative in 2023.²² Resident coordinators played a pivotal role in ensuring the road maps were inclusive, multisectoral and nationally led. United Nations country teams continue to support effective implementation of the road maps and their integration into existing frameworks, reducing duplication and maximizing impact. In 2023, the initiative dashboard²³ and the report on the Global Status of Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems²⁴ were launched to provide progress updates.

154. Looking ahead to the next quadrennial review cycle, it is critical for the United Nations development system to strengthen systemwide coherence to fully support countries in implementing the Sendai Framework. This includes accelerating

²¹ See www.un.org/en/climatechange/early-warnings-for-all.

²² Antiqua and Barbuda, Barbados, Ethiopia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives and Tajikistan.

²³ See <https://wmo.int/activities/monitoring-and-evaluation-merp/early-warnings-all-dashboard>.

²⁴ See <https://www.undrr.org/reports/global-status-MHEWS-2023#:~:text=The%20trend%20of%20increasing%20numbers,the%20Asia%20and%20Pacific%20region.>

collaboration across humanitarian, development and peacebuilding operations, strengthening national and local governance structures, enhancing multi-hazard early warning systems and supporting risk-informed investments. The forthcoming 2024 Global Risks Report and Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction will highlight the risk agenda ahead of the Summit of the Future.

C. Meeting our promise to provide tailored support to different country settings

155. The 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review acknowledged the specific development needs of countries in special situations and called upon the United Nations development system to support them to achieve internationally agreed development goals.

156. Resources for United Nations operational activities in countries in special situations have increased since 2020 (see table 6). The share of total expenditure in the least developed countries reached 50.7 per cent in 2022, a 52 per cent increase in real terms over a four-year period. In the middle-income countries, it reached 50.5 per cent, a 58 per cent increase.²⁵ A large part of spending is for humanitarian operations, however, especially in the least developed countries (74 per cent) and landlocked developing states (72 per cent). The exception is small island developing States, where most United Nations activities are for development; they have seen the most significant growth in spending since 2018 (up 71 per cent, in real terms).

Table 6
Expenditures on operational activities for development by country group

Country group	Number of countries	Total 2022 expenditure on operational activities (development and humanitarian) (millions of United States dollars)	Expenditure as a share of the total at country level (percentage)	Four-year trend in expenditure (percentage) in real terms	Expenditure per capita (United States dollars)	2022 development expenditure (millions of United States dollars)	Percentage of humanitarian expenditure
Least developed countries	45	20 645	50.7	+52	18.36	5 449	74
Small island developing States	57	1 218	3.0	+71	17.03	841	31
Landlocked developing countries	32	11 603	28.5	+53	20.56	3 266	72
Middle-income countries	109	20 579	50.5	+58	3.52	8 654	58
Countries with a humanitarian response plan	26	23 635	58.0	–	23.52	4 930	79
Host country Governments	162	39 788	97.7	+51	5.99	12 889	67

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Tailored support to the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing States and countries with humanitarian emergencies

157. Countries in special situations continued to assess positively the alignment of United Nations work with their development needs and priorities. All small island developing States,²⁶ 95 per cent of countries facing humanitarian emergencies, 97 per cent of least developed countries and 93 per cent of landlocked developing countries

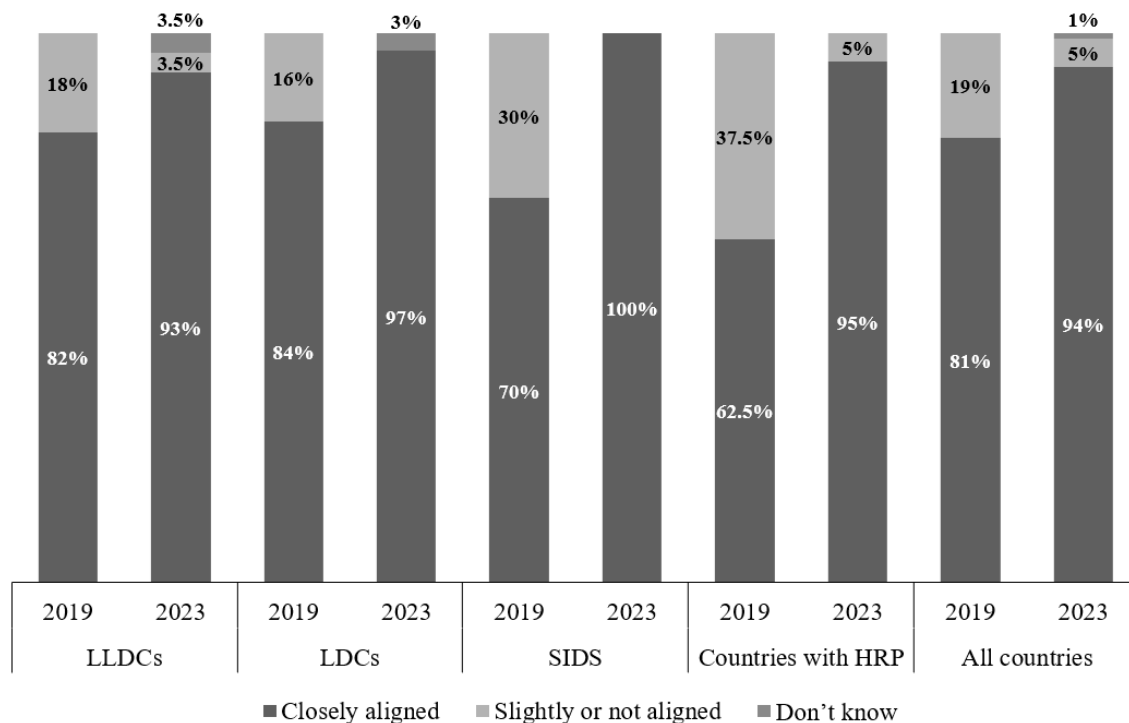
²⁵ Taking into account inflation and exchange-rate fluctuations.

²⁶ Among the 28 small island developing States that responded to the 2023 Government survey.

agreed that United Nations activities align with national development needs and priorities. There is a steady increase in alignment from 2019 (see figure 20).

Figure 20

Alignment of activities with national development needs and priorities



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of Governments, various years.
Abbreviations: HRP, humanitarian response plan; LDCs, least developed countries; LLDCs, landlocked developing countries; SIDS, small island developing States.

158. More landlocked developing countries, small island developing States and countries facing humanitarian emergencies consider the United Nations country team configuration as adequately tailored to their specific needs and challenges. The biggest increase in satisfaction is among countries facing humanitarian emergencies (87 per cent in 2019 and 100 per cent in 2023) and small island developing States (57 per cent in 2019 and 79 per cent in 2023), followed by landlocked developing countries (85 per cent in 2019 and 89 per cent in 2023). There has been a slight decrease in satisfaction among least developed countries, from 92 per cent in 2019 to 87 per cent in 2023.

159. Countries in special situations reported receiving assistance on several Sustainable Development Goals, listing the top issues in the past two years as food security, nutrition and eradicating hunger (Goal 2), health and well-being (Goal 3) and education (Goal 4). They have favourably assessed United Nations support (see table 7), in particular regarding evidence-based policy advice, technical support and support for statistical capacities and data collection, analysis and management. Percentages are slightly lower for joint integrated policy advice tailored to national needs and priorities.

Table 7
Extent to which groups of countries agree that the United Nations adequately provides advice and support (by category)

Percentage

<i>Category</i>	<i>Least developed countries</i>	<i>Landlocked developing countries</i>	<i>Small island developing States</i>	<i>Countries with a humanitarian response plan</i>	<i>All countries</i>
Evidence-based policy advice that is tailored to national needs and priorities	97	93	96	95	94
Joint integrated policy advice that is tailored to national needs and priorities	91	89	88	83	88
Technical support in line with national needs and priorities	92	96	92	95	95
Support to financing for the Sustainable Development Goals	97	89	85	100	87
Support for integrated national financing frameworks	83	81	72	74	78
Support to leverage partnerships in support of national development priorities	89	81	84	89	86
Support for statistical capacities and data collection, analysis and management	92	89	96	94	92

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of Governments, 2023.

