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Operational activities of the United Nations
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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, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions [72/279](#) and [75/233](#), provides an update on the system-wide implementation of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system and the reform of the United Nations development system.

The report covers progress made in consolidating the United Nations development system reform and implementing the mandates of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review. In a year unlike any other, during which the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic wrought devastation across the world, it shows that the United Nations family mobilized swiftly, leading a comprehensive and coherent response to address global health and socioeconomic impacts, setting out a broad policy agenda in support of the most vulnerable communities, countries and regions, and expanding the provision of life-saving humanitarian assistance. The response so far has been assessed positively by programme country Governments. The report also highlights the progress made in solidifying the reinvigorated resident coordinator system, advancing agreed changes at the regional level, strengthening multi-country offices and implementing funding compact commitments.

In the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review, strong emphasis is placed on what is expected of the reformed United Nations development system during the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development. It focuses on countries in particularly vulnerable situations and a number of areas that are critical to recovering

* [A/76/50](#).



better and accelerating progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The report contains an outline of the initial way forward with regard to these new mandates, centred on a whole-of-system response, transformative integrated policy advice and strengthened support for financing and the means of implementation.

It is clear from the report that we have come a long way since the start of the reforms, and in 2020, the United Nations development system has demonstrated that it is rising to the challenge. At the same time, it is clear that the reforms continue to mature and that there are still areas in which a more concerted effort is needed from all parties. The upcoming review of the functioning of the resident coordinator system will be an opportunity to address some of those areas, so as to continue to strengthen the offer of the United Nations development system to better support country action with regard to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Information in the report is based on the findings of surveys, conducted by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs between December 2020 and January 2021, and addressed to programme country Governments and the headquarters of various United Nations entities. Inputs were sought from across the system, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and its individual entities. Financial data were primarily sourced from the database and reporting system managed by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination. I thank the Department of Economic and Social Affairs for its ongoing efforts in supporting the quadrennial comprehensive policy review and its implementation.

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction	4
II. Maximizing the effectiveness of the new resident coordinator system	6
A. A performing reinvigorated resident coordinator system	7
B. A new generation of United Nations country teams that deliver results	9
C. Delivering effective and efficient business operations	18
III. Tailoring the United Nations response to specific country and regional contexts	26
A. Countries in special situations	27
B. Operationalizing multi-country office reviews	32
C. Leveraging the regional value of the United Nations for country, subregional and regional support	35
D. Enhancing cooperation, collaboration and coordination across humanitarian, development and peace actions	41
IV. Funding, transparency, accountability and oversight of the United Nations development system	44
A. Strengthening implementation of the funding compact	44
B. Delivering improved system-wide results, strengthening evaluation and improving transparency on funding flows	50
C. Enhancing alignment of individual and collective planning, reporting and funding	54
D. Further bolstering the operational activities segment of the Economic and Social Council as an accountability platform	55
E. Implementation of key strategies in United Nations development system operations	56
V. An integrated whole-of-system response in support of the decade of action	58
A. Towards integrated transformative support for the Sustainable Development Goals	60
B. Raising ambition to tackle poverty and inequality, leaving no one behind	62
C. Accelerating the just transition to sustainable economies and strengthening preparedness for future crises	70
D. Strengthening cooperation and partnerships for the 2030 Agenda	71
E. Supporting countries in voluntary national reviews	76
VI. Conclusion: delivering a sustainable and better future for all	78

I. Introduction

1. The year 2020 stands out as the most challenging in the history of the United Nations. As the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic took hold, the newly repositioned United Nations development system faced its first litmus test, its entities coming together to support developing countries amid a crisis. The reinvigorated resident coordinator system and the new generation of United Nations country teams rose to the challenge, leveraging assets from across the United Nations system to provide effective and immediate support to countries across the globe and to address the widespread impacts on people's lives, especially those of women and young people. The response, at all levels, was unprecedented. While the full value of the United Nations development system will be evident only after some time, it has already succeeded in supporting Governments to tackle simultaneously the immediate health emergency and the pandemic's devastating socioeconomic impact, and to expand life-saving humanitarian assistance at a time when the pressures on communities have increased. This rapid, targeted, whole-of-system United Nations response has enhanced confidence in the historic reforms that we have undertaken since 2017.

2. Even as the United Nations system mounted an unprecedented response to the human crisis, we continued to advance key reform areas. We have worked to make good on our promises to strengthen our offer in countries in special situations and those countries most affected, in particular in relation to the support that multi-country offices provide to small island developing States, and have rolled out agreed changes at the regional level. We have also seen progress in strengthening collaboration in our work on development, peacebuilding and humanitarian responses. The United Nations development system has continued to strengthen transparency, accountability and reporting, developing new tools to track and report on our contribution to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals. We have made progress on delivering on commitments under the funding compact, including our commitment to make United Nations operations more efficient and effective, and Member State commitments to change the way in which operational activities are funded.

3. There is no going back. We must complete the reforms and scale up and accelerate the achievement of results on the ground, at a time in which humanity faces difficult challenges. Adopted amidst the pandemic, the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review (see General Assembly resolution [75/233](#)) provided a strong foundation for completing the repositioning of the United Nations development system through the quadrennial comprehensive policy review. The quadrennial comprehensive policy review conducted in 2020 is policy-focused and addresses the Assembly's expectations for the system to support Governments to recover better from the pandemic and for United Nations entities to redouble their efforts towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Action is demanded in three key areas.

4. First, we must fully root, and, where needed, reinforce the reforms in specific areas. We need to move faster in effecting the transition of mindsets and skill sets in each entity of the United Nations development system, including by aligning agency-specific policymaking, planning and programming in support of an integrated response. We must intensify our pursuit of a new model of country team configurations that is more tailored to the needs and priorities on the ground. We must continue to build on the momentum created, to ensure more efficient operations by United Nations country teams and meet the targets that we all set ourselves in the funding compact. We must also proceed to strengthen transparency, accountability and reporting on all we do, together and in support of sustainable development.

5. Second, as the world emerges from this crisis, we must build unwaveringly on the achievements of our reform efforts. We must mobilize and strengthen the capacity of resident coordinators, whose leadership at the country level is now firmly taking hold, and the new generation of United Nations country teams, in order to help countries to shape a recovery that is truly transformative and accelerates progress towards the Goals during the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development. To do so, we must step up our support in critical areas highlighted in the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review, including action on poverty eradication, social protection, quality education and universal health coverage, together with support for the urgent and equitable roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines. We must strengthen rights-based and gender-responsive approaches in our work, to achieve further improvements in gender equality, disability inclusion and youth action, and increase our investment in data support, defining baselines grounded in improved data and the capacity to leave no one behind. We must bring our support for climate action, energy transition, digital transformation and the conservation of biodiversity to the next level, in order to accelerate the shift towards inclusive, sustainable and resilient economies. We must tailor our support more effectively to countries in special situations and those experiencing conflict or fragility.

6. Third, we must leverage the reforms to help to mobilize the knowledge and means of implementation needed to drive a just transition and economic transformation and deliver impact at scale so as to leave no one behind. This will require advancing the Initiative on Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond to incentivize more ambitious action on the range of policy options, including debt relief and liquidity, and reforms of the international debt architecture that have emerged through an open and broad-based consultative process. It will also require delivering on the strategy of the Secretary-General for financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2018–2021) and supporting the roll-out of integrated national financing frameworks. In addition, it will require working more closely with international financial institutions and regional development banks, further boosting the capacities of the United Nations development system in the areas of economics and financing, delivering more broadly on our potential for convening and partnerships, and strengthening our work in the areas of technology and digitalization.

7. The new quadrennial review cycle begins at a time when Member States, through the Declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations (General Assembly resolution 75/1), have emphasized the need to reinvigorate multilateralism so that it delivers more effectively and inclusively. Delivering on the promises of the 2030 Agenda is essential in that regard and, in many ways, will determine the credibility of multilateralism in the years to come. To enable transformative multilateral action, we need a United Nations development system that is a provider of global public goods, fit for purpose, inclusive and networked, at the country, regional and global levels.

8. I am pleased to see that the leadership of entities of the United Nations development system is working to put reforms into practice in response to guidance from the General Assembly. Likewise, Member States, at both the global and national levels, are taking steps to ensure that we have a fit-for-purpose United Nations. But all of us have more to do. I count on the support of Member States in the upcoming review of the resident coordinator system, which will allow us to correct our course and take further action, where necessary, to deliver on the promise of the reforms: a United Nations development system that can rise to the challenge and support Member States in delivering on their commitments to implement the 2030 Agenda.

II. Maximizing the effectiveness of the new resident coordinator system

9. At the heart of the reforms approved by the General Assembly in 2018 was the promise of a more cohesive, effective and accountable response from the United Nations development system at the country level through a reinvigorated resident coordinator system and a new generation of United Nations country teams. The 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review helps to reinforce the criticality of this shift as the world seeks to accelerate action towards the achievement of the Goals.

10. Evidence to date confirms the positive trend reported in 2020 and suggests that our efforts are coming to fruition. In the midst of the disruption caused by the COVID-19 crisis, the leadership and coordination of our resident coordinator have been significantly strengthened, and the relevance and alignment of United Nations country team responses have continued to improve, to the satisfaction of host Governments. Overall, we are beginning to see more cohesive support from country teams, and entities based outside host countries are progressively increasing their contributions to the system-wide response.

11. The feedback from Governments also indicates that the United Nations development system's collective response to the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis was very attuned to countries' priorities and needs. The tangible results of this are captured in more detail in the complementary report of the Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group on the Development Coordination Office.¹ I am also pleased to see that the more collaborative arrangements of United Nations country teams are translating into more efficient business operations, helping us to maximize the percentage of our expenditure used to support programmatic activities. As the reforms mature and our data systems across United Nations entities become fully harmonized, we will have an even better understanding of the full extent of the benefits accruing to the countries that we support and to the people whom we serve.

12. At the same time, it is clear that we must continue to move forward with the same level of attention and ambition to ensure that we maximize the impact of the changes made. In particular, we must continue to invest in strengthening our skill sets and strategically deploying our convening power, in order to help countries to leverage financing, technologies and expertise and expand partnerships for development on an unprecedented scale. We must ensure that the enhancement of the macroeconomic capacities of resident coordinator offices leads to a visible shift in our ability to support the Goals in all of their dimensions, with economic transformation at the centre and an acute understanding of national budgets and fiscal space. We must start to bring about more specific changes to our footprint in countries by tailoring United Nations country team configurations to country priorities, as mandated by the General Assembly. This aspect is receiving close attention because the roll-out of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks is well advanced. We must also consolidate the new resident coordinator system, including by ensuring that dual reporting lines are fully implemented in country teams and that entity-specific country programme documents are derived from Cooperation Frameworks.

¹ E/2021/55.

A. A performing reinvigorated resident coordinator system

13. In resolutions 72/279 and 75/233, the General Assembly reiterated that empowered, strategic, effective and impartial leadership through the resident coordinator system is central to fostering more effective support from the United Nations development system. This notion is also reflected in the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review. Today, more than ever, I am convinced that this is the only way to go and the evidence shows that on the ground, this new leadership is taking shape.

14. Compared with before 1 January 2019, when the new resident coordinator system was put in place, programme country Governments have indicated that resident coordinators have displayed strengthened leadership (81 per cent), impartiality (67 per cent), coordination capacity (73 per cent) and more of a focus on common results (78 per cent) (see figure 1).² Some 78 per cent of the programme country Governments see the resident coordinator as a genuine access point to the United Nations system at the country level. At the same time, some Governments (13 to 26 per cent) still consider it too early to determine whether the capacity of resident coordinators has been strengthened.

Figure 1
Strengthening of the resident coordinator system following the repositioning of the United Nations development system

	Percentage			Trend in target response	
	Response distribution			2019	2020
	2020				
Compared with before 1 January 2019, to what extent has the resident coordinator displayed strengthened/increased:	Great or moderate extent	No change	Too early to tell		
Authority	77	7	16	59	77
Leadership	81	6	13	65	81
Impartiality	67	7	26	59	67
Capacity to coordinate United Nations activities in support of your country's development priorities	73	10	17		73
Focus on common results of the United Nations system	78	6	16		78
Coherence in United Nations activities, reducing duplication of efforts	69	12	19		69
Ability to serve as an entry point for easy access to United Nations offer/expertise across the United Nations system	78	9	13		78

Source: 2019 and 2020 Department of Economic and Social Affairs surveys of programme country Governments.

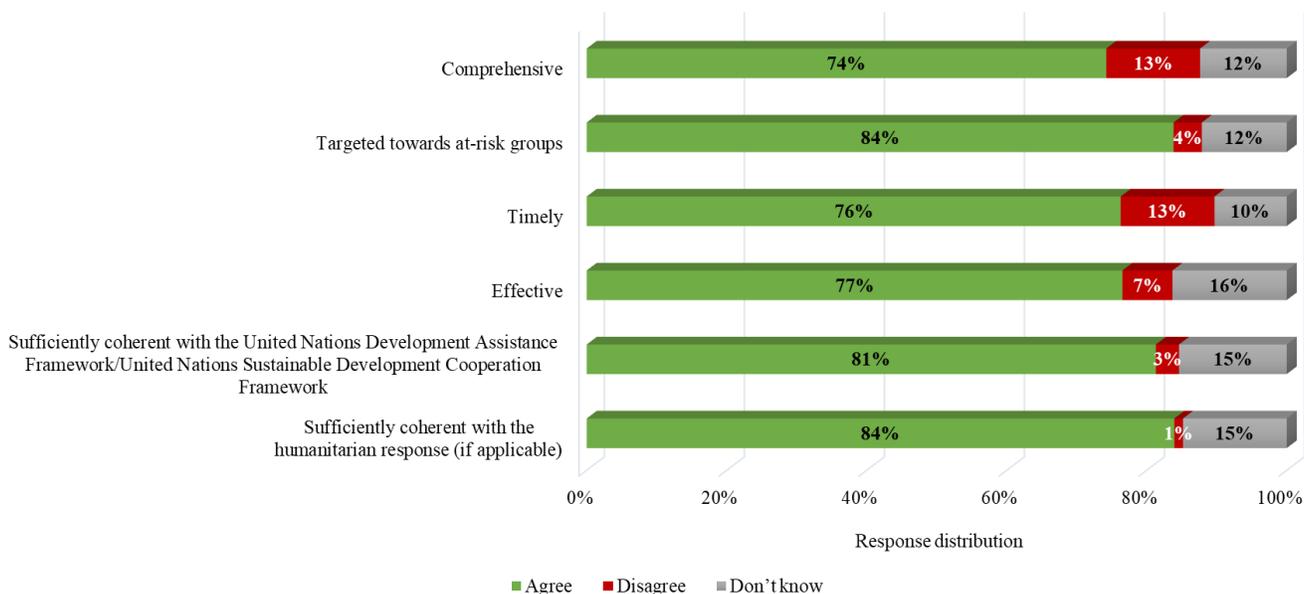
² Unless otherwise stated, data in the present report have been compiled by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Additional data on a complete list of indicators of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review are available in the monitoring and reporting framework that accompanies the present report and that is accessible through the website of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of the Economic and Social Council (www.un.org/ecosoc/en/oas-qcpr).

15. In addition, 88 per cent of programme country Governments consider the resident coordinator to be effective in leading the United Nations country team and 79 per cent consider that resident coordinators have sufficient prerogative to effectively fulfil their mandate. Both percentages reflect a substantial increase since 2019. Furthermore, 85 per cent of the Governments recognize that resident coordinators have helped to leverage partnerships for the national achievement of the Goals and 76 per cent agree that resident coordinators have contributed to enhancing synergies between humanitarian, development and peace-related interventions.

16. The added value of newly empowered resident coordinators and fully-staffed resident coordinator offices has been evident during the response to the COVID-19 crisis. Some 91 per cent of the Governments agree that resident coordinators have ensured that there has been a coherent United Nations response to the pandemic. Governments positively evaluated our response across six indicators, with over 80 per cent indicating that we had succeeded in targeting at-risk groups and had acted in coherence with the humanitarian response and the Cooperation Frameworks (see figure 2).

Figure 2
Socioeconomic response of the United Nations development system to the pandemic

The socioeconomic response of the United Nations development system to the COVID-19 pandemic has been:



Source: 2020 Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of programme country Governments.

17. The report of the Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group on the Development Coordination Office provides greater detail on the progress made in 2020 to equip the resident coordinator system to meet needs and expectations. While these findings are encouraging, it will be important to monitor the evolution of responses from programme country Governments in the areas outlined above over the coming years. Furthermore, feedback from programme country Governments, United Nations entities and resident coordinators has highlighted areas in which continued refinement is needed. These include boosting the capacities of resident coordinator offices in conjunction with United Nations country teams, in macroeconomic analysis and partnerships with international financial institutions; strengthening the resident coordinator pool, including through resident coordinator career planning and

improving opportunities for mobility within the Secretariat and between agencies, funds and programmes; bringing further clarity to the support role of the Development Coordination Office; and improving support and administrative services.

B. A new generation of United Nations country teams that deliver

Strengthened alignment, relevance and effectiveness

18. In proposing the shift to a new generation of United Nations country teams, I was convinced that only through a more collaborative, accountable and demand-driven United Nations presence could we ensure the kind of transformative support that could help countries to achieve the Goals. We are now well advanced in this transition and welcome the call in the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review for country teams to contribute their expertise, tools and platforms more effectively, as agreed in the Cooperation Frameworks and equivalent planning frameworks, to advance the 2030 Agenda.

19. Feedback from programme country Governments in 2019 and 2020 shows that Governments overwhelmingly agree (91 per cent) that, since the launch of the repositioning reforms in 2018, United Nations country teams are more relevant to their development needs and work more collaboratively (77 per cent), including in the context of the COVID-19 response efforts (see figure 3).

Figure 3
Relevance of United Nations country teams

	Response distribution			Trend in target response	
	%, 2020			%	
	Closely or very closely aligned	Somewhat aligned	Not aligned at all	2019	2020
Overall, the activities of the United Nations and your country's development needs and priorities are	87	13	0	81	87
	Effective or very effective	Ineffective or very ineffective	Don't know	2019	2020
All things considered, how effective has the United Nations been in developing national capacities	90	5	5	83	90
	More or much more relevant	Less or much less relevant	Don't know	2019	2020
Whether/how the relevance of the United Nations to your country's development needs has changed since 2018:	91	6	3		91
	More or much more collaboratively	Neither more or less collaboratively	Less or much less collaboratively	2019	2020
Since the repositioning of the United Nations development system in 2018, the United Nations system currently works together	77	21	2	70	77

Source: 2020 Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of programme country Governments.

20. There has also been other tangible progress since 2019, as 90 per cent agree that the United Nations has been effective or very effective in developing national capacities. United Nations country team support is most positively viewed in the areas of technical support (99 per cent), leveraging partnerships (90 per cent) and evidence-based and integrated policy advice (89 per cent) (see figure 4). Their support is viewed positively, but slightly less so, in the areas of statistical capacities (83 per cent), financing for development (82 per cent) and South-South and triangular cooperation (79 per cent). Only two thirds of countries consider support for integrated national financing frameworks³ to be adequate, reflecting an area for improvement (see chap. V for more details).

Figure 4
Effectiveness of the support from United Nations country teams

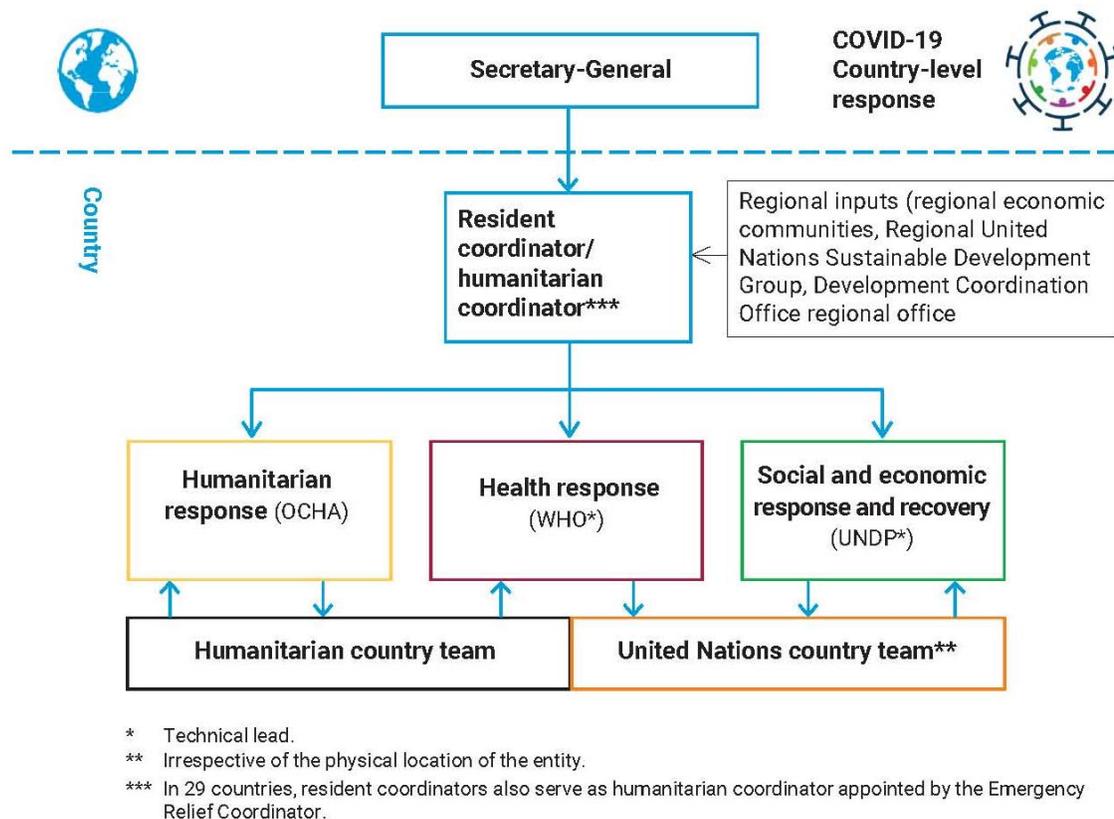
	Response distribution			Trend in target response	
	%, 2020			%	
<i>To what extent does your country agree or disagree that the United Nations adequately provides:</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Don't know</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>
Technical support in line with national needs and priorities	99	0	1		99
Support to leverage partnerships in support of national development priorities	90	5	5		90
Evidence-based policy advice that is tailored to national needs and priorities	89	5	5	87	89
Joint integrated policy advice that is tailored to national needs and priorities	88	6	6	78	88
Support for statistical capacities and data collection, analysis and management	83	10	6		83
Support for financing for the Sustainable Development Goals	82	14	4		82
Support for peer-to-peer learning exchanges and South-South and triangular cooperation	79	15	6		79
Support for integrated national financing frameworks	67	17	15		67

Source: 2019 and 2020 Department of Economic and Social Affairs surveys of programme country Governments.

21. As stated above, the COVID-19 crisis was in many ways a stress test for the reformed United Nations development system. I was pleased to see the United Nations Sustainable Development Group stepping up like never before to respond with the urgency and coherence more frequently seen in humanitarian responses. Within a few weeks, it had sent clear strategic guidance to United Nations country teams, which ensured that there was immediate and integrated support for countries and that longer-term development objectives were put front and centre from the outset of the health emergency and socioeconomic response (see figure 5). Data confirm a positive assessment by Governments of the response of country teams.

³ The United Nations development system is currently assisting some 70 countries in developing integrated national financing frameworks.

Figure 5
Country-level responses to the pandemic



Source: United Nations Sustainable Development Group, “A United Nations framework for the immediate socioeconomic response to COVID-19” (April 2020).

22. In April 2020, as United Nations country teams and resident coordinators rallied around the World Health Organization (WHO) to support the health response, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group launched the United Nations Framework for the Immediate Socioeconomic Response to COVID-19, along with the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19. It mobilized the United Nations development system under the coordination of resident coordinators and the technical lead of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and leveraged the wider system in support of the socioeconomic work. At the core of the response was the conduct of socioeconomic impact assessments by country teams, followed by 121 socioeconomic response plans covering 139 countries and territories to support Governments through a rapid, coherent and well-coordinated response by the system.

