

# Evaluation of Resident Coordinator system support to enabling coherent United Nations policy advice

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## INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

Function *“The Office shall evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the programmes and legislative mandates of the Organization. It shall conduct programme evaluations with the purpose of establishing analytical and critical evaluations of the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, examining whether changes therein require review of the methods of delivery, the continued relevance of administrative procedures and whether the activities correspond to the mandates as they may be reflected in the approved budgets and the medium-term plan of the Organization;”* ([General Assembly Resolution 48/218 B](#)).

**Project team members include:**

NATALIE ANGELA NEIL, Project Leader

LILIA ORMONBEKOVA, Team Member (January-March 2023)

SONJUHI SINGH, Team Member (May-July 2023)

Contact Information **OIOS-IED Contact Information:**  
phone: +1 212-963-8148; fax: +1 212-963-1211; email: [ied@un.org](mailto:ied@un.org)

**YUEN CHING HO, Chief of Section**

Tel: +1 212-963-8148, e-mail: [yuenching.ho@un.org](mailto:yuenching.ho@un.org)

**DEMETRA ARAPAKOS, Deputy Director**

Tel: +1 917-367 6033, e-mail: [arapakos@un.org](mailto:arapakos@un.org)

**YEE WOO GUO, Director**

Tel: +1 917-367-3674, e-mail: [guoy@un.org](mailto:guoy@un.org)

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## Summary

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) determined, as systematically and objectively as possible, the extent to which the Resident Coordinator system has led on and enabled coherent United Nations policy advice to enhance host government capacity to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The evaluation employed a mixed-method approach.

Resident Coordinators fulfilled their coordination role to effectively leverage expertise to enable integrated United Nations policy advice. They effectively engaged with senior levels of government and development partners to enable policymaking aligned to Member State needs. The advice provided contributed to enhanced government capacity to advance progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, including through development of new or revised policies or policy frameworks. Resident Coordinators also supported the advancement of human rights and the Leave No One Behind principle - both central to the sustainable development agenda - in national policymaking dialogue.

Cooperation Framework coordination mechanisms, pooled funds and Resident Coordinator leadership, impartiality and inter-personal skills were cited as key factors impacting Resident Coordinator effectiveness to enable integrated policy advice. Conversely, funding shortfalls, structural impediments and the national context at times impeded Resident Coordinator capacity to effectively coordinate and enable integrated policy advice.

Ensuring that the United Nations development system has the necessary funding and expertise to provide integrated policy advice will strengthen delivery on the outcomes of the Cooperation Frameworks agreed with national governments, and in turn, accelerate the progress needed to achieve the ambitions of the 2030 development agenda. The Development Coordination Office was encouraged to enhance Resident Coordinator office capacity to support country teams, including through further exploring: opportunities to better leverage system-wide policy support at regional and global levels; the possibility of establishing structured agreements with UNSDG entities for temporary secondments of sectoral policy experts; and options for lightening the burden of coordination mechanisms on Resident Coordinators and country team members.

## I. Introduction and objective

1. The overall objective of the 2023 Resident Coordinator system evaluation by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the extent to which the Resident Coordinator system has led on and enabled coherent United Nations policy advice to enhance host government capacity to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The evaluation assessed the following two outcomes: (a) coherent United Nations policy advice (immediate outcome); and (b) host government capacity to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals is enhanced (intermediate outcome).
2. To ensure conceptual clarity on the evaluation objective and questions, the following definitions were used:
  - Policy advice: Support to host government decisions and plans in the form of strategies, frameworks, analyses, draft policies, task forces and/or other contributions.
  - Coherence: The extent to which the whole of United Nations support is aligned to country level needs and priorities and is delivered in an integrated, coordinated and complementary fashion across pillars and sectors and consistent with Agenda 2030 goals.<sup>1</sup>
  - Capacity included consideration of human and financial resources, expertise and authority, positioning and bandwidth for strategic thought leadership.
3. The evaluation conforms with the United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards. The general frame of reference for OIOS is set out in General Assembly resolutions 48/218 B, 54/244 and 59/272 and in Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/273. OIOS' internal oversight mandate includes the departments, offices, funds, and programmes of the United Nations Secretariat. The mandate does not include non-Secretariat United Nations system entities.
4. The management response of the Development Coordination Office (DCO) is provided in the annex.