160. Some 72 per cent of small island developing States, 74 per cent of countries facing humanitarian emergencies, 81 per cent of landlocked developing countries and 83 per cent of least developed countries assessed United Nations support as adequate in its support in the area of integrated national financing frameworks, similar to all countries (87 per cent). This data is similar to the results from the resident coordinator survey, with 75 per cent of resident coordinators in small island developing States, 85 per cent in least developed countries and 86 per cent in landlocked developing countries agreeing that the United Nations country team provided adequate support. In countries facing humanitarian emergencies, most resident coordinators (94 per cent) agreed that support was adequate, a notable 20 percentage points higher than the assessment made by Governments of those countries.

161. This year, the international community has an important opportunity to commit to stronger action in support of countries in special situations. This includes implementation of the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2022–2031 and the development of new frameworks for small island developing States and landlocked developing countries. The Doha Programme of Action is a clear blueprint for recovery, renewal and resilience in the world's most vulnerable countries. Its effective implementation must be our priority. United Nations development system entities should integrate it in strategic plans, programmes and reporting as requested in the Programme of Action. The United Nations development system continues to support countries graduating from the least developed country category through the inter-agency task force on graduation and the Sustainable Graduation Support Facility, which will be fully operationalized this year.

162. In the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, the United Nations development system was also called upon to support implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024. Now that the decade is concluding, the international community can appraise implementation and chart a way forward to help these 32 countries to

overcome their specific challenges to sustainable development. The third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries, in Rwanda, offers a chance to explore solutions and forge partnerships to address the specific challenges of these countries and unlock their full potential for a more equitable and prosperous future. Preparations are also ongoing for the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States, to be held from 27 to 30 May 2024 in Antigua and Barbuda, which will guide action in the next decade.

163. Several United Nations Headquarters entities reported that they had concrete strategies to address the unique challenges of conflict-affected countries (83 per cent), small island developing States (74 per cent) and least developed countries (78 per cent). Yet only 61 per cent reported the same for landlocked developing countries. Reporting to governing bodies on outcomes of work in countries in special situations was still limited (65 per cent for least developed countries, 63 per cent for conflict-affected countries, 57 per cent for small island developing States and 48 per cent for landlocked developing countries). United Nations development system entities continue to develop specific strategies for countries in special situations and to strengthen reporting to governing bodies as crucial for demonstrating system-wide results on the ground.

Tailored support in middle-income countries

164. Comprising 109 countries and territories and approximately 30 per cent of global gross domestic product, middle-income countries are crucial for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. However, recent external shocks have driven up living costs and food insecurity in many of those countries. They face common challenges, such as high inequality, limited access to affordable financing, rising public debt and slow post-pandemic job recovery.

165. The 2020 quadrennial review recognized the need to address the specific challenges that middle-income countries face. In 2023, middle-income Governments reported that the United Nations development system provided adequate support by offering joint integrated policy advice (87 per cent) and by leveraging financing (86 per cent) and partnerships (85 per cent). In total, 89 per cent of middle-income countries received support in developing integrated national financing frameworks. There is room for improvement, however, with only 68 per cent of Governments reporting that the United Nations had responded to their request for support on South-South and triangular cooperation.

166. Middle-income countries identified health and well-being (Goal 3), food security and eradicating hunger (Goal 2), education (Goal 4), combatting climate change (Goal 13) and gender equality (Goal 5) as the top five areas where United Nations contributions had been significant in the past two years. In 2022, system spending on those countries surpassed \$20 billion, or just over 50 per cent of all country allocable spending (see table 6 above).

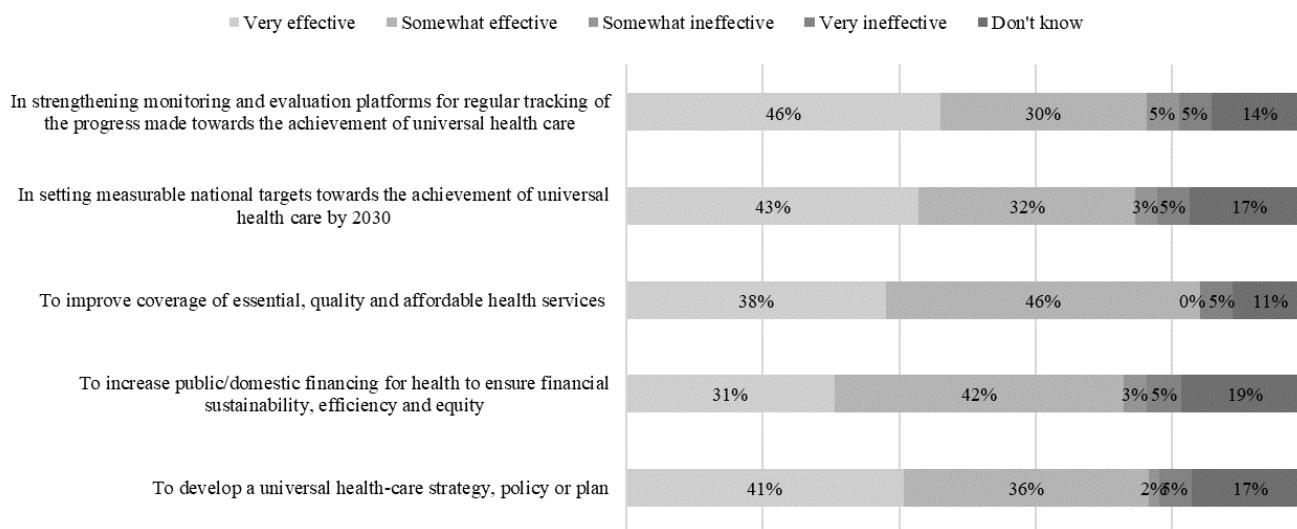
D. Support in times of crisis and beyond

Global health

167. Findings from the survey of Governments underscored the integral role of United Nations development system entities as a sought-after partner on health. Goal 3, on health and well-being, consistently emerged as the area where the United Nations' contribution has been most vital and crucial throughout the most recent quadrennial cycle. The number of Governments that rated assistance as significant over the past two years has substantially increased, from 70 to 76 per cent.

168. Feedback from Governments on the effectiveness of support for universal health coverage and other important technical areas has been encouraging. In total, 63 per cent of Governments requested United Nations country team support on universal health coverage, an increase of 5 percentage points since 2021. Out of those that requested it, 46 per cent of Governments rated as very effective the support on strengthening monitoring and evaluation platforms for the ongoing tracking of progress made towards the achievements of universal health coverage. Similar results can be seen for other areas, as shown in figure 21.

Figure 21
Government responses on the effectiveness of United Nations country team support in the following areas



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of Governments, 2023.

169. Despite these strides, universal health coverage faces challenges that were exacerbated by COVID-19. As demonstrated in my earlier reports, the repositioned United Nations development system effectively supported countries in their global health response to the pandemic, spearheaded by WHO and backed by United Nations country teams under the leadership of resident coordinators.²⁷

170. Urgent and collective action is required to make faster progress towards universal health coverage. The United Nations development system must bundle its efforts to combat the socioeconomic and health impacts of the pandemic, which continue to reverberate, underscoring the importance of collective, comprehensive approaches.

171. Looking ahead, we have the necessary tools at hand to achieve our common objective. Reorienting health systems using a primary health-care approach is the most effective, inclusive, equitable and cost-effective path to universal health coverage. Potentially, 60 million lives could be saved, and global life expectancy increased by 3.7 years by 2030.²⁸

²⁷ See [A/76/75-E/2021/57](#) and [A/77/69-E/2022/47](#).

²⁸ See [www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-\(uhc\)](http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-(uhc)) and www.uhc2030.org/fileadmin/uploads/uhc2030/Documents/UN_HLM_2023/Action_Agenda_2023/UHC_Action_Agenda_short_2023.pdf.