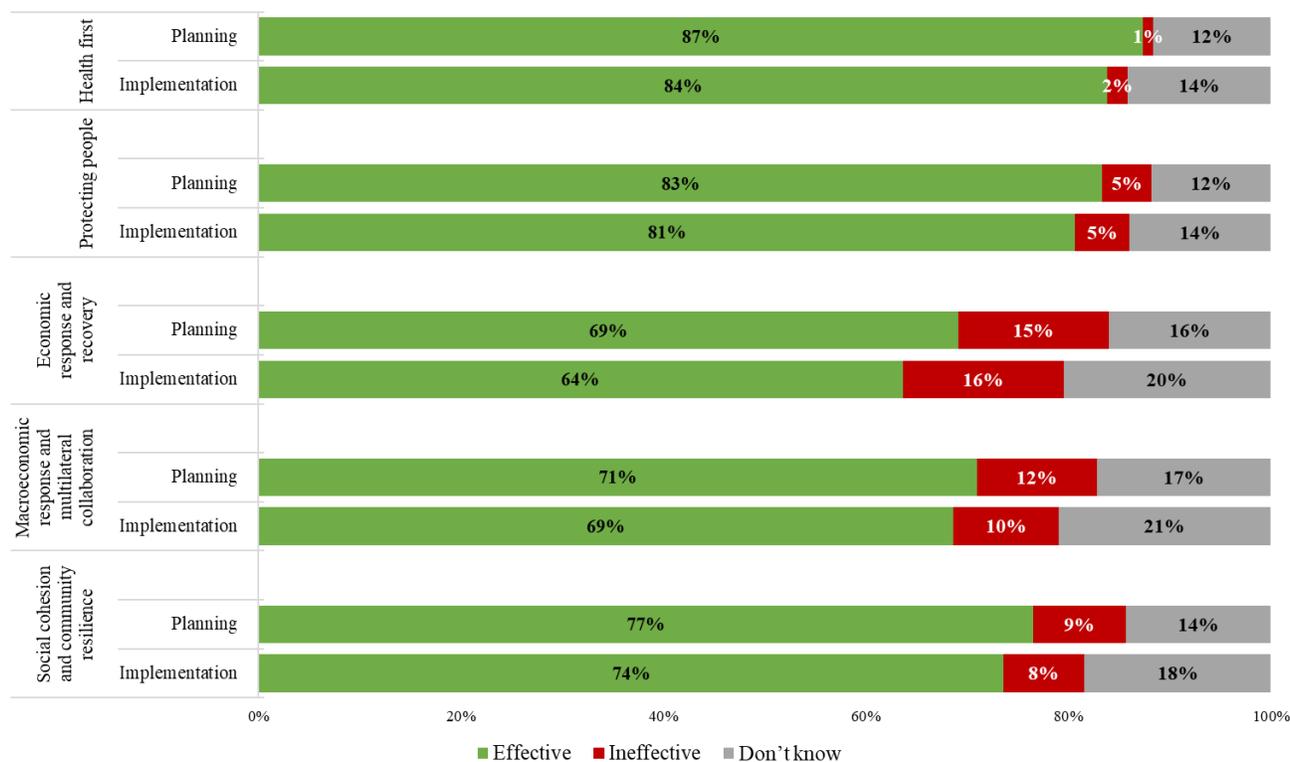
23. Feedback from programme country Governments on the planning and implementation of the socioeconomic response has been encouraging. The majority of respondents to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs surveys agreed about the effectiveness of the planning and implementation across the different response pillars (see figure 6). Notwithstanding the repurposing of \$3 billion by 126 United Nations country teams and the mobilization of an additional \$2 billion, including some \$75 million through the COVID-19 response and recovery multi-partner trust fund, the socioeconomic response plans remain less than half funded.⁴ The funding gap stands out starkly when juxtaposed with the \$18 trillion

⁴ See https://data.uninfo.org/Home/_ProcessIndicators.

mobilized by advanced economies for COVID-19 response and recovery. Closing this gap remains a priority for programme countries and the United Nations system.

24. The responses by national partners also shed light on areas in which we need to improve our efforts, in particular macroeconomic responses and multilateral collaboration. Although we have strengthened our capacities in those areas, as well as our cooperation with international financial institutions as part of our support for the COVID-19 response, there is clearly a need to go further. Reasserting the critical role of the United Nations in economic affairs and international financing for sustainable development is essential and requires continued investment and perseverance. We are moving in the right direction.

Figure 6
Effectiveness of the implementation of countries' socioeconomic response plans across the five response pillars



Source: 2020 Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of programme country Governments.

25. The overview of the contribution of the United Nations development system to country-level results set out in the report of the Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group on the Development Coordination Office provides, for the first time, a sense of the specific results to which the system has contributed during the COVID-19 crisis. It shows that the system has made a tangible and significant contribution to national efforts to minimize the socioeconomic impacts of the crisis and to lay the groundwork for a recovery that accelerates the achievement of the Goals.

26. As recommended in the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review, in 2021 the United Nations Sustainable Development Group will analyse lessons learned from the pandemic and the response plans at the national, regional and global levels, in order to be better prepared for future crises and to ensure a sustainable, inclusive, rights-based, gender-equal recovery and response. Under the leadership of the Special

Adviser to the Secretary-General on Reform, a report on the early lessons learned and the evaluability of the COVID-19 response and recovery multi-partner trust fund is planned for release in April 2021.

Coherent and integrated cooperation frameworks

27. In the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review, the Cooperation Framework was welcomed as the most important planning and implementation instrument for the country-level development activities of the United Nations development system. In 2019, 11 Cooperation Frameworks were developed and implementation of them began in 2020. During the course of 2021, implementation is expected to begin on 32 frameworks, and 31 are expected to be designed with implementation beginning in 2022. By the end of 2021, more than half of the United Nations country teams will have replaced the previous United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks with Cooperation Frameworks. The majority of the United Nations socioeconomic response plans are set to end on 31 December 2021, with the United Nations response to COVID-19 being subsumed under the Cooperation Framework.

28. Among programme country Governments, 92 per cent agreed that the Cooperation Frameworks have enabled them to ensure that United Nations operational activities effectively address and respond to national priorities, up from 89 per cent in 2019 (see figure 7), and 78 per cent of the Governments consider that the focus on common results has improved, compared with 74 per cent in 2019.

Figure 7
United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework

<i>Responses of programme country Governments</i>	<i>Response distribution</i>			<i>Trend in target response</i>	
	<i>%, 2020</i>			<i>%</i>	
	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Don't know</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>
The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework has enabled the Government to ensure that United Nations activities are effectively addressing/responding to national priorities, including the Sustainable Development Goals:	92	4	5	89	92
There has been an improved focus on common results among United Nations agencies (i.e. results achieved from United Nations entities working together) in the last year:	78	10	12	74	78
Since the repositioning of the United Nations development system in 2018, United Nations entities derive their country programmes from the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework:	74	2	25		74

<i>Responses of United Nations entities</i>	<i>Response distribution</i>		<i>Trend in target response</i>	
	<i>%, 2020</i>		<i>%</i>	
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>
Have specific measures been taken at the headquarters level to simplify and harmonize your agency-specific programming and reporting instruments in light of the Cooperation Framework guidelines?	60	40		60
Is it a requirement that outcomes be copied verbatim from the Cooperation Framework into your entity's country programming document?	35	65		35

Source: 2019 and 2020 Department of Economic and Social Affairs surveys of programme country Governments.

29. At the same time, 65 per cent of United Nations development system entities still have no formal requirement to derive their country programme outcomes from the Cooperation Framework, according to a survey at the headquarters level. In addition, 40 per cent have yet to take any action to harmonize their agency-specific programming

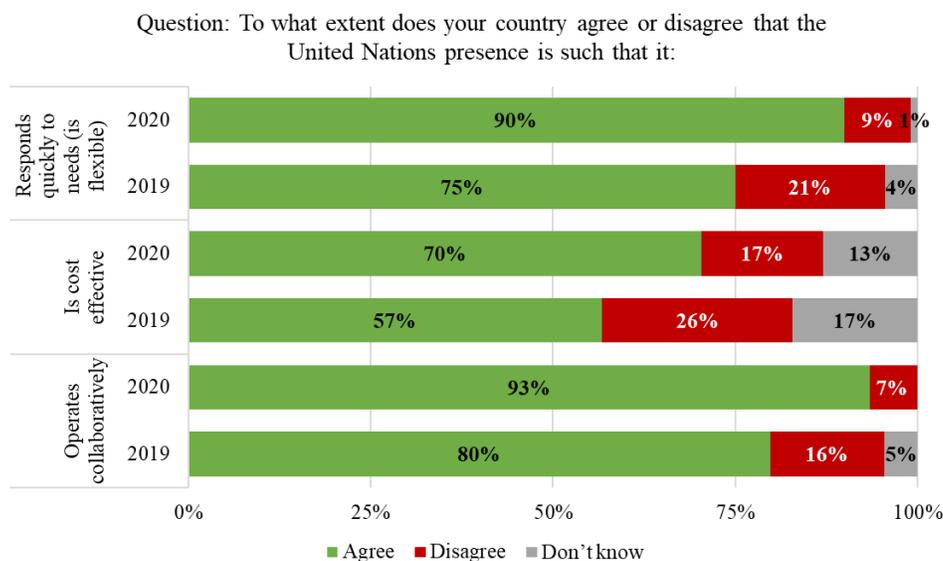
with Cooperation Framework guidance and practice. That is an area that requires urgent attention from principals of the United Nations development system and relevant governing bodies. It is encouraging to see, for example, that, as of February 2021, country programme documents presented at sessions of the Executive Board of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and UNDP will be accompanied by at least an advanced draft of the Cooperation Framework or the agreed results framework. There is clearly momentum to continue to transform the United Nations development system in bold ways, but the window of opportunity is closing fast. Decisive action by Member States in governing bodies will accompany and support the alignment efforts of each United Nations entity.

Tailored country configurations

30. In joint efforts to reform the United Nations, entities shared the vision of a new approach to country configurations by the United Nations development system – one that ensures a tailored, dynamic and responsive presence that is reviewed periodically to respond to specific country needs and priorities on the basis of the Cooperation Frameworks. The General Assembly, in its resolution [72/279](#), underscored the importance of designing United Nations country teams that are capable of drawing on the expertise and assets of all United Nations development system entities, including specialized agencies without a physical presence. While we have laid down the necessary foundations, including accountability and planning tools, and the overall feedback received from countries has improved, we have yet to see more significant changes to country team configurations by United Nations entities.

31. We are starting from a good position: in 2020, 90 per cent of countries considered the United Nations presence to be responsive to country needs and priorities and to be working collaboratively (see figure 8). In addition, the share of countries that considered the United Nations presence to be cost-effective increased significantly from 57 to 70 per cent between 2019 and 2020.

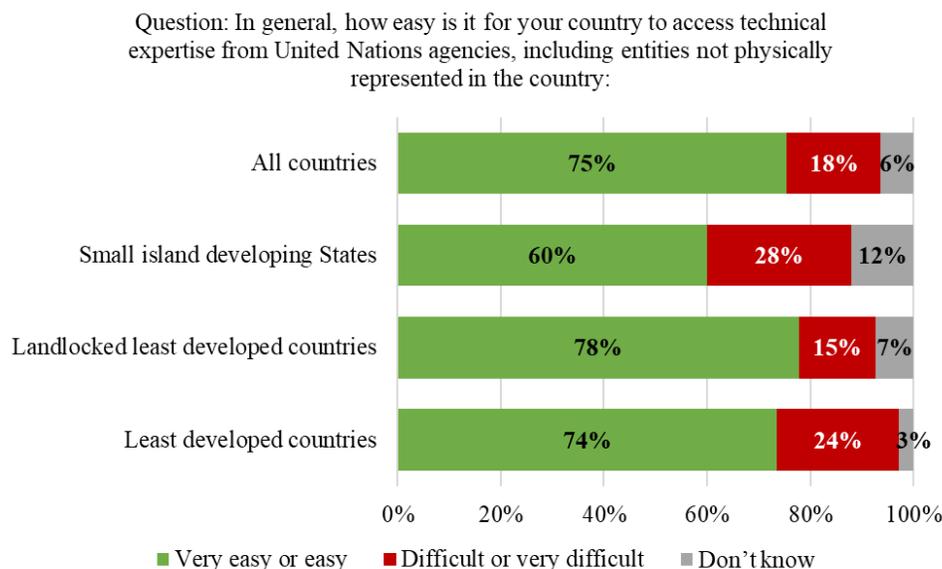
Figure 8
Effectiveness of United Nations country team configurations



Source: 2019 and 2020 Department of Economic and Social Affairs surveys of programme country Governments.

32. While 75 per cent of programme country Governments found it easy to access United Nations support from entities not physically present in their countries, nearly one in five found it difficult or very difficult to do so. This rate rose to around one in four and higher among small island developing States and the least developed countries (see figure 9), indicating serious gaps in the success of our efforts.

Figure 9
Access to United Nations technical expertise located outside the country



Source: 2020 Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of programme country Governments.

33. In 2020, the vast majority (87 per cent) of programme country Governments indicated that the United Nations presence is adequately tailored to their challenges and priorities, which is up significantly from 76 per cent in 2019. A similar proportion of Governments (85 per cent) agreed that United Nations staff presence has the right mix of capacities and skills to support their country's development.

34. The United Nations development system continues to make further progress in this area. Most countries that designed a Cooperation Framework in 2020 saw greater involvement from United Nations entities with limited or no country footprint, thus access to the United Nations offer was greatly improved, irrespective of physical presence. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs, for example, supported the preparation of 22 common country analyses covering 48 countries. Regional commissions are now members of 49 country teams, up from 40 in 2019. Several country teams report⁵ that structured country team configuration dialogues help to tap into the best and most relevant United Nations development system capacities for delivering on Cooperation Frameworks and facilitating more integrated support to programme countries.

35. However, we have still not seen a sufficient shift in our ability to update the existing footprint on the basis of changing national needs and priorities. I am convinced that there is much more potential in that regard. As a key deliverable in 2021, I am therefore asking the United Nations Sustainable Development Group to

⁵ Through monitoring by the Development Coordination Office of countries that have conducted configuration exercises.

develop a clear process to inform the decision-making approach with host Governments on the configuration of United Nations country teams and ensure that they are fit for purpose to deliver results in the context of the Cooperation Framework. In tandem, the Development Coordination Office will monitor and analyse supply and demand from United Nations development system entities that have a light footprint at the country level and regularly report on their activities to inform the individual and collective actions of the members of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group. Action to enhance staff mobility across agencies and duty stations is important in this regard. Host Governments also have a key role to play in this important priority.

More robust accountabilities at the country level

36. In the second half of 2019, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group disseminated, across the globe, the new responsibilities and accountabilities of United Nations development system entities vis-à-vis resident coordinators and country teams, in line with General Assembly resolution [72/279](#). Although we have made good progress in that regard, significant challenges remain.

37. Data from a survey conducted by the Development Coordination Office in late 2020 indicated growing familiarity with the new accountability arrangements, with 89 per cent of resident coordinators and country team members confirming that they were familiar or somewhat familiar with the implementation of the United Nations development system management and accountability framework (see figure 10). Further positive indications include the fact that 14 United Nations entities have realigned provisions in the job descriptions of their country representative to clearly define the relationship with the resident coordinator,⁶ and that 12 now have entities request input from resident coordinators for the performance appraisals of country representatives (see figure 11).⁷ When resident coordinators and country team members assessed each other's compliance with the management and accountability framework, fewer than 10 per cent of them were considered non-compliant. Most respondents (89 per cent) considered that the guidance provided by individual entities was largely or somewhat consistent with the new accountabilities set out in the management and accountability framework.

⁶ The World Food Programme (WFP), WHO, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UNDP, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UNICEF, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

⁷ WFP, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNDP, UNHCR, ILO, FAO, IOM, UNFPA, UNAIDS, UNICEF and UNOPS.

Figure 10
Country-level chapter of the management and accountability framework

<i>Responses by resident coordinators and UNCT members</i>	<i>Response distribution (percentage)</i>		
	2020		
	<i>Familiar</i>	<i>Some familiarity</i>	<i>Not familiar</i>
Degree of familiarity with the country-level chapter of MAF – Total	64	31	4
Degree of familiarity with the country-level chapter of MAF – Resident coordinators	94	5	1
Degree of familiarity with the country-level chapter of MAF – UNCT members	60	36	4
Degree of familiarity with the country-level chapter of MAF – UNCT members not present in country	57	34	9
	<i>Familiar or very familiar</i>	<i>Moderately or somewhat familiar</i>	<i>Not very familiar or not at all familiar</i>
Degree of familiarity with the MAF implementation at the country level – Total	49	40	12
Degree of familiarity with the MAF implementation at the country level – Resident coordinators	78	18	3
Degree of familiarity with the MAF implementation at the country level – UNCT members	43	44	13
Degree of familiarity with the MAF implementation at the country level – UNCT members not present in country	46	31	23
	<i>Entirely or largely compliant</i>	<i>Somewhat or mixed compliance</i>	<i>Non-compliant</i>
Assessment of resident coordinator MAF compliance by UNCT members	58	33	8
Assessment of UNCT member MAF compliance by resident coordinators	29	62	9
	<i>Entirely or largely consistent</i>	<i>Somewhat consistent</i>	<i>Not consistent or no guidance received</i>
In your view and experience, to what extent is the guidance you have received from your entity's headquarters and/or regional offices consistent with MAF?	58	29	13
	<i>Resident coordinators</i>	<i>UNCT members</i>	
Experienced inconsistency in guidance that has been provided by your entity's headquarters	65	20	
	<i>Entirely or largely free and able</i>	<i>Somewhat free and able/mixed freedom/ability</i>	<i>Limited freedom/ability or not free at all</i>
To UNCT members: to what extent do you feel free and able, according to policies, directions and mandates received from your entity, to implement and comply with MAF?	59	31	10

Source: Development Coordination Office, based on surveys sent to United Nations country teams in 2020.

Abbreviations: MAF, management and accountability framework; UNCT, United Nations country team.

Figure 11
United Nations development system entities' implementation of the country management and accountability framework

Responses by United Nations entities	Yes	No
Do the job descriptions of your country representatives include provisions that recognize the country representative's relationship vis-a-vis the resident coordinator under the new management and accountability framework?	74	26
Does your entity require formal inputs from the resident coordinator to country representatives' performance appraisal?	63	37
Has your entity changed the job description of country representatives to ensure that they report to the resident coordinator on their individual activities and on their respective contributions to the collective results of the United Nations development system towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the country level, on the basis of the Cooperation Framework/United Nations Development Assistance Framework?	53	47
Does your entity recognize reporting obligations to the resident coordinator for the following field activities?	Yes	No
Planning	75	25
Resource mobilization	69	31
Programme implementation	75	25

Source: 2020 Department of Economic and Social Affairs surveys of United Nations development system entity headquarters.

38. There are, however, areas that demand priority attention. First, there is a need for United Nations country team members not present in the country to become more familiar with the new accountability arrangements. Second, there is a need for strengthened compliance by United Nations development system entity headquarters with the accountabilities set out by the General Assembly, including through clear and consistent guidance to teams in the field. Only 12 such entities indicated that they did not recognize reporting obligations to the resident coordinator on planning, resource mobilization and programme implementation.

39. On the basis of lessons learned from implementation to date, I am requesting the United Nations Sustainable Development Group to take the steps necessary to ensure that the new accountabilities of the United Nations country team fully take root on the ground and that internal policies and provisions, such as the management and accountability framework of the United Nations development system and individual guidance on entity policies, are updated as required. The United Nations Sustainable Development Group is also working on the alignment of accountability arrangements at the regional and global levels, which will help to facilitate further progress. Continued attention by governing bodies will also be necessary to enable the behavioural change expected of the system.

C. Delivering effective and efficient business operations

40. Simplification and harmonization of business operations has been a long-standing request of the General Assembly in the resolutions on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, with returns expected from the implementation of the United Nations development system reforms that lead to more collaborative ways of

working. In its resolution 72/279, the Assembly endorsed a set of system-wide improvements that could potentially yield efficiencies.⁸

41. Underpinned by work on three enabling principles (costing and pricing, the principle of client satisfaction in inter-agency service delivery and the statement of mutual recognition), extensive efforts have been made by the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and United Nations country teams to roll out business operations strategies; provide services through common back offices and global and regional shared service centres; establish common premises; and ensure enhanced reporting on results and efficiency gains. Overall, we are on track to deliver on two of these four areas and are largely on track for a third. We are, however, off track with regard to establishing common premises (see figure 12). The COVID-19 crisis and associated restrictions have made advancing this work more challenging, but in some instances, in particular with regard to establishing common premises, there are specific obstacles that we will need more time to overcome.

Figure 12
Status of business operations reforms

Risks



Source: Development Coordination Office, 2021.

42. Despite these constraints, we are making steady progress towards projected gains in the order of \$310 million by 2022. Annual efficiency gains are estimated to have increased by 57 per cent between 2019 and 2020 to \$100.7 million. This represents an achievement of at least 32 per cent of the estimated efficiency savings by 2022 (\$310 million), although the actual figure may be significantly higher, as only one third of entities currently have policies or mechanisms for measuring efficiency gains. In 2021, planned improvements in efficiency measurements and

⁸ See explanatory note No. 10 on efficiencies, available at www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org/ecosoc/files/files/en/qcpr/10_%20Efficiencies%20in%20UNDS%20repositioning.pdf.

reporting will enhance our ability to capture gains across all entities and further strengthen our ability to monitor and secure efficiency gains in 2022 and beyond.

Operationalizing the enablers

43. Dedicated efforts under the leadership of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group Business Innovations Group have resulted in new or updated policies, mechanisms and processes. Three system-wide enablers were adopted that could facilitate a step change throughout the United Nations in the effectiveness and cohesion of operations on the ground.

44. By the end of 2020, eight United Nations entities, including those with the largest country footprints, had signed the costing and pricing principles.⁹ Almost all United Nations Sustainable Development Group members have now signed the mutual recognition statement,¹⁰ which allows United Nations development system entities to leverage each other’s policies and practices for faster and more scale-efficient operations.

45. In 2020, United Nations development system entities reported solid progress on internal policies to leverage mutual recognition in business operations, in particular in procurement, administration and human resources, although less so in information technology and finance (see figure 13). In relation to this, every entity of the system with a physical presence in 50 or more countries confirmed that they had reviewed or were about to review the business operations services that they could offer to, or purchase from, other system entities. In the same survey, the World Food Programme (WFP) highlighted its “Humanitarian Booking Hub”, which is currently used by 10 entities and has played an important role in facilitating the logistics of the United Nations system’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 13
Policies or procedures enabling mutual recognition

	<i>Response</i>		<i>Trend in target</i>	
	<i>%, 2020</i>		<i>%</i>	
Does your entity have any policies or procedures that enable mutual recognition of another entity’s policies and procedures in the following areas?	Yes	No	2019	2020
Procurement	91.3	8.7	75.0	91.3
Administration	73.7	26.3	55.6	73.7
Human resources	76.2	23.8	50.0	76.2
Logistics	68.4	31.6	52.6	68.4
Information and communications technology	61.1	38.9	50.0	61.1
Finance	66.7	33.3	50.0	66.7

Source: 2019 and 2020 Department of Economic and Social Affairs surveys of United Nations development system entity headquarters.

Roll-out of United Nations country team business operations strategies

46. The business operations strategies of United Nations country teams frame collaboration on operational services and arrangements at the country level as a way

⁹ FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN-Women, and WFP.

¹⁰ The entities that have signed the statement include the United Nations Secretariat and 20 heads of United Nations entities.

of reducing cost and eliminating the duplication of efforts. At the same time, they help to build impetus for a larger number of common services through an immediate increase in collaboration among United Nations organizations and by helping to prepare the ground for common back offices in the future.

47. The global roll-out of business operations strategies, which began in October 2019, is on track for full implementation by all United Nations country teams by the end of 2021. At the end of 2020, 78 country teams had an improved common business operations strategy in place, with a dedicated online platform and continual monitoring of country-specific data. Thirteen United Nations entities have developed internal guidance and communicated to their country offices to engage in those efforts at the country level. Over 1,500 personnel across United Nations Sustainable Development Group entities have received in-depth training through in-person and virtual engagements. This is further supported by an online certification course, which the Development Coordination Office developed on behalf of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and in partnership with the United Nations System Staff College, that will be mandatory for all heads of operations in country teams beginning in 2021.