## II. Background

### Mandate and objective

5. General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the repositioning of the United Nations development system guides the scope and implementation of Resident Coordinator system activities.<sup>2</sup> In line with resolution 72/279, the substantive mandates of the Resident Coordinator system are derived from the 2030 Agenda.<sup>3</sup> The overarching objective to which the Resident Coordinator system contributes is to “accelerate Member States’ progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through strengthened United Nations development leadership, robust coordination mechanisms,

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<sup>1</sup> The definitions for policy advice and coherence were developed and validated with DCO as part of the OIOS-IED 2021 evaluation inception phase. The present evaluation assessed each component of coherence including alignment to national needs and priorities and the extent to which support was delivered in an integrated and coordinated manner. This aligns with objectives and outcomes articulated in the revised [Resident Coordinator system results framework](#), including Outcome 2.1 (The RC system brings together global, regional and domestic assets to enable integrated, high-quality policy and programming for poverty eradication and SDG solutions) and Outcome 1.1 (Enhanced Resident Coordinator system leadership at country, regional and global levels advances the effectiveness of UN support for the implementation of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda).

<sup>2</sup> [A/RES/72/279](#)

<sup>3</sup> [A/RES/70/1](#)

tools and frameworks, the effective management of joint resources and improved transparency of results to improve the impact, efficiency and effectiveness of operational activities for development at the country, regional and global levels".<sup>4</sup>

6. The proposed programme budget defined three broad, high-level and interrelated results for the Resident Coordinator system for 2023, as follows:

- Result 1: Scaling up delivery on the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals through strengthened Resident Coordinator leadership for more joined-up support to governments;
- Result 2: Countries enabled to mitigate the effects of COVID-19; and
- Result 3: Countries access integrated advice on the most transformational policy levers for achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals from the United Nations and relevant partners.<sup>5</sup>

### Structure and roles

7. The Resident Coordinator system is headed by the Secretary-General, with global leadership exercised by the Deputy Secretary-General on his behalf as United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) Chair.<sup>6</sup> DCO is responsible for day-to-day management of the Resident Coordinator system under the direction of an Assistant Secretary-General, who reports directly to the Deputy Secretary-General.<sup>7</sup> The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is the principal oversight body for the Resident Coordinator system.

8. At the country level, 130 Resident Coordinators lead 132 United Nations country teams (hereafter, country teams) operating in 162 countries and territories.<sup>8</sup> Resident Coordinators act as the highest-ranking representative of the United Nations development system at the country level and are the designated representatives of the Secretary-General. Resident Coordinators are supported by Resident Coordinator offices, containing a core staff complement of five posts.<sup>9</sup> Dependent on country needs and priorities, Resident Coordinator offices may include supplementary staff members with particular expertise, for example in gender, human rights or peace and development. Resident Coordinators are further supported by five DCO regional offices, in addition to DCO management in New York.

9. Resident Coordinator roles and responsibilities are defined in the Resident Coordinator job description and in the Management and Accountability Framework of the United Nations Development and Resident Coordinator System (MAF).<sup>10</sup> The MAF provides that the Resident Coordinator is the highest-ranking representative of the United Nations development system at the country level, responsible for the coordination of operational activities for development of the United

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<sup>4</sup> [A/77/6 \(Sect. 1\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [A/77/6 \(Sect. 1\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> The UNSDG serves as the most senior platform for development coordination at the United Nations headquarters level

<sup>7</sup> [A/RES/72/279](#)

<sup>8</sup> [https://data.uninfo.org/Home/\\_LBRCStatistics](https://data.uninfo.org/Home/_LBRCStatistics)

<sup>9</sup> <https://unsdg.un.org/2022-unsdg-chair-report/leadership>

<sup>10</sup> [Management and Accountability Framework of the United Nations Development and Resident Coordinator System; Resident Coordinator job description](#)

Nations. The primary roles and responsibilities of Resident Coordinators focus on nine core activity areas.<sup>11</sup>

10. Regarding policy integration and advice, the MAF defines the Resident Coordinator role and responsibilities internally within the United Nations and relating to engagement with external stakeholders. Internally within the United Nations, the MAF states that the Resident Coordinator advances policy integration “together with, and in support of, government, UNCT and relevant regional entities” and that the Resident Coordinator is “supported by UNDP – in its integrator role - in leveraging system-wide expertise and knowledge for more integrated policy advice and whole-of-government and whole of society approaches toward achieving the [Sustainable Development Goals] SDGs”. The Resident Coordinator office “supports the Resident Coordinator leadership of the UNCT through the provision of strategic policy, programmatic and operational advice on the above-mentioned areas, as well as any other area relevant for inter-agency coordination”.