E. Upholding the commitment of universality and leaving no one behind

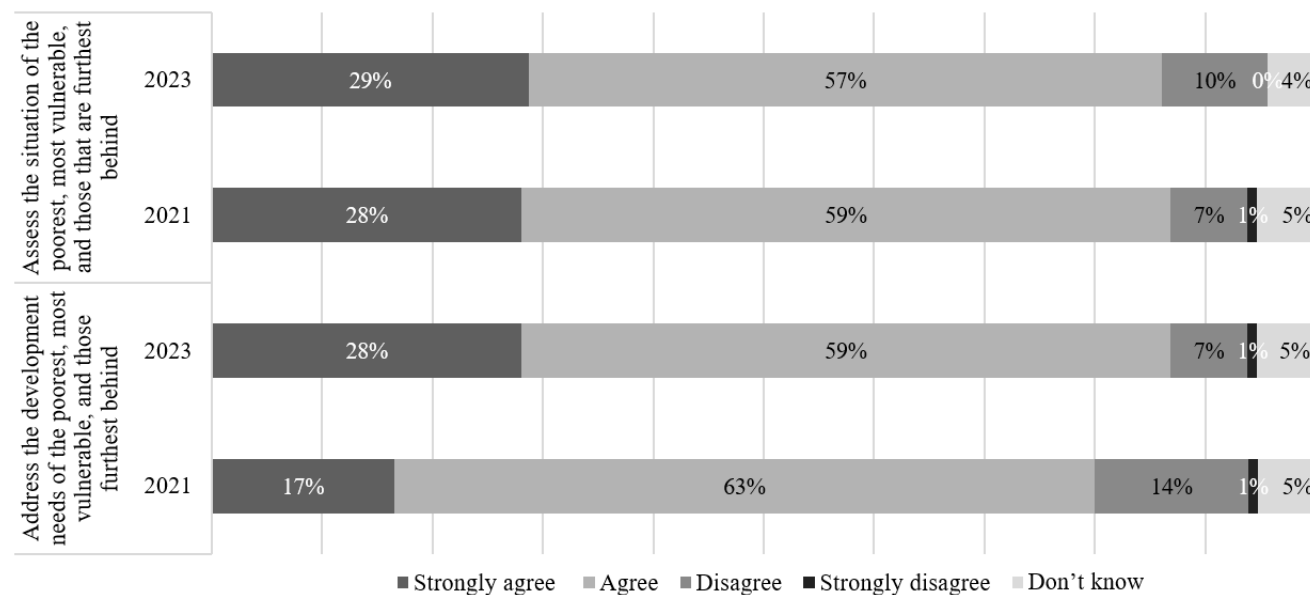
172. Human rights are intrinsic to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and meeting the promise of leaving no one behind. The recent commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights served as a reminder of its universality, indivisibility and indispensability, highlighting the urgent need to uphold its principles in our pursuit of the 2030 Agenda.

173. In the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review, Member States called upon all entities of the United Nations development system to support countries in their efforts to fulfil human rights obligations under international law. This is critical in operationalizing the pledge to leave no one behind, and United Nations entities served as vital partners for Governments in that regard, as underscored by the survey results.

174. Most Governments expressed a high level of satisfaction with United Nations assistance in assessing the situation and addressing the needs of the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind (see figure 22). Those results are consistently high over the present quadrennial cycle. Engagements between Special Rapporteurs and Governments, with support from United Nations country teams, have resulted in concrete and actionable recommendations for addressing challenges across a range of thematic areas that are critical to sustainable development, including human rights and climate change, the rights of older persons and of indigenous peoples and freedom of assembly and association.

Figure 22

Government approval ratings for United Nations assistance in leaving no one behind



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of Governments, 2023.

175. Significantly, 82 per cent of Governments affirmed that United Nations country teams had adequately supported them in fulfilling their obligations under international human rights treaties. This marks a notable increase from 70 per cent in 2021. In total, 80 per cent of resident coordinators reported that Governments had sought policy advice on human rights, which underscores a crucial partnership.

176. It is positive to see that 88 per cent of Governments reported meaningful engagement between United Nations country teams and national human rights institutions, reflecting a sustained upward trend. In-country human rights advisers provide critical support to United Nations country teams and resident coordinators in operationalizing commitments to human rights and leaving no one behind. However, this year has seen decreased deployments, with only 43 advisers deployed compared with 54 in 2022, owing primarily to financial constraints. It is encouraging to see that the number of common country analyses developed over the past year that map relevant international human rights obligations and the commitments made by the country has increased to 84 per cent, a significant increase from 56 per cent last year.

177. In the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review, United Nations development system entities were also called upon to assist Governments in preventing and eliminating all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls. Governments have consistently appreciated the system's effective support in strengthening institutional mechanisms and legal frameworks to prevent and eliminate violence and discrimination against women and girls (94 per cent) and in implementing specific measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence (95 per cent). The European Union-United Nations Spotlight Initiative is the world's largest effort to address this issue. Since 2019, this Initiative has helped advance nearly 500 laws and policies to end violence against women and girls, strengthened national action plans in 43 countries and contributed to a 10-fold increase in budget allocations across 14 countries to address violence against women and girls.

178. Resident coordinators reported that the Spotlight Initiative remained a high-impact programme contributing to countries' efforts in eliminating violence against women and girls. It has fostered collaboration, improved access to essential services, enhanced legal frameworks and promoted positive social norms. In its next phase, the Spotlight Initiative 2.0 will evolve into a multi-partner trust fund and expand its universal reach, including in bridging the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, with the aim of supporting more than 60 countries by 2030.

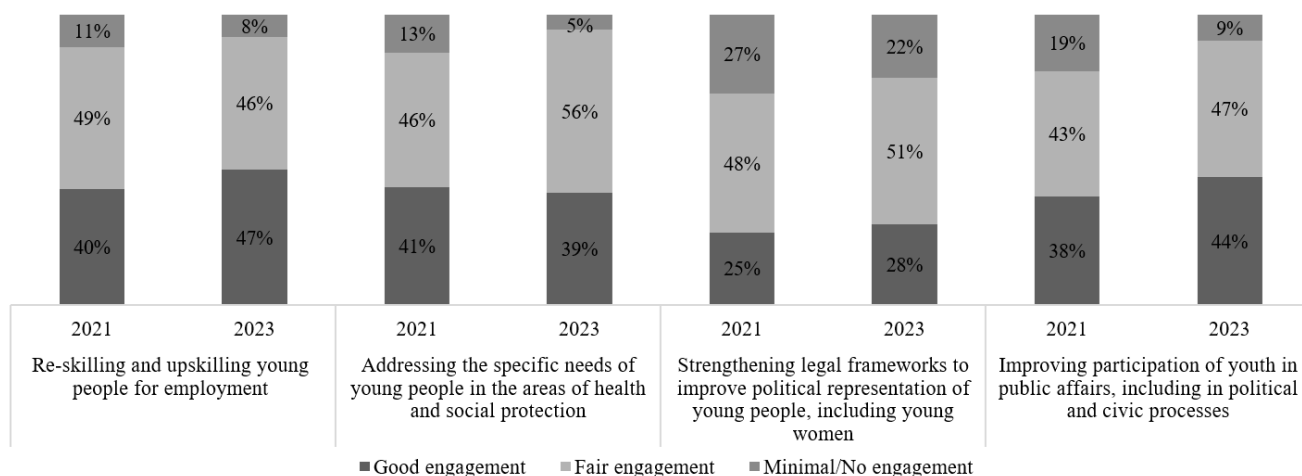
179. Youth2030, the United Nations youth strategy, continues to gain momentum through the engagement of 55 entities and 132 country teams. The first five years of the strategy saw the establishment of solid foundations for implementation. These include global governance and systemwide coordination structures, performance measurement and accountability systems, and mechanisms for periodic tracking of progress. The United Nations development system continues to support Governments in empowering young people. Some 83 per cent of all resident coordinators reported that their host country had requested support on youth matters in 2023, an increase of 7 percentage points since 2021. Resident coordinators indicated gradual improvements in country team engagement on youth matters, as shown in figure 23. Engagement of young people in United Nations Cooperation Framework processes has seen a 9.5-fold increase from the 2020 baseline.

180. This positive trend is also visible in government feedback, with some 93 per cent of host countries reporting that United Nations country teams effectively engaged with young people. There has been a 2.5-fold increase in youth engagement in United Nations support to Governments and a nearly 2-fold improvement in engagement in projects led by country teams. Some 26 out of 29 entities in the survey of United Nations development system entity headquarters reported they had developed structured and sustainable policies to expand the participation of young people. Over 70 per cent of policies include developing an integrated programme of work to facilitate more meaningful youth participation and ensure its systematic integration into global and regional United Nations intergovernmental mechanisms and processes.