48. Several high-impact common services identified for collaboration efforts could yield significant benefits in terms of cost avoidance, quality improvements and social impacts, if done jointly. They include fleet management, accommodation services, solar energy solutions, the scaling up of disability inclusion in United Nations premises, web and digital platforms, and recruitment services.

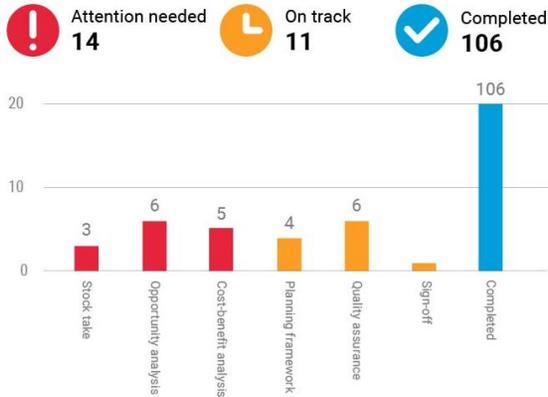
49. The impact of United Nations country team business operations strategies is expected to be realized over a period of three to five years of implementation as common services are established and utilized by United Nations entities at the country level. The projected efficiency gains over a five-year period are currently estimated at \$362 million (see figure 14).

Figure 14
Business operations strategies impact



Impact projections of business operations strategies¹

Status of business operations strategies¹



5-year projections (Based on 99 completed business operations strategies)



5-year projections⁴ (Based on 99 completed business operations strategies)

Per business operations strategy⁵

Top 10 business operations strategies ranked by total cost avoidance (Y1-5)

Country	Total cost avoidance (United States dollar value)	No. of Services
Syria	56 890 340	30
Ethiopia	37 398 585	32
Uganda	23 295 850	46
South Sudan	15 478 950	33
Afghanistan	13 817 250	88
Chad	12 335 415	25
Côte d'Ivoire	11 335 714	31
Turkey	10 357 130	27
Egypt	8 273 799	25
Rwanda	7 844 573	29

Per service line

Common services lines ranked by total cost avoidance (Y1-5)

Service Line	Total cost avoidance (United States dollar value)	No. of Services
Common administration	232 870 559	1 069
Common finance	47 441 492	306
Common information and communications technology	39 443 020	332
Common human resources	15 559 068	481
Common procurement	14 641 249	202
Common logistics	12 320 056	61

Per managing agency (supplier)⁵

Top 10 managing agencies (supplier) ranked by number of services managed

Agency	No. of Services
UNDP	1 157
UNICEF	429
WFP	203
UN	184
UNFPA	99
UNHCR	66
WHO	57
UN-WOMEN	44
UN – Regional commissions and offices away from Headquarters	41
FAO	37

Per service⁵

Top 10 services ranked by total cost avoidance (Y1-5)

Service	Total cost avoidance (United States dollar value)	No. of Services
Accommodation services (outsourced)	59 465 520	24
Travel services	39 530 506	73
Foreign exchange platform	31 363 281	6
Conference and event management	19 102 703	48
Establishment of common premises	17 087 894	7
Internet connectivity and VSAT services	13 116 956	67
Management of common premises	12 540 251	54
Security services (outsourced)	12 223 165	57
Vehicle rental	10 132 011	31
Printing services	7 885 987	46

¹ As of 29 March 2021. ² Final stages of the business operations strategy process. ³ Early stages of the business operations strategy process. ⁴ Recurrent benefits over five years. Based on 99 completed the business operations strategy. ⁵ Top 10.

Source: Development Coordination Office, 2021.

Providing services through common back offices and global and regional shared service centres

50. Common back offices help to drive efficiency and cohesion by providing a range of location-dependent operations, including services, at the country level. They generate efficiency gains from volumes of scale by eliminating the duplication of processes, services and efforts at the country level and consolidating the services reflected in business operations strategies and a range of additional services at a single service provider.

51. Travel restrictions and other limitations resulting from the pandemic have delayed the roll-out of common back offices and plans to establish common back offices in all United Nations country teams by 2022. Following approval by United Nations Sustainable Development Group in August 2020, the roll-out plan for common back offices has involved the engagement of 10 country teams in its first phase, and another 20 in its second phase in 2021. All country teams are expected to have established common back offices in the remaining countries by 2024 on the basis of lessons learned during the early roll-out phases.

52. The United Nations development system has also continued to identify opportunities to consolidate global and regional shared service centres, allowing both vertical integration of operations within system entities and the ability to leverage mutual recognition policies across them. In 2020, around 40 per cent of system entities reported having established global service centres and a further 5 per cent were planning to do so, with similar rates for the establishment and planning of regional service centres. Encouragingly, in 2020, nearly two thirds of United Nations system entities reported having used global or regional service centres of other entities, and over 40 per cent had plans for the further rationalization of business operations (see figure 15). For example, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and WFP are currently planning to create a digital solution centre that will use robotic automation for high-volume manual transactions and processes. This centre will also feature in plans to automate additional processes that can be aggregated globally.

Figure 15
Established global and regional shared service centres

	<i>Response distribution</i>		<i>Trend in target response</i>	
	<i>%, 2020</i>		<i>%</i>	
	Yes	No	2019	2020
Does your entity use an established global or regional service centre of other United Nations entities?	65.2	34.8	47.8	65.2
Has your organization developed plans for further investment in intra-agency rationalization of business operations?	40.9	59.1	33.3	40.9

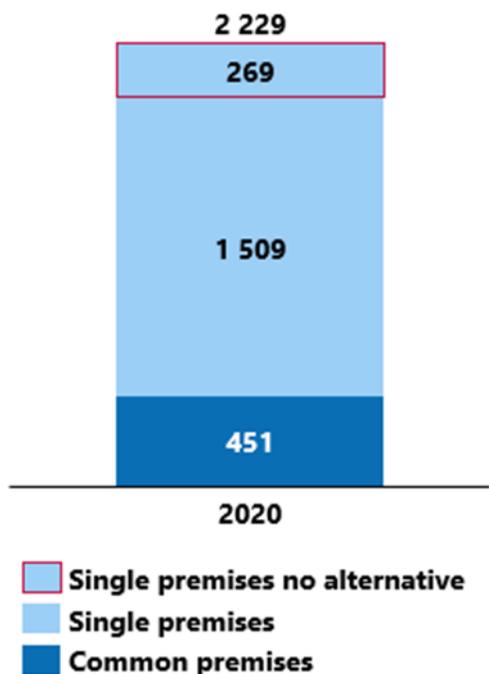
Source: 2019 and 2020 Department of Economic and Social Affairs surveys of United Nations development system entity headquarters.

Establishing common premises

53. Meeting the ambitious target of 50 per cent of United Nations common premises housing more than one entity by 2021 is proving challenging and will require further

efforts.¹¹ At the end of 2020, the United Nations system was distributed across 2,229 office premises in 131 countries. Of those, 269 single premises cannot be consolidated because they are the only United Nations presence at that duty station, while 451 are already common premises (see figure 16).¹² As such, only 23 per cent of United Nations office premises across the 131 countries in which the United Nations development system is present can currently be considered as common premises.

Figure 16
United Nations common premises



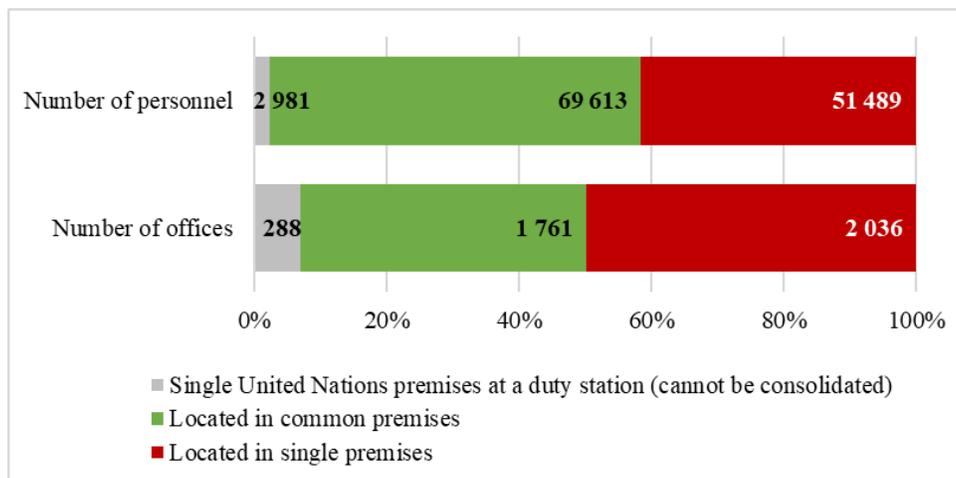
Source: Development Coordination Office, 2021.

54. It is encouraging that over half of United Nations offices (54 per cent) are located in common premises and that over 40 per cent of United Nations staff members work in common premises (see figure 17). There was a slight increase in the number of co-locations of United Nations information centres and resident coordinator offices (in the same premises) from 27 in 2019 (61 per cent) to 28 in 2020 (64 per cent). However, at the current rate of consolidation, the target of 50 per cent of common premises would be reached only after the end of the 2020 quadrennial review cycle. We must take action to correct our course and, in doing so, we will need to address the remaining structural bottlenecks, none of which are insurmountable. These include large, one-time costs, often associated with building design and construction or refurbishment and the breaking of long-term leases, and the difficulty in some locations of identifying new premises that can accommodate a large number of entities and meet all standards relating to safety and security, accessibility for persons with disabilities, and environmental and energy-efficient infrastructure and fit-outs.

¹¹ In resolution [72/279](#), the General Assembly welcomed measures to advance common business operations, where appropriate, and with the target of 50 per cent common premises by 2021. In a superficial baseline count in 2017, more than 2,900 United Nations premises were identified worldwide, of which only 16 per cent had common premises.

¹² Based on the assumed minimum of two single premises combining into one common premise and on the number of personnel in premises and offices in 2020.

Figure 17
United Nations offices and personnel in common premises



Source: Development Coordination Office, 2021.

55. I am determined to continue to work with principals throughout the United Nations development system and Member States to overcome these bottlenecks. Capital investments by Member States and other private sector partners are particularly crucial to enable faster progress in reaching the 50 per cent common premises target. Capital or in-kind investments to support common premises, for example, those made recently by the Governments of Egypt, Guyana, Kazakhstan, Senegal, Uzbekistan and Viet Nam, among others, demonstrate that significant progress is possible in this area. I count on the support, including in-kind support, of all host Governments.

Reporting on system-wide efficiency

56. Thanks to strong leadership by principals of the United Nations development system, including the co-chairs of the Business Innovations Group, we have made unprecedented progress on enhancing transparency and reporting on system-wide efficiency gains. This has entailed significant efforts within agencies themselves, given that previously, only 33 per cent of entities had a specific policy or system in place to measure efficiencies. Overall, fewer than 40 per cent (9 out of 23) of agencies report to their governing bodies on efficiency gains resulting from business operations strategies, common premises or other such factors.¹³

57. A dedicated task team on efficiency reporting was established in 2020, with 16 United Nations Sustainable Development Group entities, including the United Nations Secretariat,¹⁴ to refine estimates, methodology and the completeness of information that the United Nations can provide to Member States each year and is expected to make significant progress over the course of 2021. This has helped to strengthen our ability to report collectively and start measuring efficiency gains within the context of the repositioning of the United Nations development system.

¹³ ILO, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), UNDP (including the United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV) and the United Nations Capital Development Fund), UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), UN-Women and WFP.

¹⁴ The entities include FAO, ILO, IOM, the United Nations Secretariat, UN-Women, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNOPS, WFP and WHO.

58. The data are encouraging: efficiency gains are estimated at over \$64 million for 2019, the first year of repositioning, and \$100 million for 2020, including both quantified time savings and cost-avoidance estimates. Those gains are an aggregation of efficiencies across different United Nations entities, countries and processes. They translate into faster responses and the more effective delivery of support to countries for achieving the 2030 Agenda. It is likely that the actual gains were larger than what was captured, since reporting is not complete for all United Nations entities and data collection mechanisms vary in maturity and implementation.

59. The largest share of efficiency gains has come from United Nations entity-specific actions (66 per cent). Gains from United Nations country team business operations strategies increased by 300 per cent (from \$7.3 million to \$23.1 million) between 2018 and 2020, while bilateral initiatives, such as fleet management (WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP and UNFPA), the Humanitarian Booking Hub (WFP and UNHCR) and global shared service centres, produced further gains. This signals a very welcome shift in the operational models of the United Nations development system.

60. We are making progress, but the road ahead remains challenging. To fully deliver on the targets set out as part of these reforms and, most importantly, to meet the expectations of Member States, I am determined to continue to move at full speed, working hand in hand with leaders across the United Nations development system. I am particularly grateful to UNICEF and UNFPA for agreeing to assume the leadership of the Business Innovations Group, with the ambition of helping us to take this work stream to the next level. The support and encouragement of the relevant governing bodies and host Governments will remain key. United Nations entities will continually seek, and review, efforts to increase efficiency and effectiveness and to simplify business practices, in collaboration with the High-level Committee on Management. With a more transparent system and regular reporting on efficiencies, Member States are now better positioned than ever to ensure that resources allocated for sustainable development are used in the most effective and efficient manner.

III. Tailoring the United Nations response to specific country and regional contexts

61. The 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review highlights the need to tailor United Nations development system support to programme countries on the basis of their specific circumstances; continue to strengthen our offer in multi-country offices; fully leverage the potential of our regional assets; and enhance cooperation, collaboration and coordination among humanitarian, development and peace actions. These efforts go to the heart of the United Nations development system reforms and speaks directly to our ability to better support all countries to advance towards the Goals.

62. In recent years, we have made important progress. We are seeing the United Nations country teams respond better to the specific development needs of the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States since the start of the reforms and we are making good progress in connecting our global convening and policy-support functions to our work on the ground, in particular in important areas highlighted by programme country Governments and the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, such as financing. We have moved rapidly to boost our presence and our offer in support of small island developing States through the multi-country offices. The foundations are also now in place to maximize the impact of our regional assets. In addition, we are seeing better returns on our efforts to strengthen collaboration and coherence across United Nations operations in fragile contexts.

63. Overall, I am pleased with the progress being made, but there are concrete areas where we must go further. The share of development funding going to the least

developed countries, including through the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries, needs to be increased. The multidimensional vulnerability index that is being developed will need significant socialization, as well as concrete steps to increase the access of vulnerable middle-income countries to finance. Our offer through multi-country offices requires ongoing attention to ensure that the new arrangements have a practical impact on the ground. Similarly, the new regional arrangements are part of a longer-term repositioning exercise and more attention needs to be paid over the course of the quadrennial review cycle to ensure that the new structures translate into improved contributions to results. In addition, to strengthen collaboration and coherence across United Nations operations in fragile contexts, there is clearly a need for a more systematic approach and for financing behaviour to change in order to incentivize a more integrated and cohesive approach.

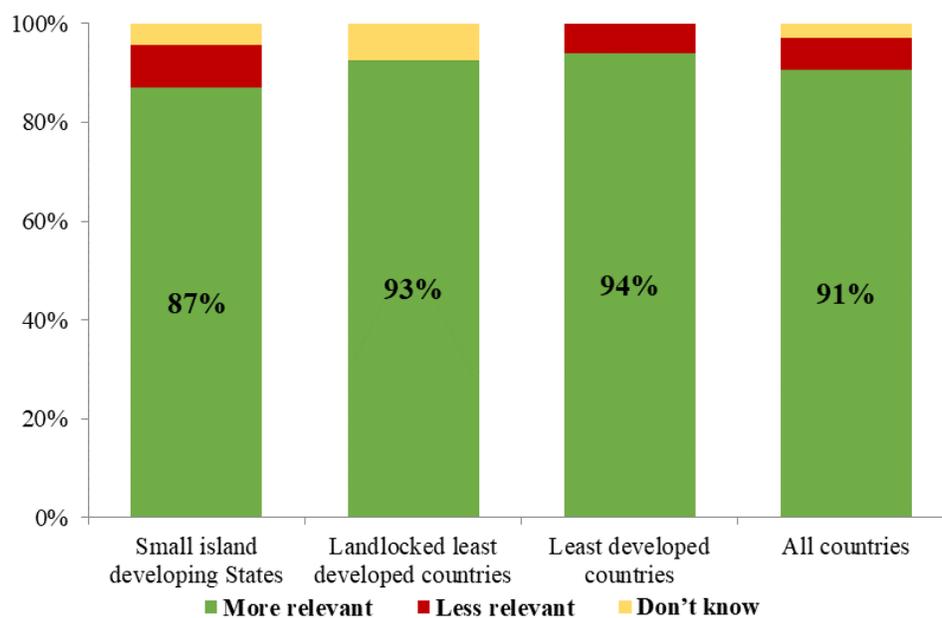
A. Countries in special situations

64. The ability of the United Nations development system to support the specific needs and priorities of countries in special situations as they pursue structural transformation will be a strong indication of whether or not we are delivering on the promise of the reforms and the directions provided in the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review. Encouragingly, the results of the latest survey from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs show that we are moving in the right direction.

65. Among all the groups, the Governments of the least developed countries and landlocked developing countries have the highest positive assessment of the relevance of United Nations development system efforts and their alignment with national needs. As shown in figure 18, 94 per cent of the least developed countries and landlocked developing countries consider that the United Nations has become more relevant to their country's development needs in the past three years, compared with 91 per cent of all programme countries.

Figure 18

Change in the alignment of the United Nations with national needs over the past three years

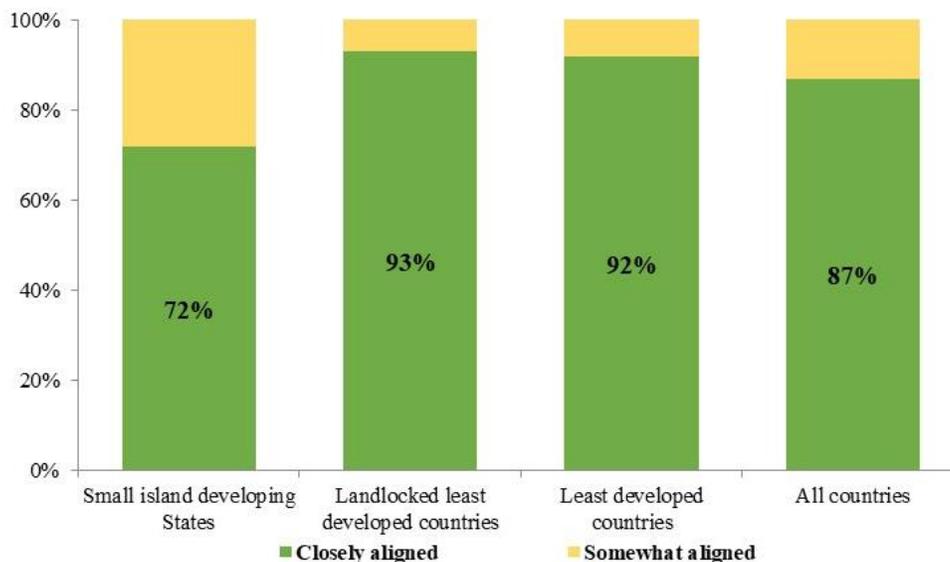


Source: 2020 Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of programme country Governments.

66. It is noteworthy, however, that only 72 per cent of the Governments of small island developing States consider United Nations activities to be aligned with their country's development needs and priorities (see figure 19). Furthermore, only 17 per cent of small island developing States report having received an annual results report from the resident coordinator and the United Nations country team, compared with 47 per cent in all programme countries.

Figure 19

Alignment between the activities of the United Nations and countries' development needs and priorities



Source: 2020 Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of programme country Governments.

67. With United Nations development system expenditures in programme countries increasing by over 40 per cent over the past five years, it is encouraging to see increases in expenditure of 83 per cent in the least developed countries, 54 per cent in small island developing States, 32 per cent in landlocked developing countries and 32 per cent in Africa (see table 1). From a per capita perspective, the least developed countries and landlocked developing countries received the highest per capita expenditure from the United Nations development system (\$15.51 and \$14.76, respectively), followed relatively closely by small island developing States (\$12.33) and Africa (\$10.26). Middle-income countries are far below at \$2.85 per capita.

Table 1
Expenditures in country groups

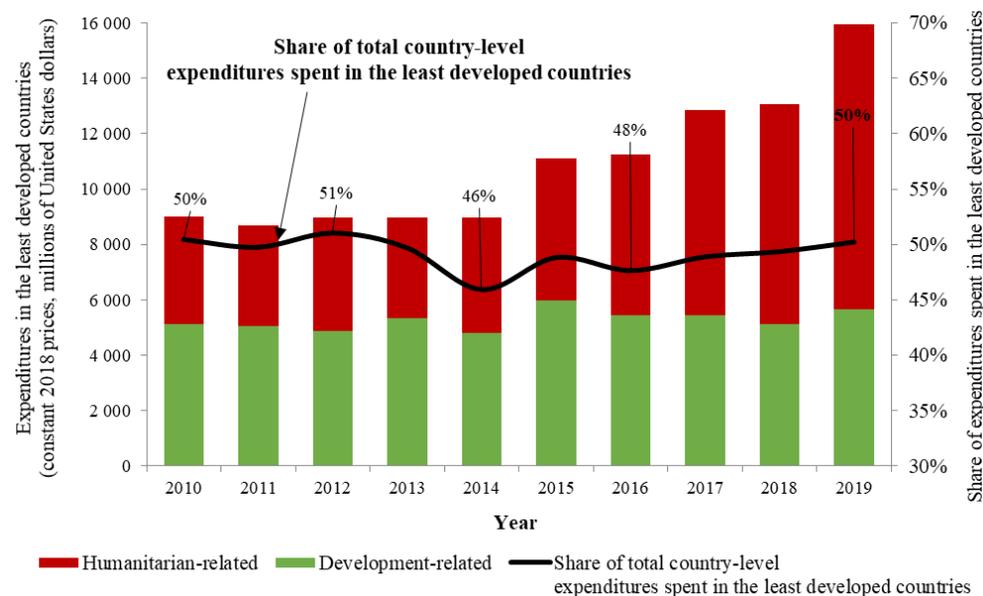
Country group	Number of countries	Total expenditure (millions of United States dollars)	Average expenditure per country (millions of United States dollars)		Five-year trend in expenditures (real terms)	Expenditure per capita
			2019	2014		
Least developed countries	47	15 656	333	185	+83%	\$15.51
Landlocked least developed countries	32	7 511	235	182	+32%	\$14.76
Small island developing States	48	809	17	11	+54%	\$12.33

Country group	Number of countries	Total expenditure (millions of United States dollars)	Average expenditure per country (millions of United States dollars)		Five-year trend in expenditures (real terms)	Expenditure per capita
			2019	2014		
Africa	55	13 070	238	180	+32%	\$10.26
Middle-income countries	105	15 716	150	118	+26%	\$2.85
All programme countries	162	30 448	188	133	+41%	\$4.84

Note: The country groups in the table are not mutually exclusive.

68. While these trends in and of themselves are positive, the breakdown in funding between humanitarian and development assistance provides a different perspective. Of the \$15.6 billion spent on the least developed countries in 2019, for instance, 64 per cent was on humanitarian assistance activities, while 36 per cent was on development activities (see figure 20). In fact, development-related expenditure in the least developed countries has essentially remained flat over the past decade. This underscores the urgency for the United Nations development system to also implement steps to prioritize allocation to the least developed countries, as requested by the General Assembly.

Figure 20
Expenditures in the least developed countries, from 2010 to 2019



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021.