11. The Resident Coordinator “leads in an open and inclusive dialogue with the UN country team in consultations with the host Government and other relevant stakeholders to define and agree on the UN’s strategic response to national development priorities and internationally agreed commitments, in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter”; “on the basis of these country-specific responses, the Resident Coordinator facilitates, when needed, a dialogue between the UNCT and government counterparts, involving civil society and relevant state institutions on needs-based capacities of the UNCT– irrespective of physical presence - to ensure an effective, efficient and responsive field structure”.

12. The Resident Coordinator also plays an important role to advance the United Nations’ normative agenda. In this regard, the MAF and Resident Coordinator job description specifically note that the Resident Coordinator “leads continued engagement on and pursuance of the UN’s normative agenda, as per international and regional treaties, conventions and recommendations in support of national capacity development in normative and operational areas, in accordance with respective mandates and based on the UN’s comparative advantage, roles and responsibilities” .<sup>12</sup>

## Resources

13. The Resident Coordinator system is funded through the Special Purpose Trust Fund (SPTF) comprising three funding streams: (i) a 1 per cent coordination levy on tightly earmarked non-core contributions to United Nations development-related activities; (ii) a cost-sharing arrangement among the UNSDG entities; and (iii) voluntary contributions.<sup>13</sup> The total 2023 budget for the Resident Coordinator system comprises \$281.8 million United States dollars (USD) for the special purpose trust fund and an additional \$9.2 million USD of earmarked contributions to be received at the country level for activities financed by third parties that are mobilized locally for functions that go beyond the core focus of the SPTF. The majority of this budget (\$248.9 million USD or 85.5%) is allocated to coordination at the country level.

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<sup>11</sup> Strategic analysis, planning and programming; policy advice; partnerships; resource mobilization; reporting, communications and advocacy; knowledge management; leadership (in addition to the Cooperation Framework process); regional collaboration; and the efficiency agenda

<sup>12</sup> [Resident Coordinator job description](#)

<sup>13</sup> <https://unsdg.un.org/SPTF>

### III. Scope and Methodology<sup>14</sup>

14. The evaluation covered the period from 1 January 2020 to 31 August 2023 and had the following scope:

- (a) Focus on Resident Coordinator, and by extension Resident Coordinator office, country-level roles and responsibilities. The evaluation sought to understand and assess the Resident Coordinator role as it relates to integrated policy advice within the context of the wider United Nations system. The evaluation did not assess the relevance and effectiveness of United Nations country team member or other United Nations system-wide actor activities.
- (b) Focus on the outcomes of the Resident Coordinator system at country level. The evaluation did not assess the work of DCO at the headquarters or regional levels. In addition to assessing progress towards evaluable outcomes, the evaluation also had a formative focus to better understand the Resident Coordinator role in practice.

15. The evaluation employed a mixed-method approach comprising the following:

- (a) Global survey of Resident Coordinators;
- (b) Global survey of country team members;<sup>15</sup>
- (c) Five country case studies consisting of the following data collection activities:<sup>16</sup>
  - i. Document review;
  - ii. Interviews with Resident Coordinators and Resident Coordinator office staff (n=30);
  - iii. Interviews with country team members (n=31);<sup>17</sup>
  - iv. Interviews with government officials (n=26);<sup>18</sup>
  - v. Interviews with other external stakeholders (including civil society organizations, academia, international financial institutions and private sector) (n=20);
  - vi. Direct observation of eight meetings across five country case studies, including meetings of the country team, Resident Coordinator office and a Joint Steering Committee;

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<sup>14</sup> Section III contains a brief summary of the scope and methodology for the evaluation. Further detail was provided in the evaluation inception paper.

<sup>15</sup> Surveys were administered in July 2023; response rates were: Resident Coordinator survey: 76 per cent (n=96); country team member survey: 50 per cent (n=969)

<sup>16</sup> Case study countries: Barbados, Lao PDR, Madagascar, Mongolia and Tanzania. Countries were selected in consultation with DCO considering: regional representation; human development index rating; development context (including LLDC, LDC and MIC representation); Cooperation Framework status; oversight burden; and data collection feasibility. Case study data served to provide qualitative insights and illustrative points.