181. In October 2023, the first-ever Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs, Felipe Paullier, was appointed to lead the new United Nations Youth Office,

established in 2022 by the General Assembly in its resolution 76/306. Guided by Youth2030 and recognizing the transformative power of 1.9 billion young people, the Office will revitalize and scale up United Nations engagement with and for young people. It will strengthen meaningful, inclusive and effective youth engagement across all pillars of our work, including sustainable development, human rights and peace and security. The current negotiations of the Pact for the Future and the Declaration on Future Generations also contain vital commitments for young people and their meaningful engagement.

Figure 23
Resident coordinators' assessment of United Nations country team engagement on young people



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, survey of resident coordinators, various years.

182. The 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review recognized the need for the United Nations development system to focus on the most vulnerable people, including Indigenous Peoples. Last year, heads of entities were asked to ramp up implementation of the system-wide action plan for Indigenous Peoples to ensure a coherent approach to achieving the commitments in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including to promote consultative mechanisms and platforms, towards the full realization of their rights. The Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues is piloting an indicator framework for the system-wide action plan on the rights of indigenous peoples at the request of the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination. It aims to roll out the framework globally by the end of 2024, establishing accurate baselines and recording results for countries and United Nations entities in serving the needs of Indigenous Peoples.

183. While 82 per cent of surveyed Governments in Latin America and the Caribbean and 67 per cent in Europe perceived United Nations country team engagement on Indigenous issues as meaningful, representing a 17-percentage-point increase since 2021, overall, only 61 per cent of all Governments perceived likewise, with a decrease in Africa, the Arab States and Asia and the Pacific since 2021. This will require some shortfalls to be overcome. Only 30 per cent of United Nations country teams assisted Governments in formulating policies or programmes to address structural inequalities that Indigenous Peoples face. A mere 20 per cent of teams consulted Indigenous Peoples in developing their current programming instrument. While 39 per cent have a cooperation framework or equivalent document incorporating the realization of Indigenous Peoples' rights as part of the 2030 Agenda, overall slow progress remains a concern. This issue requires our full attention.

184. Vulnerable groups also include migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons. United Nations country teams have shown continued commitment to the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees, ensuring effective, timely and coordinated systemwide support to Member States. In 2023, the highest percentages since 2021 of United Nations country teams supported Governments in formulating policies to address structural inequalities for migrants (86 per cent), refugees and asylum-seekers (74 per cent) and internally displaced persons (49 per cent). In developing current programming instruments, 19 per cent of United Nations country teams consulted migrants, 14 per cent consulted refugees and asylum-seekers and 6 per cent consulted internally displaced persons.

185. To meet the growing needs of internally displaced persons, I appointed the Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement to mobilize action on protracted displacement and catalyse a change in how the United Nations development system and other actors engage on the issue. The Special Adviser is working with 15 pilot countries, resident coordinators and United Nations country teams to support Government-led approaches to solutions to internal displacement, and with a group of Member States at the global level to share good practices and drive collective efforts. It is imperative to complement humanitarian action with development activities to address the root causes of displacement and reduce risks. Leaving No One Behind – the Internal Displacement Solutions Fund was launched in August 2023 to provide catalytic funding for solutions-focused programming identified by country teams.

186. Durable solutions are a core priority in my Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, and to that end we need to continue to pursue a coordinated approach alongside other actors, including other development actors and donors. Leadership by resident coordinators is crucial to enable such a seamless approach to solutions to internal displacement. Member States are encouraged to create a platform for ongoing dialogue on internal displacement at the regional and global levels to maintain the momentum created by the 2021 report of the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement and the work of the Special Adviser, whose mandate will conclude at the close of 2024.

V. Sustaining accountability and oversight for development results

A. Implementing results-based management and evidence-driven reporting

187. Reporting underpins the accountability and oversight that are central to an effective United Nations development system. I am pleased to see that enhanced, collective and transparent reporting is now embedded at all levels of the system. Since 2022, all United Nations country teams have prepared annual country results reports, and all five regional collaboration platforms have presented annual regional results. At the country level, this fulfils commitment number four of the 2019 funding compact. The resident coordinators have been integral in strengthening the enhanced oversight and accountability of the results achieved in country, including through the development of result reports.

188. At the global level, multiple channels drive evidence-based reporting on results. In response to General Assembly resolution [72/279](#), the Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group provides an annual report to the Economic and Social Council at its operational activities segment. Since 2023, the report has been

supplemented with a resident coordinator system results framework, as mandated by the General Assembly in its resolution 76/4. For over a decade, reporting on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review has continued through a monitoring and reporting framework that measures collective implementation by the United Nations development system. Updated after the adoption by the Assembly of its resolution 75/233, the framework covers the breadth of mandates and provisions through its comprehensive indicator framework.

189. Following the adoption in 2024 of the new quadrennial comprehensive policy review resolution, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs will work with other entities of the United Nations development system to create a new monitoring and reporting framework. Where possible, the framework will seek to source indicators from existing measurement tools.

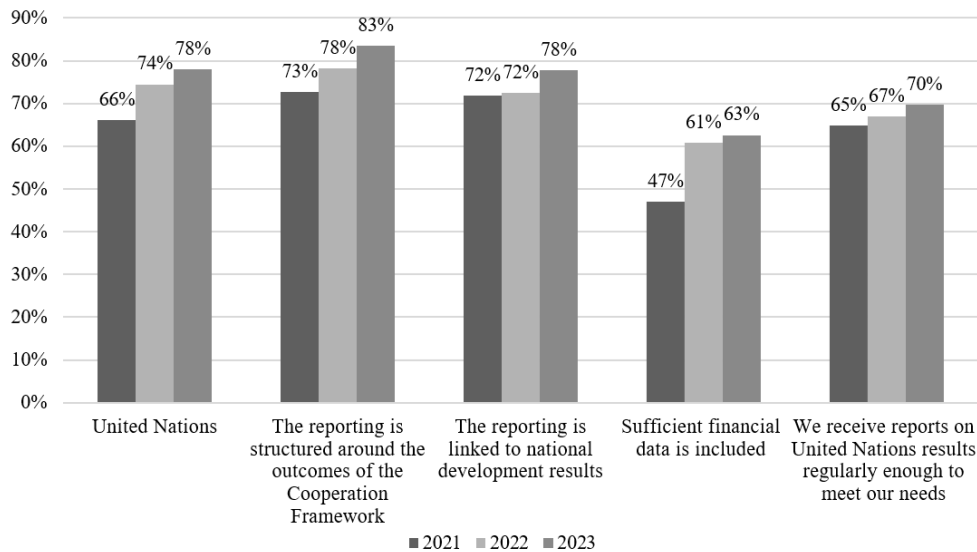
190. The implementation of data standards²⁹ has also helped to streamline system-wide financial data reporting while ensuring that data are more comprehensive, reliable and comparable across United Nations entities. Since 2020, all entities have reported financial data by system function and financial instrument. In 2023, 39 entities with 85 per cent of total system expenditures reported activities and expenditures against the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, an increase from 24 entities in 2021. The gender equality marker, introduced in 2023, with mandatory reporting from 2026, aims to measure spending on gender equality activities. This is one part of the “data cube” strategy for the period 2022–2025, which, once completed, will provide stakeholders with access to a comprehensive overview of what entities are spending to support each Sustainable Development Goal by geographical location. This is a positive step towards enhancing comparability of data and strengthening insight into spending towards the Goals.

191. Despite progress in publishing financial data, only 21 United Nations entities currently publish project lists and even fewer (11) provide project documents online. More entities can publish such documents to better support knowledge sharing and strengthen accountability. While each entity has already introduced results-based management practices, improved coordination on methods and the application of flexible tools across entities will facilitate reporting on system-wide results without adding undue pressure on individual entities.

192. We have also seen a marked increase in transparency at the country level since the launch of our reforms. Among surveyed host country Governments, there has been consistent improvement since 2021 in satisfaction with the quality of annual reports provided by the resident coordinators (see figure 24). Governments agreed that reports are aligned to national priorities and structured around Cooperation Framework outcomes. They also continued to request more detailed financial reporting and flagged the need for reporting to be timely and easily accessible. Resident coordinators will continue to engage actively with their national counterparts and country teams to continue to raise transparency and reporting on system-wide support to the 2030 Agenda.