69. For the least developed countries, the United Nations development system continues to promote the achievement of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020 and preparations have started for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, scheduled for January 2022. A report on United Nations system support for the least developed countries, including on best practices and recommendations to strengthen the effectiveness of the United Nations in least developed country contexts, is being prepared and will inform future action. The United Nations development system has also stepped up support for the four countries scheduled to graduate during the current

quadrennial review cycle¹⁵ through the inter-agency task force on graduation and smooth transition, coordinated by the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. I have requested the High Representative to ensure that similar support is provided to the five least developed countries that were recommended for graduation by the Committee for Development Policy in February 2021: Bangladesh, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Nepal and Tuvalu. Furthermore, the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries continues to support activities in the least developed countries and to serve as a knowledge hub for connecting science, technology and innovation needs, resources and actors in the least developed countries. With 2020 contributions to the Technology Bank (\$2 million) slightly less than those received in 2019 (\$2.12 million), it is essential to increase the capitalization of the Technology Bank. While the world lauded the achievement of target 17.8 of the Sustainable Development Goals and continues to acknowledge the role of the Technology Bank in helping the least developed countries to leapfrog traditional stages of development, where possible, and to accelerate progress towards the Goals, financial support is far from sufficient for the Technology Bank to effectively discharge its mandate.

70. The United Nations development system also continues its support for the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024, including by facilitating discussions among landlocked developing countries with other stakeholders on the road map for the accelerated implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action in the remaining five years, adopted by the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries in September 2020. Activities in 2020 included addressing challenges related to COVID-19 and a regional dialogue on strengthening transport connectivity in the context of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia. The second Global Conference on Sustainable Transport, scheduled to be held in Beijing in 2021, provides an opportunity to catalyse investment on sustainable transport in landlocked developing countries, in particular as countries seek to stimulate an employment-intensive, inclusive and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

71. In 2020, the United Nations system supported the response of small island developing States to the COVID-19 pandemic and helped them to mainstream the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway and the Goals in national development processes through inter-agency consultative group meetings and regional meetings for the national focal points of States in the Asia and the Pacific region, and the Caribbean and the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea region. Commenting on the United Nations development system's socioeconomic response to the pandemic, the Governments of the small island developing States were more positive than all of the programme countries on the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of the response, but were less positive on its coherence and timeliness. Further details regarding the strengthening of the system's support for small island developing States is included in sections B and C below.

72. The COVID-19 pandemic emerged at a time when the prospects for many African countries looked encouraging, with economic growth projected to rise from 2.9 per cent in 2019 to 3.5 per cent in 2021¹⁶ and important gains registered with regard to poverty eradication and health indicators. However, prolonged underinvestment in the health sector and existing economic inequalities have made Africa particularly vulnerable to the impact of the pandemic. United Nations

¹⁵ Bhutan (2023), Angola (2024), Sao Tome and Principe (2024) and Solomon Islands (2024). Vanuatu graduated in December 2020 and received support from the United Nations development system. It is also included in the 2019 funding data presented in this section.

¹⁶ United Nations, *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2020*.

development system engagement in Africa continues to be firmly anchored in the African Union-United Nations Framework for the Implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and accounts for 42 per cent of total country-level expenditures (an increase from 40 per cent in 2015). As part of its response, the system launched the Africa United Nations Knowledge Hub for COVID-19 to deliver a quick, efficient and coordinated response to the pandemic. The hub needs to be sustained, strengthened and updated so that it can be transformed into a key tool for tracking the pandemic's impact in Africa and provide an interactive and participative platform for collaboration on the pandemic response and broader issues related to the continent's development agenda.

73. The United Nations is increasingly focusing attention on the specific needs of middle-income countries, which are home to 75 per cent of the world's population and more than 60 per cent of the world's poor. The pandemic has yet again reinforced the extreme vulnerability of some middle-income countries to shocks, given their overdependence on primary commodity exports, the volatility of exchange rates and capital flows, rising inequality and weaknesses in social protection systems. Many middle-income countries are also grappling with external challenges, in particular climate change and, for some particularly vulnerable countries, access to external finance. The pandemic is also expected to result in further increases in debt in middle-income countries, placing an additional burden on them.

74. Over the past year, together with the Heads of Government of Canada and Jamaica, I have led a sustained effort aimed at mobilizing a global response to the COVID-19 crisis that would ensure that all developing countries have the fiscal space and financial support needed to protect development gains and enable a strong recovery and foundation for the accelerated implementation of the Goals over the remainder of the decade of action. Progress has been made in some areas, including the extension of the Debt Service Suspension Initiative, the creation of the Common Framework for Debt Treatments beyond the Debt Service Suspension Initiative, and the potential issuance of a new round of special drawing rights by the International Monetary Fund with a value of \$650 billion. But more must be done to provide support to the most vulnerable, including many vulnerable middle-income countries that are excluded from these initiatives. In this regard, I will continue to urge decision makers to take more ambitious action on debt relief and liquidity, including by expanding the Debt Service Suspension Initiative and the Common Framework to include vulnerable middle-income countries, by reallocating unused special drawing rights to ensure liquidity reaches those who need it most, bringing private creditors to the table and undertaking a reform of the international debt architecture to end the infernal cycle of debt waves, debt crises and lost decades of development.

75. The COVID-19 crisis has further underscored the opportunity cost of maintaining gross domestic product (GDP) per capita as the key measure of development success, given its blindness to climate factors, biodiversity loss, pollution, gender inequality and vulnerability. Several country groups, individual Member States, civil society organizations and academics have long advocated to move beyond GDP in national and global metrics of progress. To that end, and building on the pioneering work of UNDP,¹⁷ the Statistical Commission and other entities, in 2021, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group will start paving a path forward by analysing the implications of going beyond GDP as a measure of economic and social progress. As a contribution to these efforts, options for a multidimensional vulnerability index have been developed under the lead of resident coordinators in multi-country offices and small island developing States, in collaboration with the Department of Economic

¹⁷ *Human Development Report 2019: Beyond Income, Beyond Averages, Beyond Today – Inequalities in Human Development in the 21st Century.*

and Social Affairs and the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, and in consultation with all affected Member States, as well as donors. The index will meet a long-standing request by the SAMOA Pathway for the provision of a methodology for redefining eligibility to financing for sustainable development in small island developing States and to finding solutions for long-term debt sustainability. I will present my recommendations regarding the index to the General Assembly over the course of its seventy-sixth session, in response to the mandate set out in resolution [75/215](#).

76. It is also essential that we accelerate our offer in countries in special situations with regard to climate action, sustainable energy and a just transition, as outlined in more detail in chapter V.

B. Operationalizing multi-country office reviews

77. During the operational activities for development segment of the 2020 session of the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly endorsed a number of recommendations that I had put forward in order for the United Nations development system to step up its collective and individual offer to countries and territories serviced by multi-country offices. The United Nations Sustainable Development Group and the Development Coordination Office subsequently took swift action to support the roll-out of the recommendations. Considerable progress was made in just a few months, both by realizing a number of important achievements and setting the foundations for longer-term improvements. I will continue to ensure that the momentum and ambitions to meet the expectations of countries serviced by multi-country offices, in particular for small island developing States, remain strong.

Ensuring more tailored support

78. Efforts are under way to ensure that programmatic and policy support is more tailored to countries and territories serviced by multi-country offices, drawing on the scaled-up support of the resident coordinator system and the full assets of the United Nations development system.

79. In 2020, the United Nations development system developed response plans to support countries confronting the health and socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic. In Eastern Caribbean countries, for example, a multisectoral COVID-19 response plan, aimed at supporting ongoing advocacy for differential treatment based on the vulnerability of island nations, helped to yield \$23.8 million, or 80 per cent of the resources requested for addressing the immediate health and socioeconomic needs of these countries.

80. With regard to the United Nations Pacific Strategy (2018–2022), the development of the new United Nations Multi-country Sustainable Development Framework in the Caribbean is on track, based on a strong multi-country common country analysis, and will be finalized when the current development framework expires at the end of 2021. In addition, in line with my previous commitment, over the past year, resident coordinators have led the development of individual implementation plans for all countries and territories in the Pacific region, while plans for the Caribbean countries and territories will be completed by May 2021. The United Nations development system has fully engaged in the development of these plans to tailor objectives to the specific needs of all countries and territories in multi-country offices.

81. Various entities of the United Nations development system have developed new or updated offers and programmes for small island developing States. For example, in “Rising up for small island developing States: amplifying climate action”, UNDP

sets out its offer of support across three key pillars: climate action, the blue economy and digital transformation, all of which are grounded in support for financing for development. The “Hand-in-Hand Initiative” of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is aimed at accelerating agrifood system transformation and sustainable rural development in the most vulnerable countries, including small island developing States. In 2020, the International Trade Centre launched a five-point action plan to support trade-related capacity in small island developing States, while the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) developed a strategy for small island developing States in 2019. A number of entities, including the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN-Women, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and UNFPA, have all committed to updating or developing new policy offers for small island developing States in 2021. I commend United Nations entities for their actions in this area.

82. In order to ensure that multi-country offices can draw more efficiently on all of the expertise and capacities of the United Nations development system, including entities not physically present in a country, I am committed to ensuring that the roll-out of the multi-country office and regional reviews continues to intersect and proceed in tandem, with the strong joint leadership of the regional economic and social commissions and regional offices of agencies, funds and programmes through the regional collaborative platforms.

Enhancing physical presence

83. Under the leadership of resident coordinators, outposted coordination officers are now in place in Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Dominica, Grenada, Palau, Saint Lucia, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Regional coordination specialists were also hired and deployed to Fiji and Barbados to strengthen regional support and relationships with regional and subregional intergovernmental entities. In addition, an agreement was reached with the Government of the territory of the British Virgin Islands to fully fund the post of one Coordination Officer on its territory, setting an important example for others.

84. A number of entities have taken concrete steps to strengthen or increase their expertise on the ground and strengthen the delegation of authority to staff at the country level. For example, UNICEF has upgraded and added new field office staff in both the Federated States of Micronesia and Kiribati in support of the increased United Nations presence in the North Pacific, as well as upgrading and adding staff in Samoa and Trinidad and Tobago. UNDP has added posts in the Caribbean and the Pacific, with a focus on climate, environment and energy. It will also expand the United Nations Economists’ Network by adding and deploying national economists, including in Mauritius. IOM has built on its existing operational presence in 15 countries in the Caribbean and Pacific regions, with a new presence in Grenada and the Bahamas. WFP opened a Caribbean office in Barbados in 2018 and, as of March 2021, has personnel in Dominica, Guyana, Jamaica and Saint Lucia.

85. The establishment of a new multi-country office in the North Pacific office is on track, hosted in the Federated States of Micronesia. A dialogue is ongoing with the Government on immediate and long-term arrangements for the premises of the new United Nations office, including common premises in a new United Nations House. The resident coordinator is expected to be in place by mid-2021 and the head of the resident coordinator office has now been recruited. Other resident coordinator office staff will be recruited following the onboarding of the resident coordinator.

86. Funding in the amount of \$25,000 for every country or territory outside the hub that is serviced by a multi-country office was disbursed in 2020 to enhance coordination support and allocations have been made in the 2021 budget for the resident coordinator system special purpose trust fund, in addition to the funding base allocation to enable stronger coordination across countries and territories. In line with my previous commitment, no resources were diverted from one region to another to make this possible. All multi-country offices received the same allocation base from the trust fund, with funding only varying according to the number of countries and territories covered.

Improving policy support for financing for development

87. Eighteen small island developing States are already receiving assistance to develop integrated national financing frameworks to finance national development priorities and the Goals, including through the multi-country offices in Barbados, Fiji and Samoa. Furthermore, a design concept for an innovative finance design facility to respond to the financing needs of small island developing States, under the technical leadership of UNDP, is also taking shape.

88. The Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund has also approved a dedicated investment for small island developing States, as I had recommended. Through a call for proposals for small island developing States, valued at over \$30 million, dedicated interventions can be made to address the vulnerabilities faced by such States. These resources will complement nearly \$25 million already allocated through the “leaving no one behind” and “Sustainable Development Goal financing” portfolios of the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund for countries covered by multi-country offices. Additional pooled funding has been made available in multi-country settings from the Spotlight Initiative, the Peacebuilding Fund, the Global Fund for Coral Reefs and other mechanisms. I commend those who have already stepped forward, including to promote joint programming through other pooled funding channels, such as the first multi-country pooled fund in the Pacific region. I count on the solidarity of the international community to further enhance the financial support provided to these countries.

Strengthening national data systems, data collection and data use

89. The United Nations Sustainable Development Group task team on data and reporting has commenced a dedicated work stream to move from a supply-driven to a needs-driven approach to data and statistics in countries and territories covered by multi-country offices. Individual entities are also taking dedicated actions. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean is addressing legislative and capacity constraint challenges that constitute the main obstacles to the collection, dissemination and use of disaggregated data in the Caribbean region, and has committed to promoting a coordinated approach to the production of official statistics. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) is scaling up support for data collection and data use to Pacific countries for monitoring the progress of the Goals, as well as integrating statistical work into national planning and policymaking. UNICEF has enhanced support for the multiple indicator cluster survey in the Caribbean region, including Montserrat, Saint Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago and the Turks and Caicos. In the Pacific region, the surveys for Kiribati, Samoa and Tonga have been completed, they are being conducted for Fiji and Tuvalu, and will commence in 2021 for the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru and Vanuatu. IOM is also working to enhance the availability and facilitate the use of data and analysis on migration and mobility in countries and territories serviced by multi-country offices, including through targeted capacity development support.

Facilitating participation in intergovernmental forums and processes

90. Various United Nations entities, such as the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and UNESCO continue to provide funding, policy and technical support for the integration and participation of States serviced by multi-country offices in a number of intergovernmental forums and processes.

91. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and the move to virtual meetings globally, information and communications technologies have opened up new possibilities for enhanced and more regular engagement by the national Governments of small island developing States and other countries and partners in regional and global processes. This is also the case for the engagement between multi-country offices and the countries and territories that they support. I urge Member States to work with United Nations entities to explore ways to expand such opportunities in the future.

Fostering South-South cooperation

92. Through efforts spearheaded by the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation, the United Nations development system has identified a package of specific deliverables to collectively operationalize the system-wide strategy on South-South and triangular cooperation for sustainable development in countries and territories supported by multi-country offices. South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation will be mainstreamed in entities' strategic frameworks at the global and regional levels, and institutional, human and technical capacities for such cooperation, as well as support for multi-stakeholder partnerships, will be strengthened in multi-country offices. This will build on individual entity and multi-entity commitments and initiatives, such as the Partnership for Action on Green Economy, which involves UNEP, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), UNIDO and UNDP.

The way forward

93. Overall, I am encouraged by the commitment shown and the actions taken to enhance the substantive and coordination offer to multi-country offices over the past year. In a particularly challenging period, country teams and a number of entities at the regional and headquarters levels have stepped up in multi-country settings. We have laid solid foundations, but to ensure strong and tailored advice and support towards national priorities and needs, especially in a context of deeper financial and debt challenges, we will work with all United Nations entities to maximize the impact of our work on the ground. In particular, more attention will be paid to mobilizing the tailored United Nations response that is needed, strengthening coordination within multi-country offices, finding ways to expand fiscal space and responding to the unique situation of small island developing States.

C. Leveraging the regional value of the United Nations for country, subregional and regional support

94. Connecting regional assets to support country-level actions and tackle cross-border issues, in order to respond to the pandemic and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, remains at the core of a repositioned United Nations development system. Over the past year, pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution [2020/23](#) and General Assembly resolution [74/297](#), we have made significant progress in the five key areas that I identified for the regional review: transitioning the previous

United Nations development system regional coordination mechanisms into the new regional collaborative platforms and establishing issue-based coalitions; rolling out knowledge hubs; improving results reports; strengthening data systems; and advancing efficiency efforts. We have also seen the United Nations development system in all regions swiftly mobilize its collective expertise to assist countries in responding to the pandemic.

95. These first crucial steps provide us with new momentum. It is essential that we build on this in order to address the ongoing difficulties that many Governments still report in effectively accessing regional capacities and to deliver on the longer-term reprofiling and repositioning of the United Nations development system at the regional level.

Progress in operationalizing a strengthened regional architecture of the United Nations development system

96. All regions transitioned from previous coordination mechanisms to the new regional collaborative platforms, effective 1 December 2020. Each platform has developed its workplan for 2021, devised the set-up of the regional collaboration architecture and put in place its joint secretariat, within the parameters of common working arrangements that ensure consistency across regions. At the first annual meetings of the platforms, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General and held in March 2021,¹⁸ areas in which regional assets can best be utilized in support of the country-level action were identified.

97. Issue-based coalitions, one of the main vehicles of the substantive work of the regional collaborative platforms, rally United Nations system-wide expertise in an agile manner in response to changing regional and country needs. They are demand-driven and results-oriented, avoiding both siloed approaches and overlaps. While issue-based coalitions are, of course, region-specific, climate action, resilience and human mobility have emerged as priority issues in all regions (see figure 21). The substantive focus of other coalitions is unique to their regions. In Africa, an issue-based coalition on subregional initiatives is under consideration. In Latin America and the Caribbean, an additional issue-based coalition on financing for development has been proposed. In 2021, issue-based coalitions will play a critical role in supporting the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, while enabling accelerated action on the 2030 Agenda as countries strive to recover better. Regional collaborative platforms will continue to engage with resident coordinators and United Nations country teams to seek feedback on the support provided, and will engage with Member States to ensure that issue-based coalitions respond to national needs and priorities.

¹⁸ The annual meetings for Africa (2 March), Europe and Central Asia (12 March), Latin America and the Caribbean (15 March), Asia-Pacific (23 March) and Arab States (26 March) were held back-to-back with the regional forums on sustainable development.

Figure 21
Current issue-based coalitions



98. Effective pooling of policy expertise is vital for enhancing support at the country level. All regions have made good progress in establishing knowledge management hubs. Hubs for Latin America and the Caribbean and for Asia-Pacific have been launched. In Arab States, all functions of the “Manara” knowledge platform are expected to gradually become available throughout the year. The launch of the Africa Knowledge Management Hub is planned towards the end of 2021. The regional collaborative platform in Europe and Central Asia is collaborating with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia to adapt its platform for use in the Europe and Central Asia region.

99. Through these platforms, a wealth of knowledge products are available to foster evidence-based solutions on the Goals. However, further action is needed to ensure policy expertise is effectively leveraged through communities of practice, and that integrated policy support is readily available. The harmonization of common elements and greater efforts relating to interoperability across regional platforms will support this shift. These additional steps are clearly needed. While almost 70 per cent of countries in 2020 found it easy or very easy to access expertise from the United Nations development system regional offices (see figure 22) and 72 per cent of countries considered regional offices’ support to be effective or very effective, nearly 20 per cent found regional support difficult to access, and 14 per cent responded that they had received no support or that the support had been ineffective.

Figure 22
Access to and support from regional offices of the United Nations development system

	Response distribution			Trend in target response	
	% 2020			%	
	Easy or very easy	Difficult or very difficult	Don't know	2019	2020
In general, how easy is it to access expertise from the regional offices of United Nations development system entities?	68	19	13	54	68
	Effective or very effective	Ineffective or no support received	Don't know	2019	2020
How effective has been the support by regional offices of the United Nations in providing support on the highest priority regional/subregional issues of relevance to the country:	72	14	15	..	72

Source: 2019 and 2020 Department of Economic and Social Affairs surveys of programme country Governments.

100. In line with the commitment to enhance transparency and results-based management, United Nations development system entities in all regions prepared a transitional report on the results achieved at the regional level in 2020, capturing the activities under previous coordination mechanisms. In 2022, the regional collaborative platforms will present their first reports on collective achievements and joint system-wide impacts at the regional level that have contributed to the advancement of the 2030 Agenda.

101. Work is also ongoing, under the leadership of the regional commissions and together with other United Nations development system entities in the region and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs at the global level, to consolidate existing capacities with regard to data and statistics. In 2021, all regional collaborative platforms will continue to connect various data platforms hosted by United Nations development system entities in the region to create a one-stop shop for accessing the regional data ecosystem for the Goals.

102. To increase regional efficiencies in business operations, regional operations management teams have been established in all regions and have developed their 2021 workplans. The teams are focusing on developing and implementing regional business operations strategies, together with the Development Coordination Office. The mapping of regional operational supply and demand and matching that demand to the existing operational infrastructure is expected to yield both cost and quality improvements in the provision of regional operational services. The teams also support the roll-out and implementation of efficiency efforts at the regional level and the operationalization of efficiency enablers in the region, including mutual recognition.

Specificity of each region: an overview of region-by-region progress

103. In Africa, regional United Nations development system entities worked collaboratively to mount a joint response to COVID-19 through the emergency regional action plan on COVID-19, under which regional United Nations entities delivered essential support in areas such as procurement, to improve coordination amid limited global stock and weak supply chains. The regional United Nations development system entities established a regional COVID-19 knowledge management hub, offering system-wide resources in support of combating the pandemic. The Africa Knowledge Management Hub will be launched by the end of 2021, and the issue-based coalition on strengthening integrated data and statistical systems will focus on developing the Africa United Nations development data gateway during the course of 2021 to effectively monitor progress in the

implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. Work on an Africa-United Nations data and statistics strategy, to guide and harmonize United Nations support on data in Africa, is also ongoing.

104. The seven issue-based coalitions identified in the region are closely aligned with the priorities of the African Union and, in addition to the data and statistical systems mentioned, focus on macroeconomic management and economic transformation; harnessing demographic dividends through investment in youth and women's empowerment; leveraging new technologies and enabling digital transitions; climate action; peace, security and respect for human rights; and addressing forced displacement and migration. The creation of an additional issue-based coalition on subregional initiatives is being considered. A task team has been formed to further review the legacy structures in the region to determine their relevance and potential accommodation within the new structure of the regional collaborative platform. Institutionalizing those efforts for coordinated support will be critical to enabling the Africa regional collaborative platform to effectively support countries in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and to chart the path to sustainable development.

105. In the Arab States region, the regional collaborative platform and its eight issue-based coalitions will provide support for regional priorities, including on adolescents and youth empowerment and inclusion; the nexus between humanitarian and development activities; migration; macroeconomic management and social protection; gender justice and equality; food security, climate action and the environment; quality social services; and urbanization. Feedback received from resident coordinators and Member States is currently being incorporated into the issue-based coalition workplans to ensure that the coalitions are demand-driven and task-bound. The issue-based coalitions in the Arab States region contributed to the COVID-19 health response by providing, among other things, capacity-building for Governments and United Nations country teams with regard to digital health and innovation and supporting assessments of the impacts on reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health-care services.

106. Work is advancing on the Manara platform, which is intended to be a one-stop shop for all knowledge and data from United Nations sources, Member States and other development actors, to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Manara will be accessible to United Nations country teams and Member States, and includes several tools in Arabic and English, such as the Arab SDG Gateway and a comprehensive platform for data and statistics for the Arab region, based on nationally sourced data and data from United Nations custodian agencies, complemented by estimates for the most recent time periods and big data. Manara will also include a set of knowledge products, a regional United Nations development system e-learning platform, the common United Nations development system online Arab geospatial data hub and a set of policy simulation tools based on various economic models.

107. The Asia-Pacific regional collaborative platform, in its first months of existence, helped to bring together entities of the regional United Nations development system in support of gender-responsive and human rights-centred COVID-19 assessments and response plans, new regional dialogues on climate action and data for the Goals, and coherent policy messages on strengthening social protection, people mobility and disaster risk reduction. The five issue-based coalitions focused on a more coordinated and targeted response by the United Nations development system at the regional level in key priority areas. Through the issue-based coalition on human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment, for example, WHO, UNFPA and UNICEF developed strategic and operational guidance for Governments and other partners in South-East Asia to address service gaps and ensure the continuity of sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health services during the pandemic. Dedicated dialogues with groups of resident coordinators in the Asia-

Pacific region have been organized to better match the regional expertise and offer of support with country-level demands. Targeted support for Member States, resident coordinators and United Nations country teams in those areas are helping to lay strong foundations for recovering better from the pandemic and accelerating action on the 2030 Agenda.

108. The regional collaborative platform is also supported by groups addressing means of implementation, including on Sustainable Development Goals data and statistics, knowledge management and system-wide reporting, as well as by the regional operations management team. As in other regions, the peer support group, chaired by the regional presence of the Development Coordination Office, provides country-level support. Drawing on the existing Sustainable Development Goal help desk developed by ESCAP, the Asia-Pacific Knowledge Management Hub was officially launched in March 2021 and facilitates the access of Member States and United Nations country teams to knowledge resources, communities of practice and expertise throughout the United Nations development system. Work is ongoing to create a network of expertise and to further develop the hub into a self-sustaining and dynamic space. The Asia-Pacific SDG Gateway is also fully operational, providing consolidated data on progress towards the Goals at the regional level and feeding into the Global Sustainable Development Goals Indicators Database of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The Sustainable Development Goals data and statistics group also provides technical and data support to resident coordinators and country teams, including in the context of COVID-19.