<sup>17</sup> Interviews were conducted with a minimum of five country team members for each case study.

<sup>18</sup> Interviews were conducted with an average of five government officials for each case study.



- (d) Review and trend analysis of relevant Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) data from 2019 to 2023; and
- (e) Review of relevant accountability and oversight reports produced between 2021 and 2023.

16. OIOS convened an evaluation reference group comprising representatives from five United Nations entities to provide confidential input into the evaluation scope, design and early findings.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Reference group member entities: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs; United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development; United Nations Development Programme; and the Economic Commission for Europe.

## IV. Evaluation Results

### A. Resident Coordinators fulfilled their coordination role to effectively leverage expertise to enable integrated United Nations policy advice

#### *i. Resident Coordinators and country team members agreed on the key Resident Coordinator role for enabling integrated United Nations policy advice*

17. Resident Coordinator office staff and country team members interviewed in the five case study countries and surveyed globally agreed on the key Resident Coordinator roles to enable integrated policy advice. These included their inward-facing coordination role to leverage United Nations expertise and their external role as principal interlocutor for the United Nations system to support advocacy efforts and national dialogue on policymaking aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals.

18. Resident Coordinator office staff and country team members interviewed described five main ways that Resident Coordinators enabled integrated United Nations policy advice. These included the Resident Coordinator role, in close collaboration with the country team, to:

- (a) Leverage United Nations entity expertise to enable high-quality, integrated policy advice;
- (b) Coordinate the country team to enable integrated policy advice to the government (particularly when relating to cross-sectoral and cross-thematic policy advice, including on sustainable development and normative policy areas);
- (c) Act as the principal United Nations system representative and interlocutor at the country level, engaging with senior government officials and other relevant development partners on cross-sectoral and cross-thematic policy advice to enable integrated policy advice aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals;
- (d) Play a convening role, supporting and facilitating inclusive multi-stakeholder engagement in policymaking dialogue (including through support to, and facilitation of, national stakeholder consultations); and
- (e) Support advocacy efforts to advance the normative agenda (including on Leave No One Behind (LNOB), human rights, gender and disability inclusion) in high-level meetings and national dialogue, as exemplified in the quote in Box 1 below.

#### **Box 1**

“The Resident Coordinator was crucial to open doors to high-level meetings with the government and impress upon them the importance of pursuing these policy goals [related to a national action plan on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325].”

Country team member

19. As detailed further in paragraph 28 below, Resident Coordinators primarily interacted with senior officials in central government planning ministries (including ministries of foreign affairs, planning and finance). Resident Coordinator office staff and country team members largely agreed that the Resident Coordinator role did not usually extend to the direct provision of technical policy advice to the government on sectoral policy areas but instead, as described in paragraph 18 above,

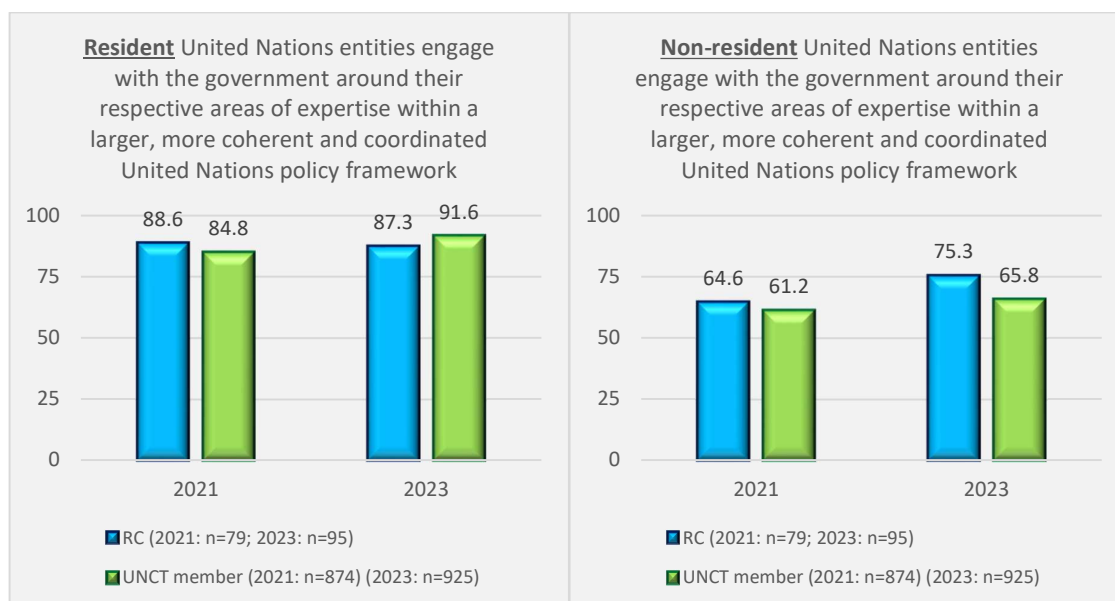
primarily focused on convening, supporting and leveraging United Nations expertise to enable integrated policy advice. At the same time, Resident Coordinators played an important role to lead on behalf of the country team on certain high-level engagements and dialogue with the government that required a cross-ministerial, national approach extending beyond individual agency mandates and expertise.