²⁹ See <https://unsceb.org/data-standards-united-nations-system-wide-reporting-financial-data>.

Figure 24
Quality dimensions of United Nations country team annual reports: percentage of Governments that agreed with the statement



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of Governments, various years.

B. Putting system-wide evaluation on a firm footing

193. The United Nations Sustainable Development Group System-wide Evaluation Office is now operational. I initially proposed the establishment of this function in my 2017 report on the repositioning ([A/72/684-E/2018/7](#)) The Office was established to strengthen oversight, transparency, accountability and collective learning among development system entities. In line with my vision for the repositioning of the United Nations development system, Member States – in General Assembly resolution [75/233](#) and most recently in Economic and Social Council resolution [78/72](#) – emphasized ensuring the Office’s independence, credibility and effectiveness. They also looked forward to reports on its functioning and work, and especially its findings, recommendations and follow-up. The first Executive Director was appointed in September 2023, with recruitment ongoing for the other staff positions.

194. To date, the Office has been supported with extrabudgetary resources. The trust fund established in 2022 received vital start-up support from two Member States, with additional support anticipated from other Member States in 2024. The evaluation offices of several United Nations entities will also be providing contributions to the Office in 2024. The assistance provided to date has been vital in building foundational elements of the Office, including operational systems and workplans to enable effective implementation of the system-wide evaluation policy.

195. In 2023, the Office completed a scoping and evaluability assessment of the Spotlight Initiative to end violence against women and girls. This led to the launch of an independent evaluation, slated for completion in 2024, to inform activities related to gender-based violence and development system reform. In 2024, the Office will conduct the system-wide evaluation of country programme derivation from and alignment with Cooperation Frameworks, which was previously planned. This important evaluation will provide insights on the alignment of the collective offer of the United Nations development system and will inform implementation of the upcoming quadrennial comprehensive policy review. The Office will also undertake

an evaluation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy as the strategy completes its fifth year.

196. The Office is now working to finalize the United Nations Sustainable Development Group system-wide evaluation policy in 2024. The policy will benefit from consultations within the group and United Nations oversight entities. Evaluations completed by the Office so far are available publicly online. The Office will continue to strengthen the dissemination and use of system-wide evaluation results, recommendations and monitoring. Options to follow-up with entities will be incorporated in the finalized system-wide evaluation policy.

197. A system-wide policy will build on continued progress during the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review cycle in fostering a culture of joint evaluations. In 2023, 18 of 27 responding entities (67 per cent) reported conducting joint evaluations, the same rate as the previous year, which remains below the 75 per cent target. Many entities highlighted corporate policies encouraging joint evaluations. Furthermore, many noted that joint and pooled funding mechanisms, system-wide policies and increased requests from Governments for joint evaluations can incentivize joint evaluations and provide benefits in streamlining oversight by Governments and donors. Entities are continuing to make progress in ensuring management responses for their evaluations, with 14 of 28 entities already doing so for all evaluations and another 9 achieving over 50 per cent of evaluations. Three quarters (21 of 28) of entities share their corporate evaluations through the United Nations Evaluation Group website.

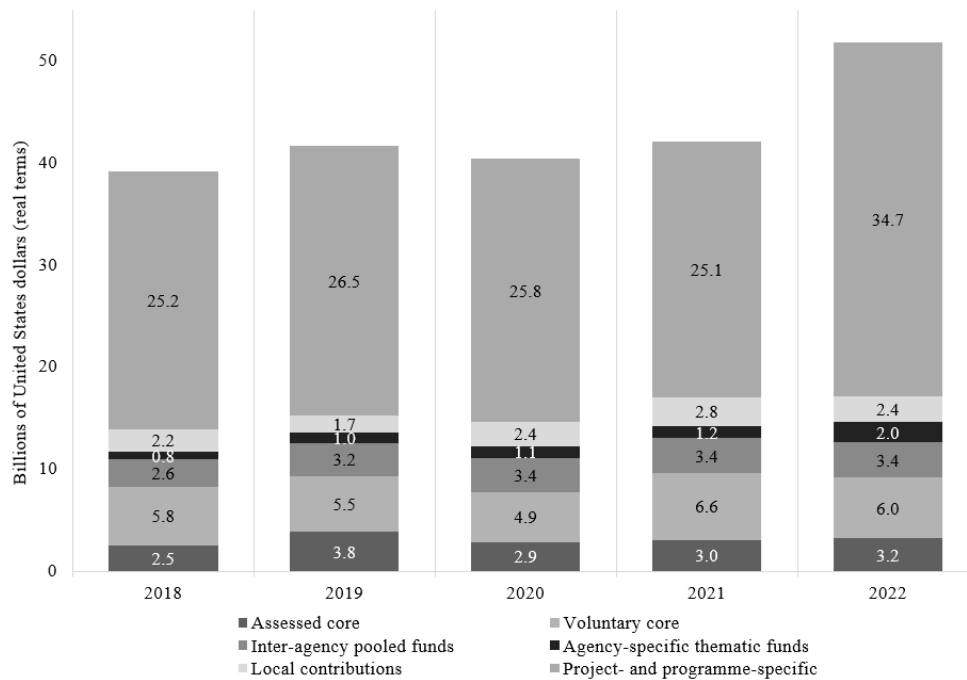
198. Stable funding through regular resources for the System-wide Evaluation Office is crucial to upholding its independence, transparency and key function in supporting learning and improvement in the United Nations development system. In my report dated 20 April 2023 ([A/78/72-E/2023/59](#)) noted the view of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions that the Office be funded through the regular budget. A request for assessed funding of the Office will be submitted in the proposed programme budget for 2025.

VI. Galvanizing the funding compact

A. Funding trends – highlights in 2022

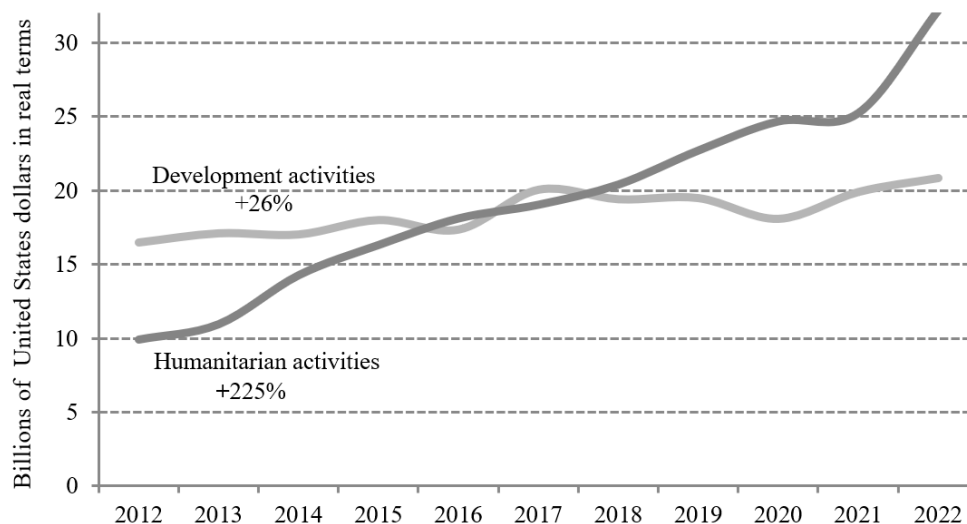
199. Financial contributions for United Nations operational activities amounted to \$54.5 billion in 2022, with 61 per cent financing humanitarian activities and 39 per cent for development activities. The overall contribution reflected an increase of 17 per cent over 2021, although growth was largely due to more non-core funding earmarked for specific projects or programmes. Core contributions accounted for just 16.5 per cent of the \$54.5 billion in funding received by the United Nations development system. Excluding assessed contributions, core funding accounted for only 12 per cent of total voluntary funding in 2022, the lowest share ever, which poses a real threat to the coherence of and effectiveness in United Nations development work. While such tightly earmarked funding can provide important resources for specific initiatives, it presents significant challenges for the United Nations in meeting Member States' expectations to deliver strategic and comprehensive support for realizing the Sustainable Development Goals. Figure 25 shows recent funding trends broken down by the main types of funding.