109. As most of the collaborative work in Europe and Central Asia was under way before it was codified in issue-based coalitions in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution [2020/23](#), regional directors conducted a review of the functionality of pre-existing issue-based coalitions in 2020. The review revealed a strong consensus on the priority areas of issue-based coalitions, based on previous results and emerging regional and country needs. A management response plan was developed for the implementation of the review recommendations, which is expected to result in a clearer support offer and exit strategies to strengthen the focus of issue-based coalitions on concrete tasks. A consultation on issue-based coalitions with Member States was organized with the Executive Committee of the Economic Commission for Europe on 12 February 2021.

110. A regional knowledge management hub is being developed with a focus on knowledge products, such as publications, reports or guidelines and the expertise of United Nations staff in the regions, including a Russian-language version. The issue-based coalitions are expected to identify staff members or relevant experts available for support as part of their menu of services, which will be offered to resident coordinators and United Nations country teams. Other regional inter-agency coordination groups created under the umbrella of the regional collaborative platform include the digital transformation group and the data and statistics group. The latter, which includes the statistics focal points of the United Nations country teams in the region and ESCAP, connects with the global statistics community so that policymakers in the region have better access to data and statistics.

111. In 2020, the United Nations development system in Latin America and the Caribbean mobilized its assets and expertise to support Member States with regard to the immediate health and socioeconomic response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including by providing assistance in scaling up health systems to provide coverage and quality services, increasing measures to address gender-based violence, expanding socioeconomic emergency measures to reach the most vulnerable and working with authorities to facilitate distance learning and the safe reopening of schools. To better match the regional expertise and support offer of the issue-based coalitions with country-level demands, the Latin America and the Caribbean regional

collaborative platform organized consultations with resident coordinators and Member States in the region. As a result, a sixth issue-based coalition on financing for development has been proposed for establishment in 2021. Youth and gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are included as cross-cutting priorities in the regional policy work. Issue-based coalition roles will be created to generate tangible country-level results by providing resident coordinators and United Nations country teams with technical support in the specific thematic areas. Moreover, the regional collaborative platform will facilitate joint actions to address gaps in the implementation of the Goals.

112. The regional collaborative platform is also supported by the knowledge management hub steering committee, the Sustainable Development Goals data and statistics group, the peer support group, the regional operations management team and a regional partnerships and communications group. The Sustainable Development Goal gateway is a reference entry point for all information on the 2030 Agenda in the region and facilitates the monitoring and statistical follow-up of progress towards the Goals at the regional and country levels. The regional Sustainable Development Goal data and statistics group mapped United Nations expertise and technical assistance accessible to Member States through the gateway. The mapping also served to update the regional self-assessment tool to diagnose the capacity to produce Sustainable Development Goal indicators, which in 2021 will be shared with national statistics offices and systems of countries in the region.

Leveraging the strengthened regional architecture in the decade of action

113. The year 2020 involved the transition to a new regional architecture, while faced with a historic pandemic that exposed the structural challenges to sustainable development across all regions. There is a need to accelerate the implementation of the five transformative areas outlined above. The new regional collaborative platforms and their issue-based coalitions, effective pooling of expertise at the service of resident coordinators and United Nations country teams and through them to Member States, reporting on results achieved, the consolidation of data and statistics and efficient business operations are key components for ensuring that the United Nations development system has a better support offer at the regional level.

114. I count on United Nations entities to further strengthen collaboration and support modalities under the umbrella of the regional collaborative platform, and to do so in a transparent manner. As we consolidate the new regional architecture, I expect the platforms to move their focus from process to substance, measuring impact and reporting on results in line with regional priorities and specificities. In doing so, it is crucial that we pay more attention to tackling cross-border challenges and strengthening collaboration across peace, development and humanitarian operations, and that we identify ways to strengthen the availability of surge capacities when circumstances require. I remain committed to continue to ensure a consultative implementation process for Member States.

D. Enhancing cooperation, collaboration and coordination across humanitarian, development and peace actions

115. Today, some 77 per cent of the world's extreme poor live in fragile contexts. If we are to achieve the 2030 Agenda, we need to end conflicts and violence and address the underlying development deficits and climate vulnerabilities that contribute to fragility. Enhanced cooperation, collaboration and coordination across humanitarian, development and peace actions, as called for in the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive

policy review, are essential for the United Nations development system to fulfil its role in this regard.

116. Over the past year, we have seen significant efforts to enhance cross-pillar collaboration in joint analysis, the identification of strategic priorities, and joint planning and programming. We have made progress in translating mandates into field-level guidance across the United Nations pillars. These efforts include the development of the Cooperation Framework companion piece in the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, the “Light guidance on collective outcomes” of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group guidance on conflict sensitivity, peacebuilding and sustaining peace. System-wide, United Nations entities are supporting resident coordinator offices to better link humanitarian, development and peace actions. UNEP, for instance, is working closely with resident coordinator offices and United Nations missions to ensure that they have access to environmental analysis to better identify opportunities for environmental action in peacebuilding. In Haiti and other countries, United Nations entities are working together to provide shared technical support to resident coordinator offices for a joined-up approach across humanitarian-development-peace actions. This work will continue throughout 2021 and inform the upcoming round of Cooperation Frameworks with lessons and analyses on humanitarian issues, preparedness, risk reduction and addressing the root causes of crises.

117. The Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian and Development Collaboration is proving an increasingly effective platform for connecting key humanitarian, development and peace actors and for more effectively tackling vulnerabilities and risks in eight priority countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan. The Committee advocated effectively for linkages between the socioeconomic and humanitarian responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. In accordance with the mandate for the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review, information on the work of the Committee will now regularly be disseminated to Member States. We have also seen several joint initiatives to promote work across the humanitarian-development-peace continuum. For instance, WFP and UNHCR launched the Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub to help their country and regional offices to operationalize global commitments, target data-sharing and accountability to affected people, and strengthen joint programming. I commend the Co-Chairs of the Committee for their leadership and count on their continued commitment to maximize the Committee’s impact.

118. On the ground, indications suggest that these efforts are beginning to pay off. According to a survey by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 76 per cent of programme country Governments agreed that in 2020, resident coordinators contributed to building stronger synergies across development, humanitarian, and/or peacebuilding interventions. Furthermore, 77 per cent of Governments responded that the entities of the United Nations system currently work together more collaboratively than before the repositioning exercise began, compared with 70 per cent the previous year. United Nations entities indicate similarly positive trends, with 81 per cent of them reporting that they had been involved in identifying collective outcomes across development, humanitarian and peacebuilding interventions in 2020, as opposed to 75 per cent in 2019.

119. Nevertheless, challenges remain. Several United Nations development system entities reported some kind of difficulty in cross-pillar collaboration in emergency and crisis settings (see table 2).

Table 2
Ongoing work to bridge humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities

Question: please assess the level of difficulties with each of the following aspects:

<i>Answer choices</i>	<i>Very difficult/difficult</i>	<i>Minor problem</i>	<i>Not a problem at all</i>	<i>Don't know</i>				
Jointly developed and risk-informed analysis	38.8%	7	33.3%	6	22.2%	4	5.5%	1
Joined-up planning and programming	50%	9	27.7%	5	16.6%	3	5.5%	1
Assessing impact	55.5%	10	22.2%	4	11.1%	2	11.1%	2
Ensuring appropriate financing	72.2%	13	11.1%	2	5.5%	1	11.1%	2
Monitoring and implementation	55.5%	10	5.5%	1	22.2%	4	16.6%	3

Source: 2020 Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey of United Nations development system entity headquarters.

120. In terms of joint planning, a major handicap reported by United Nations development system entities is the lack of a clear definition of “collective outcomes” and how they should feature in current planning tools, such as the Cooperation Framework, the humanitarian response plan and the integrated strategic framework. They also noted that joint programme design remains aspirational, as organizations try to retrofit current work to reach collective outcomes, rather than first identifying collective outcomes that then result in co-created programmes. The lack of data-sharing between United Nations entities, resulting from complex legal and privacy concerns, and the lack of data interoperability are additional obstacles to cooperation throughout the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

121. United Nations development system entities noted that a more systematic approach is required to ensure a whole-of-system response. At present, coordination efforts vary largely from one context to another, often depending on goodwill, the capacity of personnel and other in-country circumstances. They recommended that joint capacity development initiatives focus on building better understanding of the different principles, tools and approaches applied to humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts.

122. The challenge most frequently reported continues to be ensuring appropriate financing, especially in addressing a siloed approach by donors to funding channels for humanitarian, development and peace actions, which stands in the way of an effective whole-of-system response. To address these issues, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee has developed a catalogue of quality funding practices for humanitarian response as a reference tool for policymakers and practitioners. Furthermore, according to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), only 1.7 per cent of humanitarian programming is targeted at gender equality and women’s empowerment, and for only 2 per cent of all aid for peace and security in fragile States and economies, gender equality is set as a principal objective. A compact for women and peace and security, and humanitarian action, is being developed as an output of the Generation Equality Forum event on the theme “Gender equality: from Biarritz partnership to Beijing +25” to provide a clear picture of areas in which gaps exist and the actions that are needed to adequately address them.

123. Moving forward, I will continue to encourage United Nations entities to strengthen the practical impact of our work, in order to enhance cooperation, collaboration and coordination between humanitarian, development and peace actions, in particular by addressing issues concerning collective outcomes and joint programming and building greater understanding of the different principles, tools and approaches.

124. In addition, I call on Member States to continue to support a whole-of-system response by adjusting funding practices and leveraging support at the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on peacebuilding financing, scheduled to be held in 2022 during its seventy-sixth session, in order to build momentum for adequate, predictable and sustained financing for activities that promote peacebuilding through coherent development, humanitarian and peace approaches. I also encourage the continued practice of including coordination of humanitarian-development-peace efforts on the agendas of the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council to enable further progress on strengthening efforts in that regard.

IV. Funding, transparency, accountability and oversight of the United Nations development system

125. The United Nations development system repositioning exercise recognized that securing a transformative shift in the way that the system is funded is fundamental to facilitating coherent, coordinated, efficient and integrated functioning. In this regard, the 2020 quadrennial review welcomes the funding compact¹⁹ and encourages its full and effective implementation. It stresses that core resources remain the bedrock of operational activities for development, while recognizing also the need for adequate quantity and quality of voluntary funding. Two years into implementation of the compact, progress is being made, but not as rapidly as is required.

126. While progress is being made on meeting targets for overall core resources for development and for inter-agency pooled funds (up from 5 per cent to 9 per cent), concerns remain regarding the slow rate of increase in the share of voluntary funding for development-related activities (from 19.4 per cent in 2017 to 19.6 per cent in 2019), the undercapitalization of the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund (currently at 15 per cent of the 2020 target), the overreliance on a small number of contributors and the shortfall in funding for the resident coordinator system.

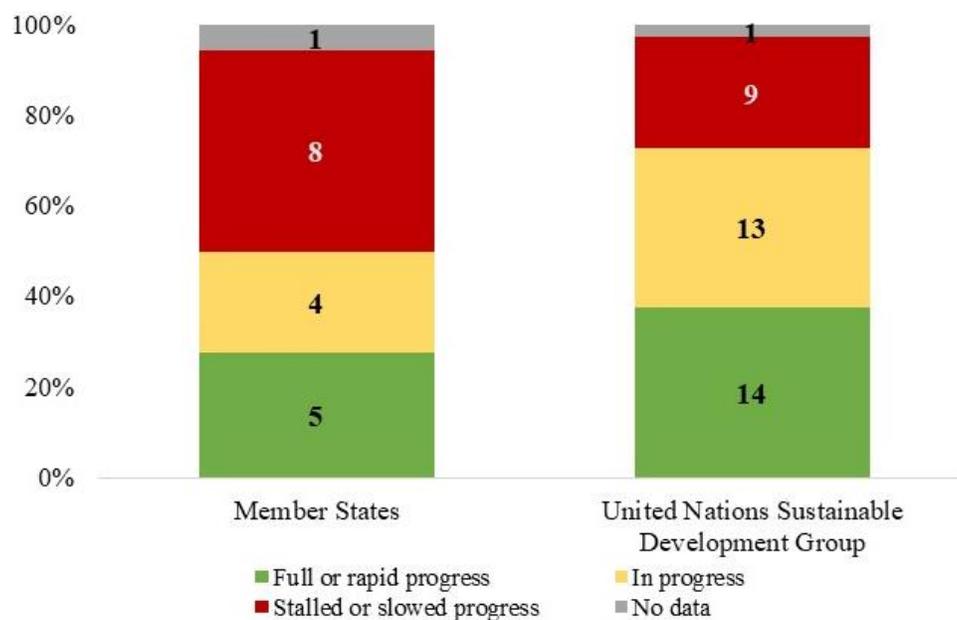
127. On the part of the United Nations development system, maximizing support for countries implementing the 2030 Agenda and advancing the funding compact demands a strong results culture, grounded in robust evaluation and reporting and the proper alignment of individual and collective planning. In 2020, the United Nations development system continued to invest in more consistent reporting at all levels, building a resilient information architecture, designing system-wide management and accountability frameworks and accelerating the pace at which it is realizing efficiency gains (see chap. II.C.). Further progress is needed, however, to strengthen transparency through better results-based management, stronger system-wide data capabilities, system-wide evaluations and enhanced coherence among governing bodies and United Nations development system entities. The year 2021 also provides opportunities to further bolster the Economic and Social Council as an accountability platform.

A. Strengthening implementation of the funding compact

128. The funding compact is a key driver of accountability. A mixed picture, however, emerges from the data on implementing commitments. Based on the latest data (2020 funding data are not yet available), there has been some progress on 50 per cent of Member States commitments and 73 per cent of United Nations Sustainable Development Group commitments (see figure 23).

¹⁹ The funding compact indicator table is available at www.un.org/ecosoc/en/content/2021-secretary-general%E2%80%99s-report-implementation-qcpr.

Figure 23
Progress on funding compact commitments



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021.

129. In 2019, Member States' financial contributions to United Nations operational activities for development totalled \$38.1 billion. A little over half of those contributions, or \$19.6 billion, was spent on humanitarian assistance, while \$18.5 billion funded development assistance activities. Of the latter, \$5.5 billion was in core (unearmarked) funding for development activities, or 29.6 per cent of total funding for development-related activities, just below the 30 per cent funding compact target (see table 3). However, when considering only voluntary (versus assessed) funding, that share drops to 19.6 per cent.

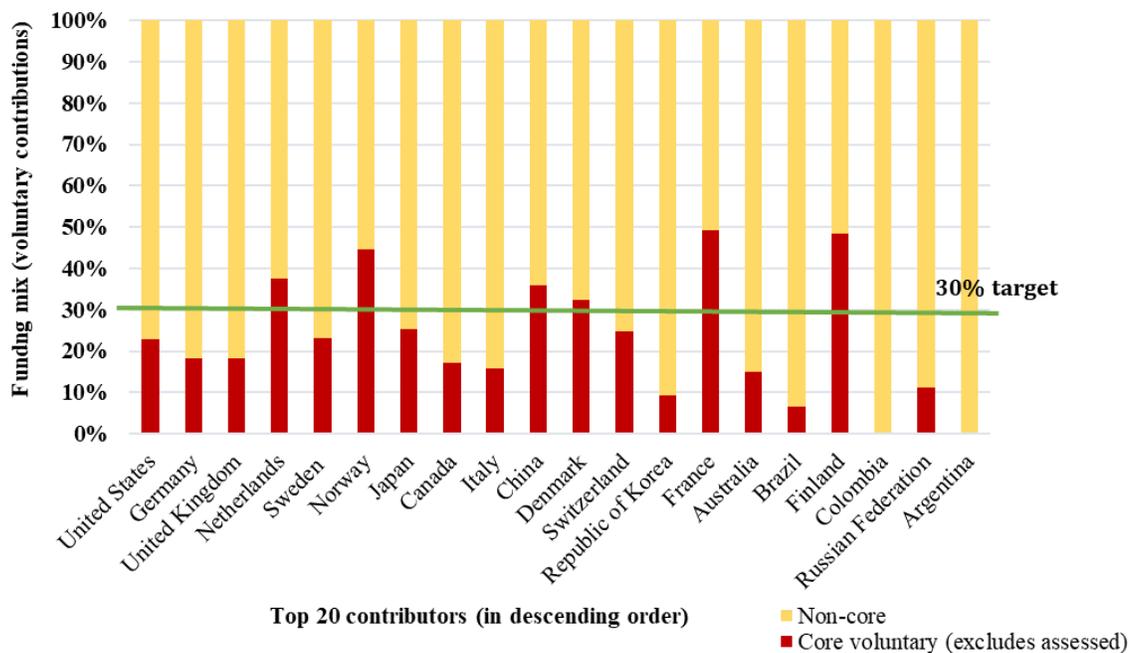
Table 3
Funding compact: Member States commitment 1

To increase core resources for the United Nations development system

Indicator	Baseline	Target	Latest value	Trend
MS. 1.1. Core share of voluntary funding for development-related activities	19.4% (2017)	30% (2023)	19.6% (2019)	↓
MS 1.2. Core share of funding for development-related activities (including assessed contributions)	27.0% (2017)	30% (2023)	29.6% (2019)	↑

130. Sixty-seven Member States provided at least 30 per cent of their voluntary funding to development activities in the form of core resources, including 6 of the top 20 contributors (see figure 24).

Figure 24
Funding mix for the top 20 contributors to United Nations development assistance activities, 2019

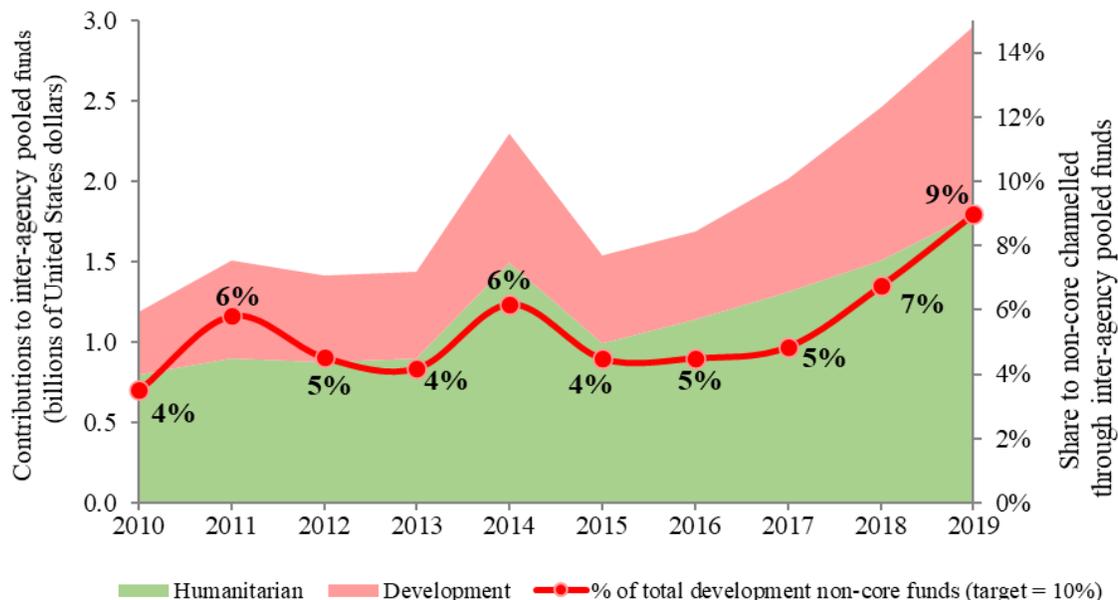


Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021.

131. The flexible nature of core funding proved indispensable as the COVID-19 crisis unfolded. Some of these core funds could be rapidly repurposed in response to the pandemic. Reprogramming other (non-core) resources, however, was more complex and sometimes not feasible owing to agreements with the individual contributors. I encourage all contributing Member States to consider allocating a larger proportion of their contributions to core resources towards meeting the targets of the funding compact, rather than providing them in the form of tightly earmarked non-core contributions.

132. I am encouraged by the efforts of many Member States to meet their commitment to double the share of their non-core contributions provided through pooled funding mechanisms. Total funding for inter-agency pooled funds in 2019 totalled \$2.96 billion, an increase of 20 per cent compared with 2018 (see figure 25). While 61 per cent of contributions to such funds went to those with a humanitarian focus, funding for development-related inter-agency pooled funds has more than doubled since 2015 and now represents 9.0 per cent of all non-core funding of United Nations development-related activities. This represents good progress towards the funding compact commitment to channel 10 per cent of non-core funding for development activities through inter-agency pooled funds by 2023.

Figure 25
Funding for inter-agency pooled funds, 2010 to 2019



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021.

133. Contributions to agency-specific thematic funds doubled over a three-year period, reaching just over \$900 million in 2019, of which \$720 million was dedicated to a development-related theme. This translates to a 5.5 per cent share of all non-core funding for development activities, compared with the funding compact commitment to a 6 per cent share by 2023 (see table 4).

134. At the same time, funding of the flagship Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund, a critical enabler of the United Nations development system reforms, remains well below the level to which Member States committed in the funding compact. In 2020, contributions to the Fund were only \$48 million, compared with the funding compact commitment of annual contributions of \$290 million. While new funds such as the complementary United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, established to finance the emergency response to the socioeconomic impacts of the crisis, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on resource availability may account for some of the lower-than-expected levels of funding, it is essential that these trends be reversed. In this regard, as we bridge the emergency response phase to the recovery and long-term sustainable development, with the winding up and off-ramping of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund into the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund, it will be essential that Member States reassert their commitment and channel resources to the latter Fund as the preeminent funding mechanism for driving joint action by the United Nations development system on interventions that are fully aligned to the transformation required by the 2030 Agenda.

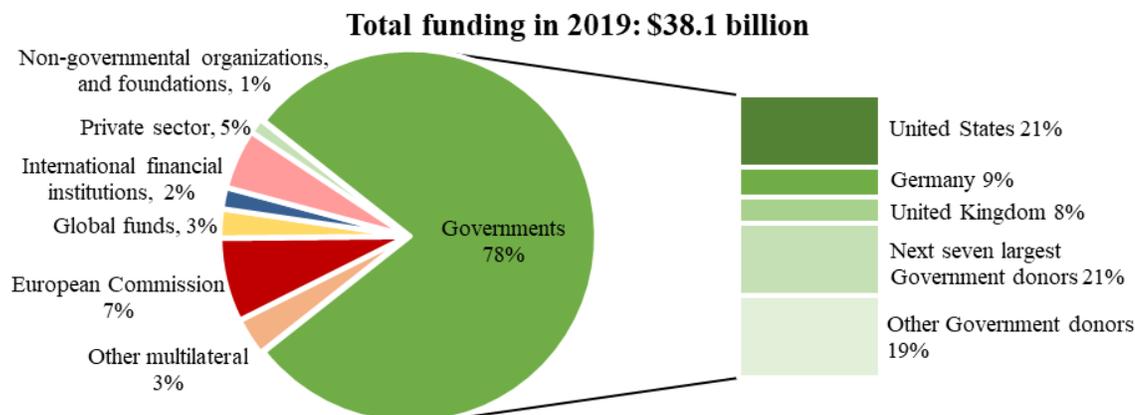
Table 4
Funding compact: Member States commitment 2

To double the share of non-core contributions that are provided through development-related pooled funds and single-agency thematic funds

Indicator	Baseline	Target	Latest value	Trend
MS 2.1. Percentage of non-core resources for development-related activities channelled through inter-agency pooled funds	5.0% (2017)	10.0% (2023)	9.0% (2019)	↑
MS 2.2. Percentage of non-core resources for development-related activities channelled through single-agency thematic funds	2.6% (2017)	6.0% (2023)	5.5% (2019)	↑
MS 2.3. Annual capitalization of the Joint Fund for the 2030 Agenda	\$43 million (2018)	\$290 million (2020)	\$43 million (2020)	↓
MS 2.4. Annual contributions to the Peacebuilding Fund	\$129 million (2018)	\$500 million (2020)	\$180 million (2020)	↓

135. Despite some positive trends in the total volume of high-quality funding, the high dependence on a few Member States for a large part of United Nations development system funding remains a concern. The top three Government contributors²⁰ accounted for nearly half of all contributions from Member States, and the top 10 contributors accounted for three quarters of funding received from the full membership (see figure 26).