20. Government officials interviewed in the five case studies noted that they had primarily engaged Resident Coordinators for support on cross-sectoral policymaking, strategic approaches to aligning national policies and financing strategies with the Sustainable Development Goals, for support on coordinating United Nations programming and to connect the government with the relevant United Nations entity or expert, and for assistance with engaging and convening other development partners. Some officials also commented on their engagement with the Resident Coordinator during emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in one case study, a government official noted the importance of United Nations support on the response to COVID-19. The official stated that “there were a number of things done and the RCO was in lead; it helped ease [the country] out of emergency response to the mode of sustainable development”.

ii. *Resident Coordinators effectively engaged with country team members and leveraged expertise from across the United Nations system to enable integrated policy advice*

21. A majority of Resident Coordinators and country team members surveyed and interviewed in the five case studies agreed that Resident Coordinators effectively engaged with resident and non-resident country team members to enable integrated policy advice. As shown in Figure II below, Resident Coordinators and country team members reported lower engagement of non-resident agencies than resident agencies. In two case study countries, lower non-resident agency engagement was attributed to the limited capacity that non-resident agencies have to fully engage in policy advice processes in all countries within their purview and/or to physical distance.

**Figure I: A majority of Resident Coordinators and country team members surveyed reported that resident and non-resident United Nations entities engaged with the government around their respective areas of expertise within a more coherent and coordinated United Nations policy framework; however, there was comparatively less engagement by non-resident entities**



22. In close collaboration and coordination with the country team and government, Resident Coordinators also engaged with other United Nations entities beyond the country team and leveraged

expertise from across the United Nations system to enable high-quality, integrated policy advice. A majority of Resident Coordinators surveyed (72.4 per cent) reported that they had leveraged expertise to support the country team on policy work. Such additional capacity was primarily mobilized through United Nations entity staff secondments and by the recruitment of additional pooled fund or donor-funded staff members and expert advisors.

23. Secondments and additional policy advisory capacity to support the Resident Coordinator and country team on high-quality and integrated United Nations policy advice included:

- (a) Peace and Development Advisors (PDAs);<sup>20</sup>
- (b) Human Rights Advisors (HRAs);<sup>21</sup> and
- (c) Temporary staff secondments from specialized agencies: In some case study countries, Resident Coordinators, in collaboration with the country team, had facilitated agreements with specialized agencies to second a staff member to the Resident Coordinator office to support the country team on a particular policy initiative or area.