Figure 25
Trends in types of core and non-core funding: 2018–2022



200. In addition, between 2012 and 2022, there was a significant increase in the proportion of resources used for humanitarian activities (figure 26). While there is a growing humanitarian need, we must not overlook countries’ development needs and goals if we intend to keep the promise of leaving no one behind and lay firm foundations for sustainable peace.

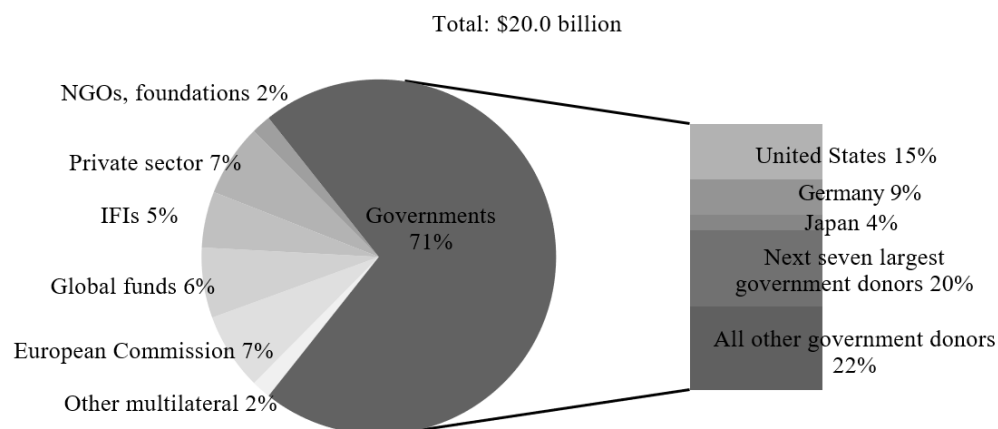
Figure 26
Funding flows by type of activity, 2012–2022



201. There were some positive trends in funding received from sources other than Governments in 2022. Funding raised from the private sector increased by 16 per cent compared with 2021, reaching \$1.3 billion in 2022. Contributions from international

financial institutions for development activities doubled between 2021 and 2022 and now account for 5 per cent of total funding. However, the United Nations development system remains heavily reliant on a small number of contributors. In 2022, the top five Government contributors for development activities (excluding humanitarian activities) accounted for 49 per cent of total funding received from Governments (compared with 48 per cent in 2021). The top 10 accounted for 69 per cent (65 per cent in 2021). Excluding the top 10 government contributors, total contributions from Governments for development activities declined by 7.3 per cent from 2021 to 2022, suggesting that the United Nations development system has become even more reliant on a handful of government contributors. Governments combined accounted for 71 per cent of total funding for development activities in 2022. The other 29 per cent came from different types of contributors, as shown in figure 27.

Figure 27

Main sources of funding for development activities, 2022

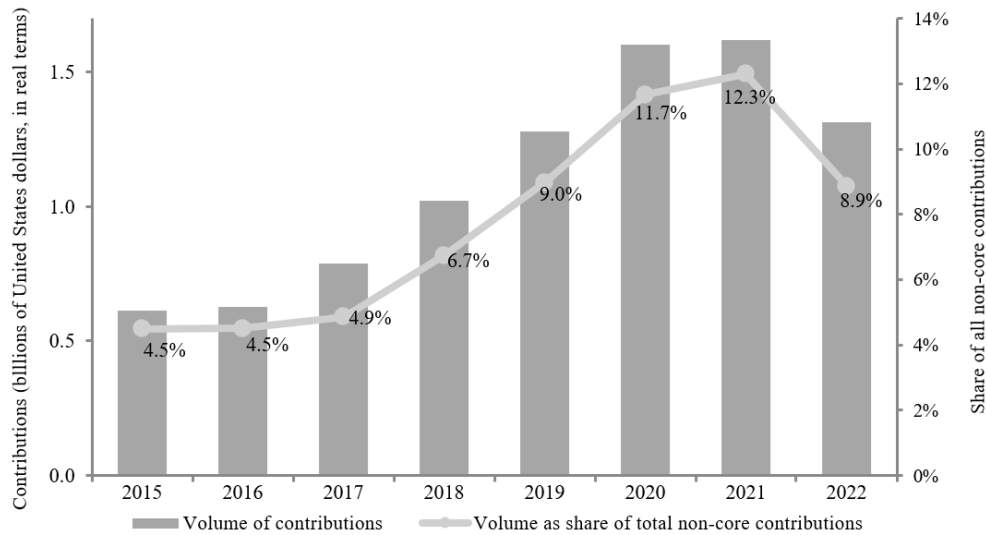
Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs and CEB financial statistics database, 2024.
Abbreviations: IFIs, international financial institutions; NGOs, non-governmental organizations.

202. A full analysis of the funding for both development and humanitarian activities is included in the addendum to the present report.

B. Achieving collective results through joint and pooled funding

203. Inter-agency pooled funds are key instruments for more strategic, efficient and coordinated action. It is concerning, therefore, that after six consecutive years of growth, contributions to development-related inter-agency funds declined by 22 per cent to \$1.27 billion in 2022 (see figure 28). These contributions accounted for 8.9 per cent of all non-core funding for development activities, below the original funding compact target of 10 per cent. In the new funding compact, the target is to reach a 25 per cent share by 2027.

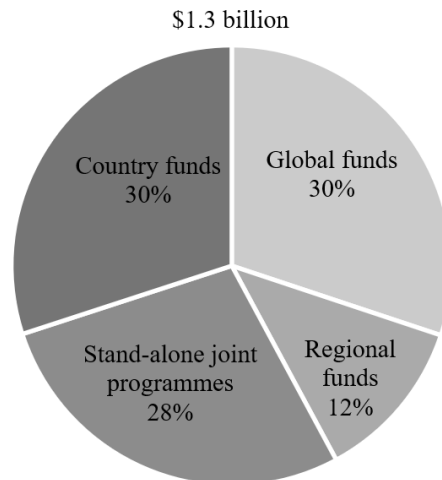
Figure 28
Contributions to development-related inter-agency pooled funds (total volume and as a share of all non-core contributions), 2015–2022



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs and CEB financial statistics database, 2024.

204. A decline in contributions to global development funds accounted for most of the drop in funding to inter-agency pooled funds in 2022. The global funds bring together United Nations entities and a variety of partners to address cross-border challenges that a single country cannot tackle alone. Contributions to global funds accounted for 30 per cent of all funding to inter-agency pooled development funds in 2022 (figure 29).

Figure 29
Funding of development-related inter-agency pooled funds, by type, 2022



Source: Inter-agency pooled fund database, 2024.

205. The Spotlight Initiative and the Peacebuilding Fund were the global funds with the largest declines in funding. Contributions to the Peacebuilding Fund³⁰ fell for the

³⁰ See sect. II.B. for more details.

second consecutive year to \$131.8 million in 2023, well below the funding compact annual target of \$500 million. At the same time, funding for the Spotlight Initiative fell from \$128 million in 2021 to \$3 million in 2023. The Spotlight Initiative is closing its inaugural phase as a 500-million-euro single partner trust fund in 2024 and will evolve to a new multi-partner trust fund with a one billion dollar ambition. We count on partners meeting this ambition to expand the universal reach of this signature initiative (see section IV.E).

206. The global Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund incentivizes transformative policies and finance to stimulate strategic investments catalysing progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2023, the Fund underwent a significant governance overhaul and embraced a new strategic vision as the United Nation's global flagship fund for driving key transitions at the country level, under the leadership of the Resident Coordinators. The Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund received contributions amounting to \$55.9 million in 2023, well below the funding compact target.³¹ \$58.8 million in signed contributions has already been secured from 16 Member States for 2024.³² The Fund continues to demonstrate excellent value for money, including through investments leveraging over \$4.9 billion in additional resources since 2019, primarily through innovative blended financing solutions and support for the integrated national financing frameworks. For every \$1 committed by the fund, \$18 is leveraged for wider financing of the Goals.