Figure 26
Main groups of funding sources, 2019



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021.

136. With regard to voluntary core contributions of United Nations Sustainable Development Group entities and to inter-agency pooled and entity-specific thematic funds, trends related to broadening the funding base are moving in the wrong direction. While progress has been made in increasing the number of contributors to the resident coordinator system budget, the current number will need to be doubled if the 2021 funding compact commitment is to be met (see table 5). The system's current heavy reliance on a small number of donors for its funding is particularly worrying when combined with the continuing imbalance that exists between core and non-core funding. Heavy reliance on a few donors makes the United Nations development system funding base more exposed to risk. Strengthened and proactive engagement

²⁰ United States, Germany and United Kingdom.

of the United Nations development system is required to continue building trust with Member States and other potential contributors and to broaden the donor base.

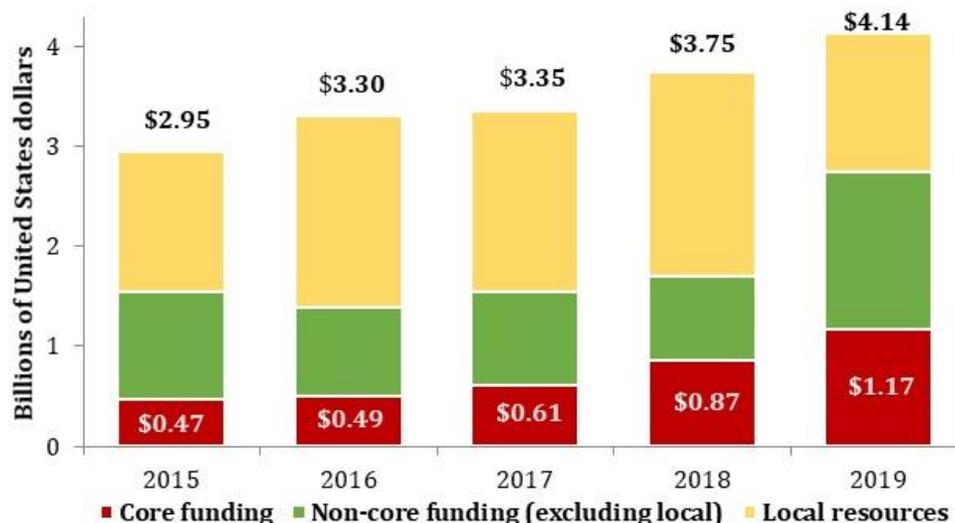
Table 5

Funding compact: Member State commitment 3**To broaden the sources of funding support to the United Nations development system**

Indicators	Baseline	Target	Latest value	Trend
MS 3.1. Percentage of United Nations Sustainable Development Group entities reporting an annual increase in the number of contributors of voluntary core resources	67% (2017)	100% (2023)	50% (2019)	↔
MS 3.2. Number of Member State contributors to development-related inter-agency pooled funds and to single-agency thematic funds	59 and 27 (2017)	100 and 50 (2021)	39 and 24 (2019)	↓
MS 3.3. Number of Member State contributors to the resident coordinator system budget	28 (2019)	100 (2021)	43 (2020)	↓

137. Funding from programme countries helps to alleviate some of the high dependency that the United Nations development system has on its top donors. I am very pleased to see that funding from programme countries reached \$4.1 billion, a very significant increase of 40 per cent since 2015 (see figure 27).

Figure 27

Funding from programme countries, 2015–2019

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021.

138. This includes \$1.4 billion in local resources for programming in contributors' own countries. Encouragingly, core funding from programme countries increased by 150 per cent over the same period, from just under \$0.5 billion in 2015 to nearly \$1.2 billion in 2019.

139. In relation to funding the resident coordinator system, there is a significant scope for improving its sustainability. I am pleased by the progress made to deliver on the three funding sources: voluntary contributions, cost-sharing and the levy. I commend those contributors that have made a strong effort to front-load contributions and to ensure that their contributions are at the appropriate level. However, voluntary

funding of the special purpose trust fund for the resident coordinator system remains below anticipated levels, with a \$72 million funding gap in 2020, despite full payment of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group cost-sharing and levy contributions exceeding initial projections. As the resident coordinator system is now at full capacity and the early results demonstrate that it is living up to expectations, the budget shortfall will need to be addressed in 2021 to avoid cash constraints. The first review of the functioning of the new resident coordinator system will also include concrete recommendations relating to its funding arrangements.

B. Delivering improved system-wide results, strengthening evaluation and improving transparency on funding flows

1. System-wide results

140. Both the funding compact and the 2020 quadrennial review call for strengthening transparency and commitment to system-wide results.

141. At the country level, annual results reports of United Nations country teams on their cooperation frameworks constitute the cornerstone of our transparency and accountability to countries. Internal data from the United Nations Development Coordination Office show that country teams produced 86 annual reports by the end of 2020, and we expect to see this figure significantly surpassed in 2021. I am concerned, however, that 25 per cent of programme country Governments report that they did not receive an annual country team results report in the previous annual cycle, and a further 30 per cent of respondents were unaware if they had. New guidelines have now been issued for country teams requesting that reports be produced within the first quarter of the year that follows the annual reporting cycle. It is my expectation that we will see 100 per cent compliance in the course of the current quadrennial review cycle.

142. Encouragingly, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey also shows that the quality of reporting has improved in almost all country categories (see figure 28). Between 61 and 64 per cent of countries state that country team results reports are structured around cooperation frameworks, linked to national results, and include up-to-date information, for example, on United Nations resource mobilization and delivery. Agreement is lowest on whether the results of the whole United Nations system are included (57 per cent agree) and if reporting includes information on resources leveraged for Sustainable Development Goal financing (52 per cent agree).

Figure 28
Improvements in reporting quality

	Response distribution			Trend in target response	
	% 2020			%	
	Yes	No	Don't know	2019	2020
Did your Government receive a report from the United Nations Resident Coordinator on the results achieved by the United Nations system in your country in the last annual cycle?	47	24	30	50	47
To what extent do you agree with the following statements about reports on your United Nations:	Agree	Disagree	Don't know	2019	2020
We receive reports on United Nations results regularly enough to meet our needs	57	31	12	51	57
The information in the reports is up to date	61	16	23	62	61
The results of the whole United Nations system are included	57	15	28	50	57
The reporting includes resources leveraged for financing the Sustainable Development Goals in the country	52	21	27	48	52
The reporting includes information on resources mobilized and delivered by the United Nations development system	63	14	23	54	63
Reporting is structured around the outcomes of the cooperation framework/United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework	64	11	25	61	64
Reporting is linked to national development results	63	13	24	56	63

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019 and 2020 surveys of programme country Governments.

143. The work of various United Nations entities at the country level is to be captured through UN-Info, the system-wide monitoring and reporting platform for tracking results on how United Nations country teams direct resources to national priorities to support the Sustainable Development Goals. All new cooperation frameworks and joint workplans are to be included in UN-Info, thereby ensuring a common result reporting baseline and improving data visualization through public websites (country and global). Country-level reporting for 2020 is due in April 2021 based on the new guidance, and will be made available on the country team pages, and on the United Nations Sustainable Development Group website, especially those using UN Info.

144. This past year, country teams have used UN-Info as the key system for COVID-19 socioeconomic response plans, with data conveyed automatically on the new public COVID-19 data portal to track the roll-out of socioeconomic response plans. UN-Info is complemented by the Development Coordination Office information management system that collects quantitative and qualitative data on country team work for country and global results reporting, including information published on public websites. However, the success of UN-Info very much depends on the number of country teams that regularly contribute their joint workplans and results to the platform and on the number of United Nations entities that invest in updating their systems in line with open-data principles. The aim will be to ensure data interoperability within entities' systems by end 2023, in keeping with the vision of the Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere. The support of individual governing bodies for these objectives is critical.

145. At the regional level, we have reframed system-wide results reporting as an integral part of the regional review and restructuring of coordination. As mentioned in chapter III, I am pleased to see the first annual regional United Nations development system results reports of system entities made available to Member

States by the regional collaborative platforms in each of the five regions.²¹ The reports will enable Member States in each region to consider annually the regional achievements of the United Nations development system.

146. At the global level, the United Nations development system continues to develop and expand common methodologies to ensure robust results-based management. In 2020, all but two responding entities reported support for the development of common approaches to measure system-wide results and harmonize indicators. Entities are increasingly using Sustainable Development Goal targets and indicators in their results-based frameworks. WFP and WHO already have their strategic plans fully aligned to the targets and indicators of the Goals. In 2020, four entities (UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and UN-Women) developed a tracking framework to monitor results with regard to a core set of Sustainable Development Goal indicators for the common chapter of their strategic plans. In 2021, the United Nations Strategic Planning Network and the Development Coordination Office will work together to revise the 2011 United Nations Development Group results-based management handbook.

147. All of these actions will help to strengthen the ability of the Chair of United Nations Sustainable Development Group to report on the contribution of the United Nations development system to the Sustainable Development Goals. This year's report of the Chair provides a first snapshot of the results that the United Nations development system helped to achieve in 2020, against a set of indicators developed as part of the COVID-19 socioeconomic response. This will be expanded to improve system-wide reporting on its contribution to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals throughout 2021.

2. Evaluation

148. The United Nations development system has made progress fulfilling its funding compact commitments and responding to the 2020 quadrennial review by increasing joint and system-wide evaluation and improving the quality of evaluations of the cooperation frameworks at the country level. There has been progress in strengthening a culture of evaluation, with increasing engagement by entities in joint and system-wide evaluations and a significantly increased percentage of corporate evaluations being made centrally available on the United Nations Evaluation Group website.

149. More than 70 joint evaluations were carried out by United Nations development system entities in 2020. Most (50) were conducted at the country level and there was an increase to 20 global-level evaluations, up from 16 in 2019. Smaller entities, and those engaged in fewer joint activities, noted constraints on increasing joint evaluations. Over 95 per cent of entities (24 out of 25) track evaluation status and management responses and over 80 per cent (21 out of 26) of entities' evaluation units meet independence standards set out by the United Nations Evaluation Group. In 2020, 80 per cent (20/25) of entities reported that over three quarters of evaluations had a management response. Similarly, 80 per cent of entities reported in 2020 that in most cases the management response was publicly available, up from 68 per cent in 2019 (see figure 29). A major focus in 2021 is on the roll-out of strengthened evaluation reports of cooperation frameworks, based on new guidance and the establishment of the system-wide evaluation office.

²¹ See ESCAP/RFSD/2020/INF/3 for the report from the Asia-Pacific region. Other 2021 regional reports are pending online publication.

Figure 29
Evaluations and management responses

	Response distribution			
	%, 2020			
	0–25%	26–50%	51–75%	Over 75%
What proportion of your entity's evaluations have a management response?	8	0	12	80
What proportion of these responses are publicly available?	12	8	0	80

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020 surveys of United Nations development system headquarters.

150. The United Nations Evaluation Group has also updated its database of evaluation reports to track evaluations specific to pooled funds or joint programmes. Recommendations and lessons extracted from these evaluations are being incorporated in the design of new pooled funds, new strategic frameworks of existing funds and knowledge products of the Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office. A good example is the Peacebuilding Fund's new strategic plan for the period 2021–2024, which was informed to a great extent by portfolio evaluations.

151. Independent system-wide evaluation is an essential component to strengthen oversight, transparency and accountability and to incentivize joint work and collective learning among United Nations development system entities. I detailed in my previous report my decision to establish the United Nations Sustainable Development Group System-wide Evaluation Office as a dedicated capacity to help coordinate system-wide evaluations.

152. The COVID-19 pandemic offered a first opportunity to test the methodology for system-wide evaluation. As the United Nations development system came together in responding to COVID-19, there was an immediate need for a system-wide assessment of the response to ensure alignment with our objective to save lives, protect societies and recover better, and course correct as needed. As a first initiative of the System-wide Evaluation Office, under the interim direction of a senior coordinator, I launched a lessons-learned and evaluability exercise on the relevance of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund. The resulting report²² is the first to assess the United Nations development system response from a system-wide approach. It demonstrates the potential of United Nations development system collaboration to achieve collective results when all members of the United Nations country team bring their expertise to inform policy engagement. Its findings and recommendations will be considered as part of the review of the Resident Coordinator System.

153. This first exercise has reaffirmed the need, and the value, of an independent system-wide evaluation office that is fully equipped to assess the system's collective support for the Sustainable Development Goals. I am requesting the concurrence by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions for the creation of a Director position to head the United Nations Sustainable Development Group System-wide Evaluation Office, supported by a small team, with a view to the office being fully operational by the end of the year. To ensure the independence and credibility of function, this will be a stand-alone office with the Director reporting directly to me, with the authority and discretion to submit reports at the appropriate level of decision-making, and with the prerogative to share reports directly with the

²² "Early lessons and evaluability of the UN COVID-19 response and recovery MPTF". Available at <http://mptf.undp.org/factsheet/fund/COV00>.

Economic and Social Council. Through these reports, the Director will keep Member States apprised of the priorities and activities of the Office.

C. Enhancing alignment of individual and collective planning, reporting and funding

154. The structured funding dialogues organized by United Nations development system entities provide a platform for interactive discussions between Member States and United Nations entities on a spectrum of issues covered in the quadrennial review. Thirteen entities, including all funds and programmes, held a structured dialogue in 2020, with the funding compact at the heart of these discussions. Several entities now produce a results matrix that tracks their progress in meeting their commitments under the compact.

155. In addition, in the past two years, there have been concerted efforts to improve the working methods of the governing bodies of United Nations development system entities vis-à-vis the repositioned United Nations development system. The most tangible progress has taken place within the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP, both in the individual Boards and the joint meeting of the Executive Boards. The core group on working methods, formed by the Presidents of the Executive Boards in 2019, prompted several changes. The decision of the Boards to hold joint informal briefings and Presidents' meetings fosters transparent consultations that address coordination and harmonization issues. Individual Board sessions are now more interactive, feature a lessons-learned component and invite diverse stakeholders and experts from the private sector and civil society.

156. I welcome and commend the United Nations entity boards that are also taking action to ensure coherence between individual entities' country programme documents and system-wide activities and results laid out in the cooperation frameworks. To this end, the Development Coordination Office has created a new cooperation framework status dashboard for United Nations partners to see the links between the documents and their stage of development. In line with the 2020 quadrennial review, UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF now have standard operating procedures to ensure that draft country programme documents submitted to the Executive Boards are accompanied by at least an advanced draft of the cooperation framework or agreed results framework. Such practices need to become more systematic and more commonplace across all United Nations entity boards.

157. Efforts to address agenda items such as United Nations development system reform in the first of their triannual sessions in 2021 show the strong commitment of Member States to aligning the strategic planning of the funds and programmes to the quadrennial review. Addressing United Nations development system reform issues and the annual results reporting of entities at annual sessions also allows holistic oversight.

158. Almost all United Nations development system entities have at least partially aligned their planning and budget cycles with the quadrennial review cycle. Some entities, including the Secretariat, noted partial alignment due to different planning cycle frequencies, while WHO noted that its governing body was discussing the alignment of its planning with the quadrennial review cycle (see figure 30). The governing bodies of specialized agencies have made various efforts to align with the rest of the United Nations development system, including by taking significant steps to increase efficiency gains through United Nations development system common business operations (see chap. II) and harmonization in thematic areas related to Sustainable Development Goal support and acceleration.

Figure 30
Alignment of United Nations development system strategic planning cycles
(Percentage)

	<i>Response distribution</i>		
	<i>%, 2020</i>		
	<i>Fully</i>	<i>Partially</i>	<i>Not at all</i>
To what extent is your entity's planning and budgetary cycle aligned with the quadrennial comprehensive policy review cycle?	40.7	55.6	3.7
Does your entity's strategic plan include reporting on the implementation of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review?	63.0	18.5	18.5

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020 survey of United Nations development system headquarters.

159. At their first regular session 2021, the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF and UN-Women stressed the importance of the United Nations development system repositioning and integrating the 2020 quadrennial review in the policies, planning, programming and monitoring of entities as they develop their new strategic plans for the period 2022–2025. It would be helpful for governing bodies to further encourage joint programme activities, including by recommending that each country office ensure that a minimum proportion of its portfolios is comprised of joint programmes. United Nations development system entities and their governing boards can also deliver on their commitment to collective results by making every effort to fully align their upcoming strategic plans to the 2020 quadrennial review mandates and guidance.

160. I was also pleased to learn that at the first regular sessions of 2021, the Presidents of the Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP stated that those Boards would pursue cooperation and coordination with the executive boards of other funds, programmes and specialized agencies and continue to seek ways to improve Board effectiveness through pragmatic, results-oriented, proactive approaches to providing guidance. Member States may wish to continue to strengthen integration of the governance of the Executive Boards.

D. Further bolstering the operational activities segment of the Economic and Social Council as an accountability platform

161. The 2020 quadrennial review resolution strengthens the responsibility and prerogative of the Economic and Social Council in line with the Charter of the United Nations. It reaffirms the role of the Council and its operational activities segment as an accountability platform for the United Nations development system when carrying out operational activities for development.

162. Over the past quadrennial review cycle, Member States reinvigorated the functioning of the operational activities segment to ensure that it remains a forum for interactive discussion and feedback on United Nations development activities in support of the achievement by countries of the 2030 Agenda. To strengthen linkages with other governance mechanisms, in its resolution [72/305](#), the General Assembly changed the segment's timing to be held close to the annual sessions of the Executive Boards of the funds and programmes. It also built on the call made in resolution [72/279](#) to ensure that the segment provided an opportunity for regular evidence-based reporting and dialogue on quadrennial review implementation and with the Chair of United Nations Sustainable Development Group. The segment is now much more

interactive, and includes a dedicated session with resident coordinators and United Nations country team members from all regions, along with broadened participation of United Nations development system executive heads beyond those of funds and programmes primarily headquartered in New York. I will work with the Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council to build on this progress, which was facilitated by the virtual nature of the segment in 2020, and include participation of actors from civil society and the private sector.

163. The General Assembly is currently reviewing the role of the Economic and Social Council through deliberations that include follow-up to the 2030 Agenda and review of the high-level political forum on sustainable development. Following the outcome of this process, there will be opportunities to reinforce the Council's accountability role through the segment by improving the format and contents; adjusting the segment's timing to enable it to feed into the reports of the Boards; strengthening linkages between the Council's accountability functions and those of the Assembly; and requesting consistent reporting and action-oriented recommendations from United Nations development system entities.

164. As part of overhauling the quadrennial review monitoring and reporting framework, I will encourage United Nations development system entities to more fully align their new strategic plan indicators with those of the quadrennial review and provide system-wide results reports to their governing bodies, which will then be submitted to the Economic and Social Council.

E. Implementation of key strategies in United Nations development system operations

165. The 2020 quadrennial review places an increased focus on a number of areas that speak to the ability of the United Nations development system to strengthen its own performance against critical corporate commitments, particularly as it relates to achieving gender parity, ensuring environmental sustainability and preventing sexual violence and abuse. I welcome this important step by the General Assembly and will continue to encourage the United Nations development system to deliver consistent improvements in these three crucial areas.

1. Achieving gender parity across the United Nations development system

166. Implementation of the 2017 system-wide strategy on gender parity is showing steady progress. We have maintained gender parity across our senior-most ranks of full-time Under-Secretaries-General and Assistant Secretaries-General, a result achieved in January 2020. We have also achieved and maintained parity in resident coordinator appointments and reached a record number of women heads and deputy heads of peace operations (24 out of 50 encumbered positions). The overall representation of women in the international professional and higher categories of the United Nations system reached 47.3 per cent in 2019 (up from 46.6 per cent in 2018). United Nations country teams have also taken various actions to enhance gender parity in the recruitment, retention, progression and talent management of staff, including by producing, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a gender parity compact, designed to achieve full gender parity by 2026 and signed by all heads of agencies of the country team.

167. The global pandemic has brought additional challenges and opportunities. Over 71 per cent of United Nations gender focal points that participated in a survey conducted by UN-Women in September 2020 pointed out that the COVID-19 crisis had negatively affected progress towards gender parity and the creation of enabling working environments in their respective entities. At the same time, the pandemic

made flexible working a reality across the United Nations system and offered a window of opportunity for organizational culture change. Country teams have undertaken specific actions to build an enabling environment for all, conducting communication campaigns, advocating, engaging in dialogue and organizing workshops. More immediate and holistic support is needed to transform organizational culture to attract and retain more women, especially in the field. I expect the entire United Nations system to step up implementation of the Enabling Environment Guidelines for the United Nations system and the field-specific Enabling Environment Guidelines to help increase representation of women and accelerate efforts to reach gender parity throughout the United Nations system.

2. Ensuring environmental sustainability of United Nations development system operations

168. The 2020 quadrennial review requests the United Nations development system to address the environmental sustainability of operations, building on system-wide efforts that have already been put in place. Since 2009, the annual Greening the Blue report has provided a snapshot of the United Nations system's environmental sustainability in the management of its facilities and operations. It has expanded over the years to include data on climate emissions, waste, pollution, water and biodiversity from nearly 60 entities. To make joint progress that goes beyond individualized entity efforts, the Strategy for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System, 2020–2030, was adopted in 2019. Phase I focuses on management and phase II, to be rolled out in 2021, addresses the full picture of internal environmental and social sustainability in policies, programming, facilities and operations. The strategy is supported by the United Nations Secretariat climate action plan 2020–2030, which is aimed at achieving an ambitious reduction in emissions from the Secretariat's operations, in line with recommendations from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

169. Despite progress, at the country level only 18 per cent of operations management teams reported having a premises environmental strategy in place in 2019, citing a lack of financial resources and capacity and fragmented locations as the main challenges. The move to set up common country premises should spur further efforts on our path to ensure that every country team has a plan in place to reduce its environmental footprint, following the example of the environmental strategy for field missions launched in 2016.

3. Preventing sexual exploitation and abuse

170. In reforming the resident coordinator system, the responsibility for preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse was explicitly included in resident coordinators' terms of reference and in management and accountability frameworks in 2019. United Nations country team members are instructed to notify the resident coordinators of any allegations they receive.

171. As set out in my annual report on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in February of this year, 91 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse relating to personnel of United Nations entities (other than peace operations and special political missions) and their implementing partners were reported, compared with 107 in 2019. Of the 91 allegations, 19 related to 2020 and 72 related to previous years or unknown periods. The number of allegations of sexual abuse decreased from 38 in 2019 to 17 in 2020, and the number of child victims decreased from 38 in 2019 to 15 in 2020. Of the allegations, 7 have been substantiated, 9 were

unsubstantiated, 35 are under investigation, 21 are at the preliminary assessment stage, 1 is to be determined and 18 are closed.²³

172. My 2017 strategy to combat sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations personnel²⁴ is clear: a zero-tolerance policy applies to everyone in the organization. As of 2020, 119 out of 129 country teams reported having a prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse action plan in place and a dedicated inter-agency task force, coordination mechanism or focal point. We will continue to provide guidance and training to support them in their role.

173. I will also continue to work with United Nations entities to advance the United Nations System Mental Health and Well-being Strategy and the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, addressed in greater detail in chapter V.

4. Delivering on our collective commitments

174. As we advance into this new quadrennial review cycle, it is clear that more concerted action and efforts are needed by both Member States and the United Nations development system to implement the funding compact and to strengthen system-wide results, evaluation, transparency and accountability.

175. Over the past two years, we have made encouraging progress, but advances remain uneven, and some of the critical levers of change still need more determined commitment. Our monitoring efforts clearly show where more attention is required to close the gaps. I call on all entities to thoroughly review commitments and ensure that the required steps are being taken to deliver on each of them. All entities need to customize their individual reporting on funding compact implementation to their governing bodies, in the context of the structured funding dialogues. I am asking the Development Coordination Office to continue to facilitate regular follow-up with entities and Member States to monitor implementation and encourage progress.

176. I also call on all Member States to continue implementing the funding compact, individually and collectively. During a time of global crisis, it is critical that we do not lower ambitions to improve the quality of funding to the United Nations and ensure that it can be a driver of coherence and results. While some Member States have clearly reviewed policies and funding practices in the light of the compact, I count on Member States and entities to sustain the momentum of the compact and ensure that we stay the course on our mutual commitments.

177. Today more than ever, we must deliver at scale. The funding compact marked a milestone in the drive to better results. United Nations development system entities have internalized the compact, and we have made progress on transparency and accountability, but there are realities we must recognize. We will not achieve some commitments by year's end. We need to accelerate our individual and collective efforts and strengthen the case for Member States to achieve theirs. Funding must increase considerably so that the United Nations development system has the resources and capacity to support Member States in achieving the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals in this decade of action.

V. An integrated whole-of-system response in support of the decade of action

178. In the 2020 quadrennial review, Member States recognized the progress we have made together in reforming the United Nations development system. The revitalized

²³ See [A/75/754](#), para. 68.

²⁴ [A/71/818](#) and [A/71/818/Corr.1](#).

resident coordinator system and the new generation of United Nations country teams demonstrated their increased agility and a more integrated, focused approach through the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The necessary changes at the regional level are in place and significant progress has been made in strengthening our support through our multi-country offices. I commend the principals of the United Nations development system for their tremendous commitment and contribution. In this context and at the beginning of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, it is appropriate that the 2020 quadrennial review marks a significant shift in focus, from the structural changes required to advance the reforms to the transformative policy and technical support expected of the United Nations development system to accelerate progress towards achieving the Goals during the decade of action.

179. The challenges the world is facing are daunting. The COVID-19 crisis, and the inequitable global response that has followed, are causing immense hardship and disruption and have set back our efforts to advance the Sustainable Development Goals by many years. This is particularly the case in relation to eradicating poverty, which is estimated to have increased by 131 million people in 2020 alone,²⁵ and the advancement of women's rights, where progress may have been set back by a generation.²⁶ The pandemic has highlighted the fragility of our current systems – economic, social and political – and made crystal clear the folly of pursuing development pathways that produce extreme inequality and fuel a war on nature; but the path forward is also clear. With the 2030 Agenda as our North Star, COVID-19 recovery efforts provide a unique opportunity to make bold changes towards more inclusive, gender-equal and low-carbon economies, underpinned by accountability, respect for human rights and effective international cooperation.

180. Against this backdrop, the 2020 quadrennial review highlights critical areas in which the United Nations development system is expected to step up during the current cycle. It calls for support for recovery efforts that can supercharge the implementation of the Goals. It also requests the United Nations development system to focus in particular on crucial investments in education, health, social protection and decent work; in climate action, sustainable and inclusive economic growth, the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the energy transition; in advancing gender equality and tackling discrimination; and in leveraging the power of digital transformation.

181. To meet the expectations of Member States as they seek to recover lost ground and secure a great leap towards sustainable development, the United Nations development system will need to leverage the full potential of the reforms, move its provision of integrated policy and programmatic support to the next level, strengthen its offer with regard to capacity development, intensify support to Governments to mobilize investment and technologies and facilitate strengthened partnerships with other international institutions, the private sector, academia, civil society, local authorities and the world's young people.

182. After three years of reforms, the foundations are now securely in place and I am confident that the United Nations development system is ready to rise to this challenge set out in the 2020 quadrennial review. Combined with the right level of ambition and political will from Governments, partners and society at large, together we can make this a decade of transformation for people and planet.

²⁵ See United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2021*.

²⁶ World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2021* (Geneva, 2021). Available at http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf.

A. Towards integrated transformative support for the Sustainable Development Goals

183. The United Nations development system has shown its ability to adapt to the needs and priorities of programme countries as it supported them in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Programme country Governments have reported that the United Nations contribution to national efforts in the past two years has been most impactful in the areas of health and well-being (Sustainable Development Goal 3), food security (Goal 2) and education (Goal 4), followed by poverty eradication (Goal 1), gender equality (Goal 5) and climate change (Goal 13) (see figure 31).

Figure 31
Past and future United Nations assistance and contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals

Sustainable Development Goal	Top five areas in which the United Nations contribution has been most significant over the past two years	Top five areas in which United Nations assistance will be required over the next four years		
	2020	2020	2019	Change in percentage points
3 (Health and well-being)	68%	59%	45%	▲ 15
8 (Productive employment and sustainable economic growth)	24%	52%	42%	▲ 10
4 (Education)	46%	48%	47%	■ 1
1 (Poverty eradication)	42%	44%	49%	▼ -5
2 (Food security, nutrition and eradicating hunger)	51%	42%	36%	▲ 7
13 (Combating climate change and its impacts)	42%	39%	52%	▼ -13
17 (Convening and leveraging partnership for the goals)	18%	34%	31%	■ 3
9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure)	12%	33%	20%	▲ 13
6 (Water, sanitation and hygiene)	27%	25%	23%	■ 2
16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions)	32%	25%	34%	▼ -9
5 (Gender equality)	42%	20%	29%	▼ -10
7 (Affordable and clean energy)	11%	20%	17%	■ 3
10 (Reducing inequalities)	15%	19%	29%	▼ -11
14 (Sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources)	6%	17%	15%	■ 2
11 (Sustainable cities and communities)	11%	12%	14%	■ -2
15 (Sustainable use of land, ecosystems and forests)	6%	12%	15%	■ -3
12 (Responsible consumption and production)	4%	10%	10%	■ 1

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019 and 2020 surveys of programme country Governments.

184. For the next four years, programme countries report that United Nations development system support will especially be needed in the areas of health and well-being (Goal 3), decent work and economic growth (Goal 8), education (Goal 4), poverty eradication (Goal 1) and food security (Goal 2), which are among the areas most critically affected by the pandemic. With variance across regions and countries, these Goals were also the most frequently cited in 2019 (see figure 32), although combating climate change and its impacts (Goal 13) was given greater importance that year.

Figure 32
Future United Nations assistance and contribution related to the Sustainable Development Goals in country groupings, ranked from most frequently to least frequently selected



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020 survey of programme country Governments.

Note: Based on responses regarding the top five areas in which United Nations assistance will be required.

185. In responding to these priorities, it is essential that the United Nations development system account for the interconnections between sectors and goals, the centrality of gender equality and the interdependence of the three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental. This demands a new way of examining challenges and advancing national planning and policy. Central to this is a systems approach to sustainable development, as called for in the 2019 *Global Sustainable Development Report*. Over the coming period, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group will continue to strengthen capacity, knowledge and skills among United Nations development system staff in this area to ensure that the system itself is fully attuned to the type of transformation demanded by the 2030 Agenda.

186. It is also key that the United Nations development system focus more on providing high-quality, integrated policy advice and support that leverages the comparative advantages and capacities of United Nations entities and accelerates the shift away from a traditional single agency direct support and service provision model. New instruments or the recasting of those already in place, such as common country analyses and cooperation frameworks, already embody this shift and are having a knock-on effect on the approach of United Nations entities. Over 60 per cent of United Nations development system entities report having simplified and harmonized agency-specific programming and reporting instruments based on cooperation framework guidelines. Ninety-one per cent have taken steps to support the development of common approaches and definitions and harmonized indicators to measure system-wide results. Some entities, however, commented on the challenge of harmonizing programming and reporting in the context of four different results frameworks: national development plans, United Nations development system entity strategic plans (including country programme documents, where they exist), cooperation frameworks and donor plans when and if they are applicable. We will continue to identify opportunities to simplify and harmonize these frameworks.

B. Raising ambition to tackle poverty and inequality, leaving no one behind

187. The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to the first upsurge in global poverty in more than two decades. Underlying and intersecting inequalities, including gender inequality, have meant that many of those people and segments of the population who were facing discrimination or were marginalized in society before the pandemic suffered the most. The 2020 quadrennial review places renewed emphasis on each of these issues and underscores that collective efforts are essential to support countries with transformative policymaking that can build inclusive societies and economies, leaving no one behind.

1. Turning the corner on poverty eradication and investing in human well-being

188. Addressing the weaknesses in current systems of health care, education and social protection, as well as systemic discrimination and unequal power relations that were laid bare by the COVID-19 pandemic, is central to eradicating poverty, one of the greatest global challenges. As Governments leverage new resources to support investment-led recoveries, fresh attention must be placed on protecting the dignity of all persons and their rights to an adequate standard of living, increasing the investment in these services and examining new ways to support their effective and inclusive provision, including by making use of new technologies, such as big data and digital connectivity, and investing in areas with a multiplier impact, such as the care economy.

189. With more than half the world's population still without access to social protection, we can no longer ignore the urgency of looking at poverty reduction and building resilience from a multidimensional perspective. The United Nations development system is working to step up its offer in this area. In 2021, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group will elaborate a coherent, system-wide strategy to help countries implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including social protection floors, as requested in the 2020 quadrennial review. Furthermore, in the context of the Initiative on Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond, ILO is leading efforts to identify concrete steps for strengthening social protection systems, boosting decent work and reducing poverty. This work will culminate in a high-level meeting convened with UNDP and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development on the margins of the high-level political forum on sustainable development in July 2021. It demonstrates a broader commitment to strengthening United Nations development system capacities in the area of macroeconomic analysis and support for productive employment.

190. The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly exposed underinvestment in health and health systems. Even before the pandemic, at least half of the world's population was still without full coverage of essential health services, and over 800 million people were spending at least 10 per cent of their household budgets to pay for health care. The world must draw the hard lessons of this crisis and immediately invest in equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics, in universal health coverage that includes mental health, and in health emergency preparedness. WHO has been leading the global health response to COVID-19 through its knowledge and expertise, and United Nations country teams, under the leadership of the resident coordinator and with WHO and UNICEF support, will continue to play an important role in enabling vaccine equity and the roll-out of national vaccination programmes in 145 countries through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility. Through other joint efforts to advance Sustainable Development Goal 3, including mental health, such as the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All, the United Nations development system's convening power, knowledge and expertise can be better leveraged to support countries in achieving universal health coverage by 2030.

191. Exacerbating a pre-pandemic learning crisis, education has been disrupted on an unprecedented scale, which threatens to reverse progress on reducing the number of out-of-school children, especially girls. The crisis put a spotlight on unacceptable limits on the right to education, along with gaps in education provision and financing globally, and demonstrated the urgent need for transformative change to educational systems and curricula. At the Global Education Meeting convened by UNESCO in October 2020, Member States highlighted concrete areas for immediate action, while the UNESCO Futures of Education initiative will release a flagship report later this year on how knowledge, education and learning must be reimagined in a world of increasing complexity, uncertainty and precarity. In addition, UNICEF has launched new efforts to bridge digital learning divides, leveraging the UNICEF-International Telecommunication Union Giga initiative, as well as the Generation Unlimited partnership. Together with UNESCO and UNICEF, I am also working to advance an initiative aimed at placing access to digital learning and skills at the heart of recovery efforts, as in nine of the world's most populous developing countries.²⁷ More broadly, a review of the global education collaboration and monitoring mechanism is under way, aimed at enhancing efficiency, fostering stronger synergies and scaling up

²⁷ UNESCO, "Scaling up digital learning and skills in the world's most populous countries to drive education recovery" (4 April 2021). Available at <https://en.unesco.org/news/scaling-digital-learning-and-skills-worlds-most-populous-countries-drive-education-recovery>.

cooperation among global education partners to support Member State priorities and efforts.²⁸ Together, these measures provide a unique opportunity to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations development system and its partners to bring support to quality education for all to a new level.

192. Conscious that we are in danger of a digital divide that will reinforce social and economic divides between and within countries, the quadrennial review places emphasis for the first time on United Nations development system support for digital technology for sustainable development. About half of the world's population remains offline, the majority in Africa and the Asia and the Pacific regions, and there are further rural-urban, gender and youth-older persons digital gulfs. As technology transforms our world, the United Nations development system must support Governments in prioritizing investment in digital literacy and infrastructure. To that end, I launched my Road Map for Digital Cooperation in June 2020, which promotes a vision of an inclusive, sustainable digital future for all; and several United Nations entities are already working to strengthen the United Nations development system offer on digital transformation. Accelerating digital connectivity of schools through the Giga initiative is one key element of the Road Map. Furthermore, UNDP has served as the United Nations institutional lead of the Task Force on the Digital Financing of the Sustainable Development Goals that I launched as a part of my road map for financing the 2030 Agenda, released in 2019, and which has produced actionable recommendations to leverage digitalization and financial technology (fintech) for sustainable development. The United Nations Legal Identity Agenda task force has developed the "One United Nations" model towards legal identity consisting of a holistic model of birth-to-death registration, which can be further accelerated by widespread and appropriate development of new digital technologies and digitized systems. Additionally, UNDP in 2020 launched its first digital strategy, which will serve as a key part of its integrator offer.²⁹ Digital technologies also open the door for members of the wider public to increasingly participate in the design and implementation of their country's development programme. Resident coordinators are requested to facilitate the active, meaningful participation of local communities, in particular those being left behind. Innovative tools and information technologies can expand participation, including in the development of cooperation frameworks, closing the access gap for those who are still left out of the digital revolution.

2. Leaving no one behind

193. Given the increasing complexity, uncertainty and precarity of our world, as previously referenced, dedicated measures and action are needed to achieve inclusive societies and economies.

194. Accordingly, 25 out of 26 United Nations entity strategic plans define concrete approaches for reaching the furthest behind, and 21 out of 24 entities report annually to their governing bodies on progress in this area. At the country level, 91 per cent of programme country Governments reported that the United Nations development system has assisted them in identifying those furthest behind, and 92 per cent indicated that it had actually helped them to reach those furthest behind. Eighty-four per cent of programme country Governments agreed that the United Nations development system COVID-19 socioeconomic response had targeted at-risk groups. At the same time, analysis by the United Nations Sustainable Development Group shows that these actions were often incomplete, addressing primarily women and children, with insufficient attention paid to other marginalized groups or intersecting

²⁸ UNESCO, "Education post-COVID-19: extraordinary session of the Global Education Meeting" (22 September 2020). Available at <https://en.unesco.org/news/education-post-covid-19-extraordinary-session-global-education-meeting-2020-gem>.

²⁹ See <https://digitalstrategy.undp.org/how.html>.

vulnerabilities. Forty-three per cent of socioeconomic response plans developed by October 2020 had yet to translate into targeted interventions across the five response pillars.³⁰ Similarly, while 70 per cent of such plans included human rights analysis, only 32 per cent mainstreamed a rights-based approach into concrete measures throughout the plan.³¹ These results indicate that specific attention and focus, along with additional support and training, are essential to fully translate the leave-no-one-behind principle and the rights-based approach into our policy and programmatic support, in keeping with my call to action on human rights.

195. Recognizing that 80 per cent of the world's persons with disabilities live in developing countries, the 2020 quadrennial review guides the United Nations development system in mainstreaming the inclusion of persons with disabilities into our work, in particular at the country level. Following the launch of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, we developed and rolled out an accountability scorecard on disability inclusion to all country teams. Reporting by 57 entities and 7 early roll-out United Nations country teams for the 2019 programme year shows that the Strategy has triggered positive action, across programmes and operations. At the end of 2020, all country teams reported for the first time on implementation of the Strategy through the accountability scorecard, which will create a global United Nations baseline on disability inclusion, as well as planned actions for advancing progress in 2021 and beyond. We are already seeing progress in the area of joint programming, leveraging financing from the fund of the United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and from the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund. Active consultation with organizations of persons with disabilities, disability-inclusive procurement and communications have been identified as key areas in which significant progress is needed, and specific policy and technical guidance is being provided to meet these gaps.

196. The United Nations is also seeking to strengthen its ability to work for and with young people, given that today the world hosts the largest generation of youth ever, close to 90 per cent of whom live in developing countries. With poverty, food shortages, unemployment, interrupted education and lost opportunities resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, and an unfolding climate and biodiversity crisis, the future of an entire generation is at risk. Many young people who are advocating for justice and action to advance the Sustainable Development Goals are also facing challenges to their right to peaceful assembly and to freedom of expression, as part of a broader trend of narrowing civic space. The first stocktaking report on the implementation of the United Nations Youth Strategy demonstrated that there is strong momentum across the United Nations system on the youth and Sustainable Development Goals agenda at all levels, but it also highlighted the need for more concerted efforts to strengthen how the United Nations works with youth, particularly disadvantaged and marginalized groups. Over the course of the quadrennial review cycle, I expect all United Nations entities and country teams to accelerate implementation of the Strategy across all foundational and programmatic priority areas.

197. Quality, timely, relevant, open and disaggregated data on countries' progress towards sustainable development and other targets is central to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and reaching the furthest behind first. The operations of national statistical offices in many countries were already facing serious resource constraints and gaps in data collection before being severely disrupted by the pandemic in 2020, resulting in the postponement or even cancellation of key data collection efforts. From the perspective of Governments, in 2020, 83 per cent of

³⁰ Health first, protecting people, economic response and recovery, macroeconomic response and multilateral collaboration, and social cohesion and community resilience.

³¹ United Nations Sustainable Development Group, human rights review of United Nations country team COVID-19 socioeconomic response plans (10 November 2020).

respondents deemed United Nations development system support in this area to be adequate. This is consistent with the fact that 96 per cent of United Nations country teams were helping to strengthen national statistical capacities, including to a lesser extent on direct data collection (see figure 33). However, agreed workplans to coordinate and strengthen national statistical capacity exist in only 18.5 per cent of country teams.

Figure 33
United Nations country team responses regarding support for national statistical capacity, 2020

(Percentage)

	Yes	No
Does the United Nations country team provide support to national statistical capacity?	96.2	3.8
Does the United Nations country team have an agreed workplan to coordinate and strengthen national statistical capacity?	18.5	81.5
Type of support provided:		
Capacity development	96.8	3.2
Direct data collection/survey administration	56	44.0
Financial support	66.4	33.6
Other	27.2	72.8

Source: Development Coordination Office, based on official data from the Information Management System.

198. In response to the current crisis, the United Nations development system will work closely with national statistical offices in a collective effort to help create resilient and sustainable information architectures based on statistics, geospatial information and, where appropriate, big data. This includes supporting the modernization of data collection, processing and dissemination, the upgrade of skill sets at the national level, the strengthening of data governance and stewardship and the sharing of best practices. Resident coordinators, country teams and national statistical offices are getting a technical support boost thanks to a major effort by the regional commissions, other entities and offices, and the Global Network of Data Officers and Statisticians launched in October 2020, led by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Through the Data For Now initiative, the United Nations will also increase the use of robust methods and tools that improve the timeliness, coverage, inclusiveness and quality of Sustainable Development Goal data at the country level, working closely with key partners such as the World Bank, the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network. The United Nations World Data Forum, to be hosted by Switzerland in October 2021, provides further opportunities to reinvigorate the push for strengthened Sustainable Development Goal data systems.

3. Accelerating efforts on gender equality and the rights of all women and girls

199. The pandemic has disproportionately affected women and girls, illustrating just how deeply gender inequality remains embedded in the world's political, social and economic systems. Women's labour force participation has regressed, the feminization of poverty deepened and the burden of unpaid care work escalated, as have horrifying levels of male violence against women and girls, which I highlighted

in my call for peace in homes around the world. The past year has also, however, highlighted the positive outcomes of gender-balanced leadership for all, leveraging the capacities of societies as a whole to address critical challenges. The recovery and reset from this crisis must accelerate implementation of Goal 5, through the building blocks of realizing women's full and equal rights, ensuring equal participation, advancing inclusive economies, urgently addressing the emergency that is violence against women and supporting the intergenerational transition to those advocating for a more just and equal world. The United Nations development system has a crucial role to play in this regard, in terms of advocacy, the strengthening of norms and policy, and programming. However, analysis of current United Nations development system performance levels on gender equality shows a mixed picture.

200. In terms of United Nations policy and programming support, we can see that while gender equality remained the most common focus of joint programmes, the proportion of cooperation frameworks featuring gender-specific results at the outcome level decreased to 65.9 per cent in 2020, down from 72.3 per cent in 2019. For United Nations socioeconomic response plans, analysis shows that all plans identified women as a vulnerable group and 79 per cent recognized gender equality as a cross-cutting priority, yet only one fourth mainstreamed gender equality across all response plan pillars, and 9.3 per cent included a gender analysis of groups furthest behind.³² In terms of joint programming, the Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls, a flagship United Nations development system initiative in partnership with the European Union, has delivered concrete results even in the face of the challenges of mobility restrictions and increased violence in recent months. A midpoint review of the first country programmes in Latin America and Africa found that the Initiative has been successful as a model of integrated delivery, making gender equality the responsibility of the country team as a whole. Moving forward, we will continue to refine the Initiative and ensure that lessons learned inform other joint Sustainable Development Goal initiatives.

201. We are also seeing progress in boosting expenditure on gender equality in inter-agency funding mechanisms. The explicit emphasis on the gender equality marker, combined with the establishment of a 30 per cent funding target, led to 65 per cent of allocated funding going to proposals with gender equality as their principal objective in the second call of the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund. In line with my call to action on human rights, the system is coordinating around two strategic interventions on gender equality: the repeal of all discriminatory laws, and the consistent use of temporary special measures, including quotas, to achieve the full and equal participation of women in all levels of decision-making in public life. United Nations development system and secretariat entities, in coordination with the Development Coordination Office, are developing and piloting the tools needed to support United Nations country teams. The full, equal and meaningful participation of women in achieving and sustaining peace remains another key priority for the United Nations, and is essential for successful peacekeeping, for peacebuilding and for laying the foundations for sustainable development.

202. The United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women 2.0 and its country-level equivalent provide a further insight into United Nations performance on gender equality. In 2020, as in 2019, 39 United Nations development system entities reported on the Action Plan accountability framework. Over 80 per cent of them exceeded or met requirement ratings for performance indicators in the areas of audit, gender-responsive performance management, policy and strategic planning, and gender-related

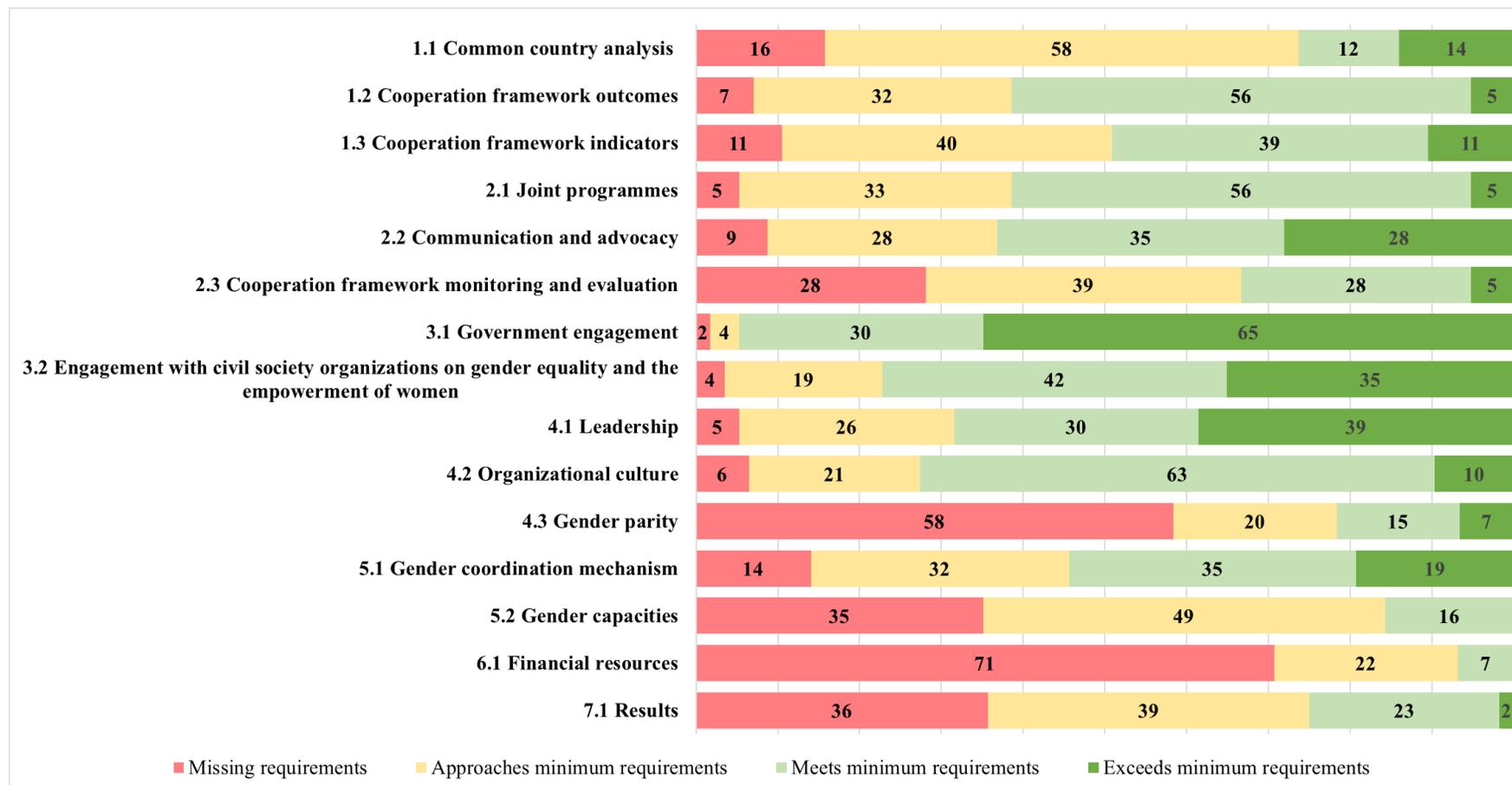
³² United Nations Sustainable Development Group, technical note on gender mainstreaming into the United Nations country team response to COVID-19 (forthcoming).