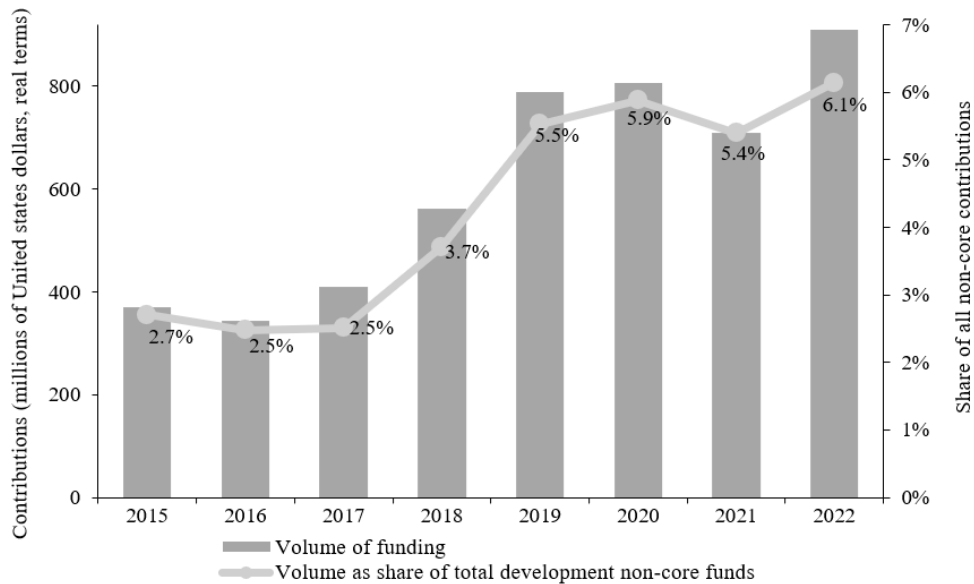
207. Resources for country-level development pooled funds amounted to \$383 million in 2022, just 1 per cent higher than in 2021. United Nations country teams use this flexible funding instrument to carry out joint actions on priority Sustainable Development Goals outlined in the Cooperation Framework and to respond to development emergencies. I encourage Member States to scale up resources for these funds as they enable more timely development support that is fully aligned to national priorities.

208. Single-agency thematic funds constitute another pooled funding mechanism with softly earmarked resources that support high-level results at the country, regional and global levels. They act as a valuable complement to core resources. Positively, funding to thematic funds with a development focus increased in 2022 by 24 per cent, continuing the longer-term growth observed since 2015 (figure 30). Such funding now accounts for 6.1 per cent of all non-core funding for development activities, thereby reaching the funding compact target of 6 per cent. In the latest version of the funding compact, the target has been raised to 15 per cent by 2027.

³¹ Originally, as part of the 2019 funding compact, the target was \$290 million in annual commitments. In the renewed 2024 funding compact, the target is \$500 million in commitments by 2027.

³² As of late February 2024.

Figure 30
Contributions to single-agency thematic pooled development funds (total volume and as a share of all non-core contributions), 2015–2022



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs and CEB financial statistics database, 2024.

C. Re-energizing the funding compact

209. The 2019 funding compact between the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and Member States is a core element of the United Nations development system reform. It is anchored in a mutual understanding that, in order for the United Nations to effectively support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, significant changes in funding are necessary. The funding compact aimed to shift funding towards higher-quality resources that would allow the United Nations to respond in integrated, flexible and dynamic ways to Member State expectations and priorities, in line with the 2030 Agenda. This process was to be supported by dedicated actions to build trust and confidence among Member States, and to strengthen the case for such funding arrangements on the basis of a more collaborative, effective and efficient United Nations development system.

210. Five years after the adoption of the funding compact, advances towards its commitments and targets have been uneven. Despite dedicated efforts by some individual Member States to implement commitments, funding continues to be a challenge. Rather than driving progress in the Sustainable Development Goals, funding is holding us back.

211. A shift towards more flexible, predictable funding requires political will. A key takeaway from the 2023 surveys is the lack of political weight behind the funding compact, on the part of the United Nations development system and both contributing and host country Governments. Only 17 per cent of resident coordinators indicated that the funding compact was a reform element with a significant positive impact on country team support for Sustainable Development Goals-related results. Member States observed that, despite progress at the headquarters level, the funding compact has not sufficiently reached the field level.

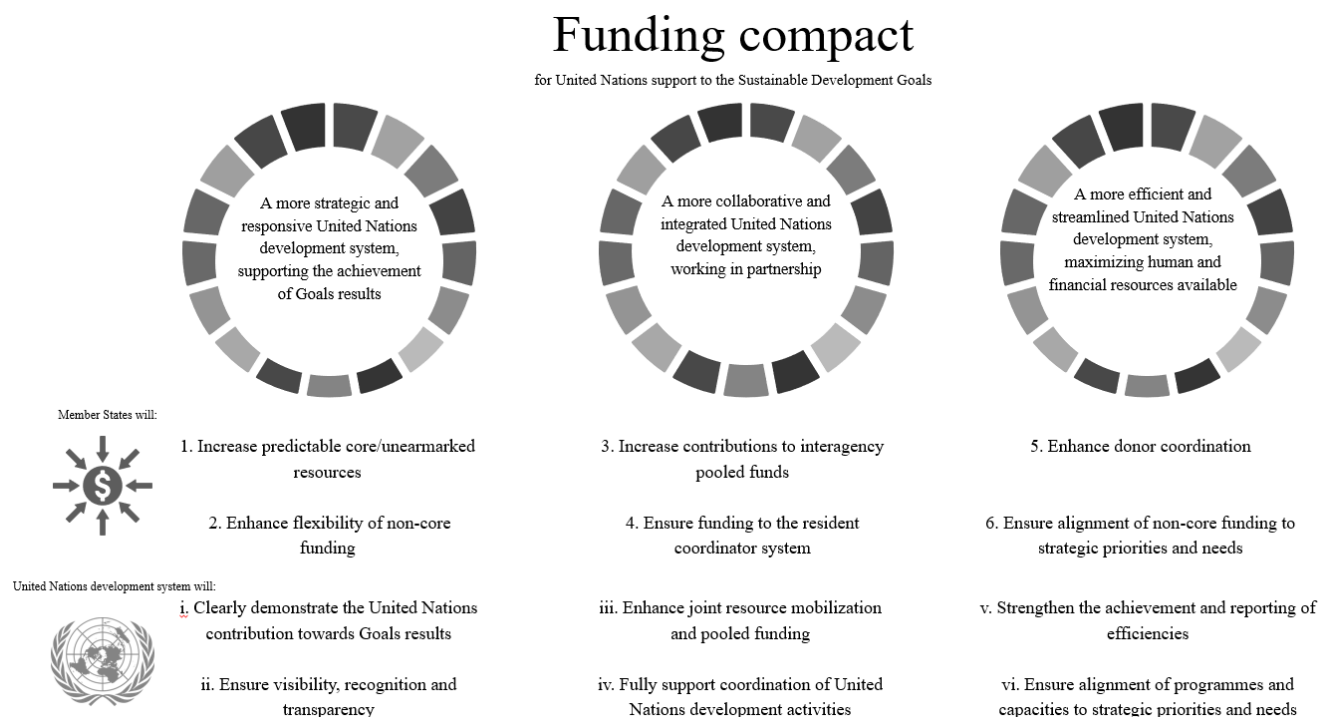
212. As set out in my previous report, with some targets in the funding compact expiring, it was important to review how the funding compact was driving

commitments from Member States and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group to realizing better results for countries, and what steps could further accelerate progress. A new round of dialogues on the future of the funding compact were needed, with a focus on identifying commitments that are most critical to building trust and fortifying the business case for effective funding in delivering greater results. The dialogue with Member States sought to address the low awareness of the funding compact in capitals, where funding decisions are often made, as well as among funding partners on the ground.

213. This inclusive dialogue between Member States and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group was launched on 27 October 2023. It took place over a five-month period, until 27 March 2024. The dialogue was led by the Assistant Secretary-General for Development Coordination, on behalf of the Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, and consisted of five plenary meetings, informal briefings and consultations with regional groupings and United Nations development entities, and various opportunities for written inputs and comments.