Sustainable Development Goal results. There was a noteworthy improvement in evaluation. Of concern, however, is that ratings remained significantly lower for indicators measuring resource tracking, resource allocation and gender parity, underscoring the need for targeted action and the further integration of gender perspectives across all areas of work.

203. In terms of the United Nations country team System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 38 country teams reported in 2020. The number of country teams undertaking comprehensive assessments under the Action Plan conducted at the planning stage of cooperation frameworks is steadily increasing and now stands at 60 country teams in the past four years (2017–2020).³³ Of these, only 56.7 per cent either met or exceeded requirements in at least half of the 15 performance indicators (see figure 34). While this shows a slight improvement on 2019, it is still well below the target of 75 per cent for 2020 established in the funding compact. A major effort will be needed to ensure gender mainstreaming at the country level.

³³ Country teams are expected to complete the Action Plan comprehensive assessments once per cooperation framework cycle, usually at the beginning of the cycle.

Figure 34
United Nations country team System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women performance 2017–2020
 (Percentage)



Source: UN-Women, 2021.

204. Overall, as we pursue quadrennial review implementation, we must step up our performance on gender equality, ensuring that the rights of women and a gender perspective are integrated across our work on all Sustainable Development Goals, including the building blocks outline. In 2021, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group is committed to ensuring a common United Nations voice on the centrality of gender equality and human rights; their systematic integration in inter-agency analysis, planning, implementation and evaluation; and integrated delivery that places gender equality as a shared priority and common goal in all programmes. Most importantly, I expect to see improved performance translate into a measurable difference in the lives of women and girls.

C. Accelerating the just transition to sustainable economies and strengthening preparedness for future crises

205. The 2020 quadrennial review directed the United Nations development system to make confronting the climate emergency a central aspect of our work, not only at the global level but also regionally and in every country.

206. My Climate Action Team, together with the Development Coordination Office, has been stepping up outreach and engagement with resident coordinators and United Nations country teams to advance climate change priorities at the country level. Increasingly, country teams are supporting the preparation of enhanced nationally determined contributions, long-term low emission development strategies and national adaptation plans. Still, only 75 out of 130 common country assessments include a specific examination of environment and climate change factors. Going forward, the cooperation frameworks will serve as a primary vehicle for United Nations climate change support to Governments at the country level. At the regional level, several issue-based coalitions focused on climate change, the environment and resilience provide a regional platform for United Nations entities to promote coordinated support for Member States and country teams. In addition, to expand the depth and breadth of our reach, the 2021 workplan of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group envisages a detailed review of the United Nations climate response at the country level and the development of a strategy to deliver climate support to programme countries. This includes a commitment to mainstreaming a more climate- and environment-responsive approach in operations, programmes and cooperation frameworks.

207. As part of stepped-up climate action, the United Nations development system is also supporting countries in accelerating the just transition to low-emission resilient pathways, with a particular focus on energy access and the energy transition, sustainable food systems and sustainable infrastructure, and leveraging investments in COVID-19 recovery stimulus packages to implement ambitious climate actions. Recent analysis by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) showed that every dollar spent on key carbon-neutral or carbon-sink activities – from zero-emissions power to the protection of wildlife and ecosystems – has estimated multipliers two to seven times larger than those associated with non-eco-friendly expenditure, depending on sectors, technologies and horizons.³⁴ Food systems directly support the livelihoods of over 1 billion people and represent at least a tenth of the global economy, yet new data from the European Commission and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations show that they are also responsible for over one third of all human-

³⁴ Nicoletta Battini and others, “Building back better: how big are green spending multipliers?”, International Monetary Fund working paper (21 March 2021). Available at www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2021/03/19/Building-Back-Better-How-Big-Are-Green-Spending-Multipliers-50264.

caused greenhouse gases.³⁵ At the same time, a recent UNEP report found that only 18 per cent of COVID-19 recovery spending so far is expected to enhance sustainability. Major processes, such as the United Nations Food Systems Summit and the high-level dialogue on energy, the second Global Conference on Sustainable Transport and the sessions of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, provide key opportunities to mobilize a global movement for transformation in these areas. It is essential that the momentum generated by these processes be leveraged by United Nations country teams to advance improved policy advice and support over the course of the quadrennial review cycle.

208. These issues are also inextricably linked to the promotion of biodiversity and ecosystem-based approaches for sustainable development, highlighted by the 2020 quadrennial review. Implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, expected to be agreed in 2021, will provide an opportunity to advance commitments in this direction, supported by the upcoming report of the United Nations Environment Management Group on supporting the global biodiversity agenda, which lays out a United Nations system commitment for action to assist Member States delivering on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. The High-level Committee on Programmes endorsed in March 2021 a common approach to integrating biodiversity and nature-based solutions for sustainable development into United Nations policy and programme planning and delivery, which will help United Nations entities engage more actively with country teams and resident coordinators to deliver on the environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Overall, we must do better to adopt a system-wide approach to the environment, with the Environment Management Group, currently comprising 51 United Nations entities, serving as the central coordination body.

209. The pandemic showed how unprepared and ill equipped the world is to face these parallel and intertwined crises. With the significant and increasing risks of climate change and environmental degradation, we must strengthen preparedness and deepen our resilience to future shocks starting today. Member States directed the United Nations development system, through the 2020 quadrennial review, to strengthen its offer on disaster risk reduction in general and as part of sustainable, inclusive and resilient recoveries. Support for national disaster risk reduction efforts is currently provided by 115 out of 130 United Nations country teams. As the pandemic unfolded, in August 2020 the United Nations Sustainable Development Group issued additional guidance on integrating disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in cooperation frameworks, accompanied by training modules and briefing packages for country-level staff. Efforts are under way to incorporate the guidance into cooperation frameworks, enabling country teams to offer even stronger support in the future.

D. Strengthening cooperation and partnerships for the 2030 Agenda

210. With progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals set back by the pandemic, achieving the 2030 Agenda will require unprecedented collaboration and partnerships across sectors and borders. Joining forces with development partners

³⁵ M. Crippa and others, "Food systems are responsible for a third of global anthropogenic GHG emissions", *Nature Food*, vol. 2 (March 2021). Available at www.nature.com/articles/s43016-021-00225-9.

from the public and private sectors is simply no longer an option but rather a sine qua non for success. A desk review of 86 United Nations socioeconomic response plans shows that, while they were developed with diverse cross-entity engagement, about 35 per cent fully involved external partners, with 36 per cent involving partners sporadically. At the same time, over the past year, country-level satisfaction with the ability of the United Nations development system to leverage partnerships remained high. In 2020, 9 in 10 programme country Governments agreed that the United Nations adequately provides support to leverage partnerships in support of national development priorities. These results are consistent with the results achieved in 2019. Similarly, 85 per cent of respondents agreed that the resident coordinator has contributed to leveraging partnerships in support of national efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda.

211. The 2020 quadrennial review is clear on its expectations of the United Nations development system in this area and there are a number of steps that need to be taken to meet those expectations.

1. Deepening United Nations action on financing in post-pandemic response and recovery

212. The 2020 quadrennial review makes an explicit request to the United Nations development system to further explore financing strategies for the Sustainable Development Goals, including through innovative financing and blended finance, to respond to the unique situation of countries, especially those with special needs. This takes on added importance at a time when many developing countries are facing immense financing pressures due to the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, including in terms of debt vulnerability and liquidity constraints.³⁶ The crisis has proven a major setback for efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, but it also provides opportunities, including through stimulus and recovery packages, to scale up investment in areas that will drive inclusive and sustainable economies.

213. A key area of collaboration is the system's support for integrated national financing frameworks, a country-owned strategic tool derived from the Addis Ababa Action Agenda to close the link between national development plans and the financial resources needed to achieve them. Around 70 countries are developing and implementing integrated national financing frameworks with support from the United Nations system at the local, regional and global levels, as well as bilateral and other partners. Most are also receiving financial assistance from the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund. The experience of 16 countries that have been pioneering the design and implementation of integrated national financing frameworks is informing these efforts. To further strengthen this work, the Inter-Agency Task Force on Financing for Development coordinated by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, including United Nations development system entities and the Bretton Woods institutions, is developing methodology and guidance materials that will be available on a global integrated national financing framework knowledge platform in the first half of 2021. The guidance also touches on the important alignment of financing strategies with national long-term priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals, for example, on issues such as leaving no one behind and climate action.

214. At the global and regional levels, United Nations entities have been advancing numerous actions aimed at increasing access to financing and advocating the relief of debt burdens for developing countries to ensure they can not only respond to the

³⁶ United Nations, "Liquidity and debt solutions to invest in the SDGs: the time to act is now" (March 2021). Available at www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_on_liquidity_and_debt_solutions_march_2021.pdf.

immediate challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, but also recover better. The Initiative on Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond, highlighted in section V.B.1 above, has resulted in a comprehensive menu of options and supported progress in some areas. To maintain momentum for action, United Nations entities are working to support countries with implementation of relevant policy options relating to six clusters.³⁷ Leadership of each cluster is open and collaborative, drawing on the knowledge and expertise of other United Nations entities, while cross-cluster work is undertaken as necessary. I will continue to call for more ambitious measures on financing for development, including the extension of the Debt Service Suspension Initiative until at least the end of 2022, the expansion of the Initiative and the Common Framework for Debt Treatments beyond the Debt Service Suspension Initiative to include vulnerable middle-income countries that request support, and a large issuance paired with a reallocation of special drawing rights. I will also continue to advocate for action to redress the long-standing weaknesses in the international debt architecture, in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders.

215. The United Nations development system and international financial institutions have rallied together as part of the COVID-19 response, but this is only a first step. At present, 44 out of 130 United Nations country teams report having joint initiatives with international financial institutions to promote sustainable financial systems at the country level, mostly with IMF, the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Unchanged from 2019, a little over half of programme country Governments agree that collaboration between the Bretton Woods institutions and the United Nations in their countries has improved over the past four years. When disaggregated by region, responses show sharp differences (see table 6).

Table 6
Government assessments of whether collaboration between the Bretton Woods institutions and the United Nations in their country has improved over the past four years

(Percentage)

<i>Region</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Unaware of any</i>	<i>No Bretton Woods institutions in country</i>	<i>Total</i>
Africa	76	3	18	3	100
Arab States	36	45	18	0	100
Asia and the Pacific	55	14	27	5	100
Europe and Central Asia	71	7	21	0	100
Latin America and the Caribbean	36	8	48	8	100
Total	58	11	27	4	100

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020 survey of programme country Governments.

216. Cooperation with the international financial institutions is the new frontier to reposition the United Nations development system as part of an integrated effort to

³⁷ The six clusters and respective United Nations leads are (a) sustainability and climate action, led by UNDP; (b) socioeconomic response: social protection, gender, youth, health, education and human rights, led by ILO; (c) finance and technology, led by UNCTAD; (d) liquidity and debt vulnerability, led by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs; (e) illicit financial flows, led by the regional economic commissions; and (f) addressing special country needs, led by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

address the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. To increase cooperation with not only the Bretton Woods institutions but also the entire range of international financial institutions, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group will develop a joint framework of collaboration with those institutions and multilateral development banks to improve synergies at the regional and country levels, as requested by the 2020 quadrennial review as part of my financing for sustainable development strategy. I look forward to seeing a step change in our collaboration over the course of the quadrennial review cycle.

2. Continuing to improve engagement with the private sector

217. United Nations development system entities continued growing their private sector partnership portfolios, with new partnerships increasing by 26 per cent between 2019 and 2020. The United Nations Sustainable Development Group is planning a common online platform to centralize and streamline information on private sector partnerships. A number of United Nations entities, including UNOPS, are advancing innovative approaches to private sector engagement. Additionally, the Global Compact Local Networks, in collaboration with the partnership and finance officers of resident coordinator offices, are playing a central role in promoting local action to build private sector partnerships. In January 2021, the Global Compact launched its new three-year strategy that strengthens active engagement across the system and the growth of local and regional networks. The new strategy aims for measurable impact in five areas: gender equality; decent work and economic growth; climate action; peace, justice and strong institutions; and partnerships.

218. Oversight of partnerships has been reinforced through the United Nations Sustainable Development Group common methodology on due diligence adopted in 2019, and practical guidance is currently being developed for resident coordinators and United Nations country teams to complement it. In most cases, United Nations development system entities provide additional guidance and support for partnership development. Three quarters of United Nations entities have platforms or mechanisms to track the annual status and results of each partnership at the global and regional levels, and nearly two thirds monitor at the country level (see table 7). While good progress has been made, we must make an additional effort to ensure that we have oversight policies and mechanisms in place everywhere.

Table 7

Does your entity have a functioning monitoring and reporting platform or mechanism(s) that tracks the annual status and results of each partnership?

Level	Yes		No		Total
	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	
Global	77	20	23	6	26
Regional	73	19	27	7	26
Country	63	15	37	9	24

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020 survey of United Nations development system headquarters.

3. Invigorating support for South-South and triangular cooperation

219. There was a surge in activities related to South-South cooperation organized by United Nations development system entities in 2020 that included hundreds of pandemic-related capacity-building events, knowledge exchanges and cooperation for the rapid deployment of vital medical supplies. South-South trust funds fast-

tracked close to \$12 million to 31 countries to support the purchase of ventilators and personal protective equipment, as well as resources to mitigate the socioeconomic impact among vulnerable populations. Furthermore, 85 per cent of United Nations development system entities have included South-South cooperation in their strategic plans. At the same time, the number of entities with a unit dedicated to South-South cooperation decreased from 12 out of 28 in 2019 to 7 out of 25 in 2020. The challenges remain unchanged, namely with regard to the mobilization of additional resources, effective monitoring and evaluation, and lack of engagement when impact is difficult to measure and national institutions for managing South-South cooperation initiatives at the national level are limited. The South-South Galaxy platform established in 2019 is increasingly serving as a one-stop shop for a broad array of partners, including some 300 institutions, 50 Member States and 45 United Nations entities, to share solutions and broker deals between solution seekers and providers. The platform includes a curated digital repository of over 550 good practices so far, including a specific repository of efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

220. In 2020, most programme country Governments reported receiving adequate United Nations support for South-South and triangular cooperation. Still, approximately one in five countries (21 per cent) considered this support inadequate and requested more engagement in this area. The adoption in August 2020 of the system-wide strategy on South-South and triangular cooperation for sustainable development for the period 2020–2024, and the ongoing development by the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation of an action plan and monitoring framework for this strategy, are expected to improve integrated support from the system and enable us to better initiate, facilitate and crowd in South-South and triangular cooperation.

4. Collaboration with other partners

221. Collaboration for partnerships continues to be strengthened across the United Nations development system, with strong engagement of the United Nations Office for Partnerships as the global gateway for partnerships to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals. Examples include the tailored support provided through the 2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator , with direct partnership training and advisory services to country teams and regions, and the Sustainable Development Goals Strategy Hub, which raises engagement around the Sustainable Development Goals by helping enhance, connect and align the efforts of various stakeholders. The United Nations Office for Partnerships has also worked in close collaboration with the United Nations Foundation on the COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund, which allows individuals, organizations and companies to support the WHO response to COVID-19. More than 663 million contributors have already committed over \$242 million in flexible funding through the Fund.³⁸

222. Engagement with resident coordinator office partnership and finance officers and those of United Nations development system entities will be key to strengthening partnerships going forward, including actors such as civil society and academia. There is also a need to strengthen our engagement with local authorities, including through the work of Local 2030, a platform that supports local leaders in collaboratively incubating and sharing solutions, unlocking bottlenecks and implementing strategies that advance the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level. This initiative will be taken to the next level by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme as we look ahead to the high-level meeting on the New Urban Agenda to be held during the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly.

³⁸ As of 19 March 2021.

223. The 2020 quadrennial review includes a dedicated focus on volunteerism, which is increasingly recognized as a powerful, cross-cutting instrument to implement the 2030 Agenda. Between 2016 and 2020, 51 per cent of voluntary national reviews submitted by Member States to the high-level political forum on sustainable development referenced the positive contributions of volunteers. A review of 77 cooperation frameworks or similar instruments active between 2019 and 2021 showed that 58.4 per cent included volunteerism. United Nations Sustainable Development Group entities have embedded volunteerism in their organizational strategies, including through specific mentions in strategic plans, interdivisional working groups, volunteer offices and individual initiatives. In 2020, 9,458 UN-Volunteers served in 60 United Nations entities across the globe, the highest number of volunteers deployed in the history of United Nations Volunteers. Looking ahead, United Nations country teams should deepen their engagement with local volunteers, volunteer groups and volunteer-involving organizations and reflect the distinctive value added and contributions of volunteering in cooperation frameworks and country programme documents.

E. Supporting countries in voluntary national reviews

224. Voluntary national reviews provide an opportunity for countries to engage a wide range of stakeholders to reflect on progress being made to implement the 2030 Agenda and to focus on key areas in need of accelerated action over the course of the coming decade. In 2020, the vast majority (82 per cent) of countries that participated in the voluntary national reviews at the high-level political forum on sustainable development considered the process effective in advancing national implementation of the 2030 Agenda, a strong increase from around two thirds of countries in 2019 (see figure 35).

225. As highlighted by the 2020 quadrennial review, United Nations country teams can play an important role in supporting Governments in this critical exercise. Over half of programme country Governments report receiving United Nations support in preparing voluntary national review national reports and in following up after their presentation at the high-level political forum. United Nations support in preparing national reports focused most often on stakeholder engagement, report writing, data and statistics, and awareness-raising. Over 90 per cent of countries indicate that the United Nations has, in the voluntary national review context, to some extent assisted in identifying and reaching those furthest behind first.

Figure 35
United Nations country support to the voluntary national review processes

	Response distribution			Trend in target	
	2020			%	
	Yes	No	Don't know	2019	2020
All things considered, was the voluntary national review effective in strengthening implementation efforts towards the 2030 Agenda in your country?	82	1	17	67	82

	2020	2020	2018 and 2019
	Voluntary national review report support	Voluntary national review follow-up support	Voluntary national review follow-up support
If your country presented a voluntary national review at the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2020, please select those areas where the United Nations provided support to the voluntary national review process:			
Consultations within the government	44
Report writing	59
Data and statistics	59	45	64
Stakeholder engagement	63	52	54
Resource mobilization	34	44	56
Awareness raising for the Sustainable Development Goals	59	56	58
Capacity-building for the Sustainable Development Goals	53	52	62
Institutional arrangements	19	30	32
Other (specify)	13	11	6

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019 and 2020 surveys of programme country Governments.

226. Nevertheless, support for voluntary national review follow-up appears to have dropped from 2019 in all areas, possibly due to the focus of countries and United Nations country teams on responding to the pandemic. The development and updating of cooperation frameworks present an opportunity to strengthen the interface between reporting on the voluntary national reviews and follow-up on the one hand and country-level programming and implementation on the other, as called for in the 2020 quadrennial review. To maximize results and impact, it is essential that these two exercises be considered as part of a single loop. The emergence of voluntary local reviews provides an opportunity to further advance the localization of the 2030 Agenda and it is important that United Nations country teams support such efforts in the spirit of inclusive development.

The way ahead

227. The areas highlighted in the 2020 quadrennial review provide clear direction for the United Nations development system as it seeks to step up its support for countries during this decade of action. It will require a considerable effort from all United Nations entities, departing from old ways of doing business, embracing new partners, identifying synergies across various mandates and approaching the significant challenges that countries face with both humility and ambition. The COVID-19 response from the United Nations development system shows that the system is primed for this shift. With support from Member States, in executive boards, in funding allocations and in programme countries, and commitment by all involved, the current quadrennial review cycle can demonstrate that the United Nations

development system now embodies what is needed to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals, as evidenced by the transformative results to which it now must contribute.

VI. Conclusion: delivering a sustainable and better future for all

228. The COVID-19 crisis has shown how interconnected our world is and how mutually dependent we are. A microscopic virus has categorically demonstrated that no one is safe until all are safe, that overcoming this crisis will require a whole-of-society, whole-of-government unified approach driven by compassion, humility and solidarity.

229. I am pleased that programme country Governments positively view the United Nations development system response to this unprecedented emergency, demonstrating that our collective effort to reform the system is bearing fruit. Building on these achievements and noting the challenges that the present report has highlighted, we have started planning the way forward to deliver upon the expectations conveyed in the 2020 quadrennial review.

230. First, we must continue to strengthen our ability to deliver a truly whole-of-system and whole-of-society level of support at the country, regional and global levels. This will require investments to shift and incentivize the United Nations development system business model, culture and workforce, including country configuration, towards integrated policy advice. It will also require better alignment of the United Nations development system, individual and collective planning, reporting and funding, enabling improved results-based tracking, reporting and evaluation, and further advancing more efficient operations. In addition, it demands close attention to tailoring our offer to countries in different situations, overcoming the challenges that this poses for many agencies, funds and programmes, and making further progress on the synergies across our development, humanitarian and peace operations.

231. Second, with a view to accelerating implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals during the decade of action, we must now see a step change in our delivery of transformative policymaking, advancing a systems approach that promotes resilience and facilitates the transition to more inclusive and sustainable economies, leveraging opportunities that emerge to recover better together. In particular, the provision of concrete policy advice and investments related to climate adaptation and mitigation will be crucial if we are to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, leveraging the appropriate capacities and skills for resident coordinators and United Nations country teams to co-create solutions with Governments and partners.

232. Third, we need to enhance our support for countries to mobilize the means of implementation. This requires working through key instruments such as the integrated national financing frameworks, and better engagement with international financial institutions and multilateral development banks and other financial partners. It also requires greater capacity within the United Nations development system on these issues and a more concrete offer on issues of digital transformation.

233. Demand for United Nations development system support continues to be strong. Successfully meeting this demand and delivering at scale require predictable, sustainable, flexible, long-term funding that addresses the continuing imbalance between core and non-core resources and the system's overdependence on a small number of donors. As we continue our efforts to enhance transparency and accountability and fulfil our commitments under the funding compact, I count on the

strengthened and proactive engagement of the principals of individual United Nations entities to continue building trust. Governing boards must play their part in establishing and implementing accountability mechanisms against which the United Nations development system will report.

234. These issues and more will inform the review of the functioning of the resident coordinator system that I am currently undertaking, as requested by the General Assembly. We will engage actively with Member States to reflect progress to date and to identify areas where course correction may be needed. This requires honest and thorough reflection. While it is already clear that the resident coordinator system is proving its added value, we must not be shy in recognizing any shortcomings and seizing opportunities to improve our value proposition.

235. In moving forward, our common agenda, set out by Member States in the political declaration marking the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, provides a clear framework for strengthening the United Nations within the context of inclusive and networked multilateralism. The 2020 quadrennial review brings similar intent to the work of the United Nations development system and will guide our work over the coming four years. I look forward to continuing partnership with Member States and all stakeholders to meet expectations and deliver on the promise of the 2030 Agenda, so as to secure a sustainable and better future for all.