214. There was broad agreement on the value of drafting a new funding compact that is shorter, simpler and more strategic. This would help it to resonate with senior decision-makers and encourage greater awareness and buy-in at the country level, and in governing bodies across the United Nations system. A new compact was subsequently developed along those lines, benefiting from multiple consultations and inputs from Member States and system entities. This document (see addendum 2 to the present document) consists of 12 mutually reinforcing commitments – 6 by Member States and 6 by the United Nations Sustainable Development Group. Together, these can lead to a United Nations development system that is more strategic and responsive, more collaborative and integrated, and more efficient and streamlined.

Figure 31
Objectives and commitments of the re-energized funding compact



215. To support effective monitoring, reporting and follow-up on implementation, various indicator frameworks will be applied. The dialogue process helped to develop a global monitoring framework for use by the Economic and Social Council. It includes a balanced number of indicators to track collective implementation by Member States and system-wide implementation by the United Nations Sustainable Development Group. Some indicators and targets show an increased level of ambition since the previous compact. All indicators are measurable and quantifiable. They clearly assess change and, where possible, impact.

216. The global monitoring framework will be complemented by specific monitoring frameworks for individual United Nations entities, tailored to their context, and for use in funding dialogues held by their respective governing bodies. United Nations country teams are encouraged to develop their own monitoring frameworks, with tailored indicators and targets, in dialogue with development partners in the context of national funding dialogues. Additional measures to enhance monitoring and mutual accountability have been included in the proposed compact.

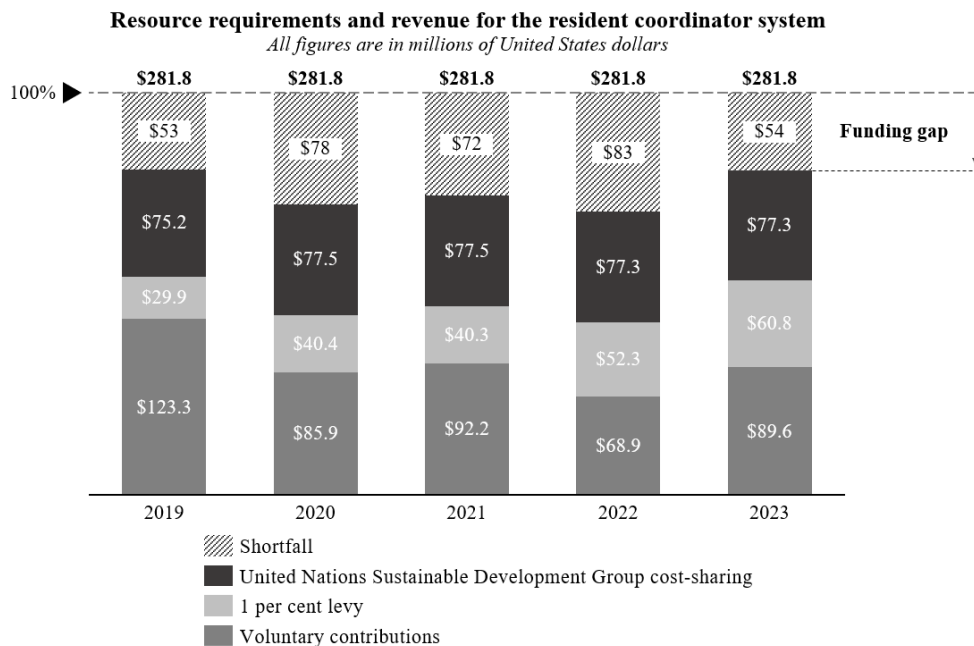
217. The renewed funding compact can generate real change in the funding patterns of the United Nations development system, better enabling it to fulfil its core functions, including the normative support and guidance that Member States expect, and the accelerated action called for in the Political Declaration of the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit. I urge all Member States and United Nations development system entities to reflect, strategically and internally, on active steps to realize the commitments in the new funding compact by 2028.

D. Rooting reforms and scaling up results through a fully funded resident coordinator system

218. The resident coordinator system anchors all our efforts to support countries in achieving the 2030 Agenda. Unfortunately, the system's chronic funding shortfall continued in 2023, threatening the capacity to foster more coherent, accountable and effective United Nations support tailored to country priorities. In 2023, 29 contributors provided a total of \$90 million in voluntary contributions. However, voluntary contributions in 2023 fell \$64 million short of the volume needed to have a fully funded resident coordinator system. The United Nations Sustainable Development Group cost-sharing arrangement continued to provide a consistent level of funding at \$77.3 million in 2023. The 1 per cent coordination levy charged to tightly earmarked contributions generated \$61 million. Overall, the funding gap in 2023 stood at approximately \$54 million (figure 32). As noted separately in my report to the General Assembly ([A/78/753](#)), the chronic funding shortfall has hampered the ability of the resident coordinator system to deliver fully upon the mandates of General Assembly resolutions [75/233](#) and [72/279](#). The report of the Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group provides further details on funding performance and the impacts in country in 2023.³³

³³ [E/2024/5](#).

Figure 32
Funding for the resident coordinator system, by funding stream (2019–2023)



Source: Development Coordination Office, 2024.

219. The chronic funding shortfall and resultant operational impacts has reinforced my belief that the current model is untenable. As set out in the General Assembly resolution on the review of the resident coordinator system,³⁴ I was invited to present recommendations to the General Assembly should the proper functioning of the resident coordinator system not be enabled through adequate, predictable and sustainable funding. Following the adoption by the Economic and Social Council of a resolution³⁵ in which the Council reaffirmed the aforementioned General Assembly resolution and looked forward to an open and transparent consultation process on resident coordinator funding, I asked the Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group to lead consultations with Member States during the last quarter of 2023. In my report to the General Assembly of 31 January 2024,³⁶ I proposed to fund the resident coordinator system by converting voluntary contributions, currently the highest source of unpredictability and inadequate funding, to assessed funding from the United Nations regular budget. In the report, I outlined the post and non-post resource requirements proposed for regular budget funding to enable proper functioning of the resident coordinator system.

220. Over the past five years, the reinvigorated resident coordinator system has made great strides in guiding the United Nations development system offer to support improved alignment with national development policies, plans, needs and priorities. Now is not the time to lose gains made and jeopardize the ability of the system to support countries in their efforts to accelerate progress towards the Goals. The support of all Member States remains vital in securing a fully functioning and adequately resourced resident coordinator system.

³⁴ General assembly resolution 76/4.

³⁵ Economic and Social Council resolution 2023/31.

³⁶ A/78/753.

VII. Conclusion

221. At the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit, the international community stepped up to restore the promise of the 2030 Agenda, accelerate implementation of the Goals and draw on the United Nations development system to support in the journey ahead. The system remains a trusted partner in achieving the Goals on a universal scale, reaching the most remote villages and the highest echelons of decision-making. The United Nations development system combines expertise and tools to enable and accompany the six key Goals transitions more quickly and inclusively. A world where everyone has adequate food, income, health care, education and skills, digital connectivity, and energy, and where nature thrives, pollution reduces, peace thrives alongside prosperity and the climate is stabilized, is one that simply cannot wait.

222. The prospect of a new quadrennial comprehensive policy review cycle makes the present report an important reflection on what has been achieved by United Nations country teams under the leadership of resident coordinators. Surveys and assessments provide overwhelming evidence that there is now greater trust and confidence among government partners, more effective and integrated policy expertise and continued attention to meeting the needs of countries in different circumstances. As the next review cycle begins, in line with the guidance provided by Member States, we will look forward to Member States guidance on areas where they will want to consolidate reforms made and to see increased policy and operational support from the United Nations. We will intensify our analytical and policy-oriented profile through more integrated programmes and less of a focus on projects, consistent with the vision of the 2030 Agenda. The next quadrennial comprehensive policy review cycle will also mark the final push to accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Efforts to do so must be universal in scope and impact, led by all Governments and involving all stakeholders, nationally, regionally and globally.

223. This is a moment to embrace our accomplishments, acknowledging the road ahead and with an eye firmly on keeping the promise of the 2030 Agenda for people and for planet. The global context is sober and there is absolutely no time for complacency. What we expect from the United Nations development system is that it takes full profit of reforms to use its resources, skill sets and global reach, convening power to help countries turn the tide. The 2024 Summit of the Future should serve as a springboard for action to build on the outcomes of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit and the commitment to achieve the Goals. The United Nations development system is ready to collaborate with every nation in this critical journey.