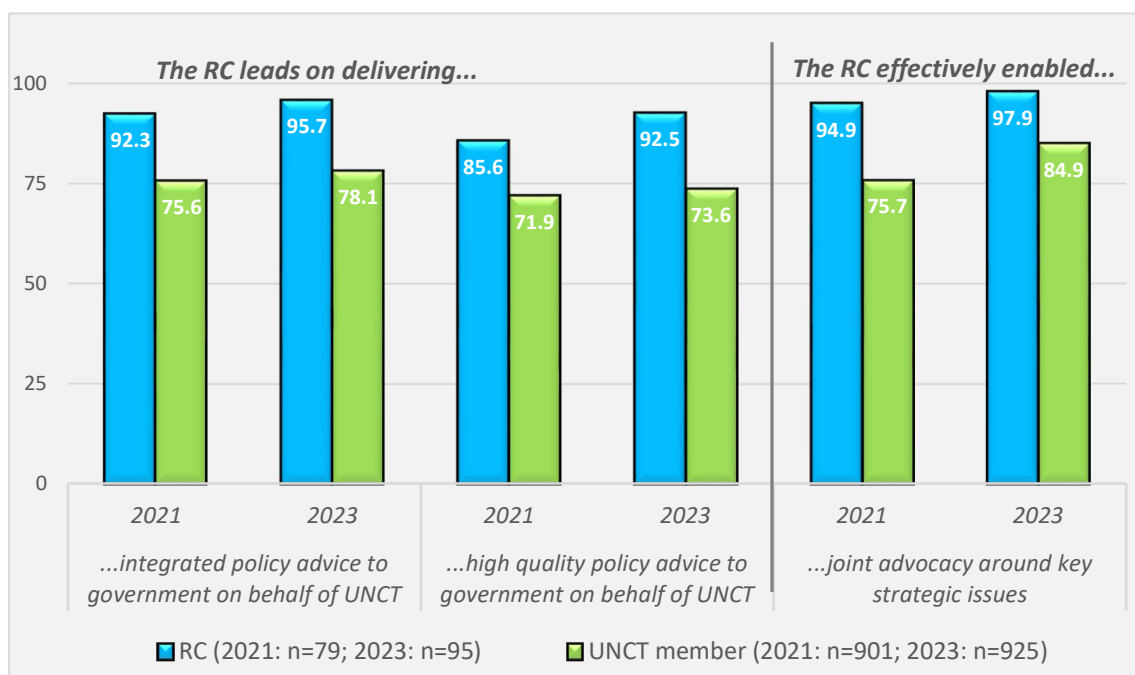
24. Further, Resident Coordinators were seen as effective at enabling joint advocacy and leading on integrated policy advice. Majorities of Resident Coordinators and country team members surveyed reported that the Resident Coordinator had effectively led on delivering integrated policy advice to the government on behalf of the country team and has effectively enabled joint advocacy around key strategic issues in the country, as shown in Figure III below.

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<sup>20</sup> The [Joint UNDP-DPPA Programme](#) on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention supports Resident Coordinators and country teams through the deployment of Peace and Development Advisors, who serve as shared assets benefitting Resident Coordinators, DPPA, UNDP and wider country teams and undertake a range of analytical, advisory and facilitative functions.

<sup>21</sup> Human rights advisors (HRAs) support Resident Coordinators and country teams to integrate human rights into programming strategies and strengthen national human rights capacities.

**Figure III: More Resident Coordinators and country team members surveyed reported that the Resident Coordinator effectively enabled joint advocacy and led on delivering high quality, integrated policy advice in 2023, compared with 2021**



*iii. Cooperation Framework coordination mechanisms, pooled funds and Resident Coordinator leadership, impartiality and inter-personal skills were cited as key factors impacting Resident Coordinator effectiveness and ability to leverage expertise to enable integrated policy advice*

25. The Cooperation Framework and its coordination mechanisms enabled integrated policy advice. Resident Coordinators and country team members engaged and collaborated on policy approaches and advice in regular country team meetings, Cooperation Framework results and working groups and through joint programmes emanating from strategic priority areas (including those forged under a pooled fund). One Resident Coordinator office staff member suggested that the Cooperation Framework, signed by the government and country team members, identified major strategic priorities and empowered the Resident Coordinator “to bring important issues [to the fore] where the UN has capacity to leverage its convening power - especially where it comes to important assets and priorities and reaching out to partners”. As detailed further in paragraph 38 below, some Resident Coordinators and country team members did also note the burden of an expanded coordination architecture.

26. Pooled funds<sup>22</sup> (including the Joint SDG Fund, as well as country-level funds to operationalize the Cooperation Framework) were also consistently noted across all five case studies as one of the most significant enabling factors for integrated United Nations policy advice at country level. For example, in one case study, Resident Coordinator office staff members noted that a country-level Sustainable Development Goals Acceleration Fund had enhanced intra-agency accountability and streamlined donor engagement with the country team member agencies as a collective group, supporting a One-UN approach. Further, joint programmes provided an opportunity for Resident

<sup>22</sup> Awarded to select initiatives and projects involving two or more United Nations agencies working together on the same programme

Coordinators to mobilize the involvement of multiple agencies and facilitate collaboration between country team member entities.

27. Across all five case studies, the Resident Coordinator's leadership, impartiality and interpersonal skills were also cited as a key factor affecting the Resident Coordinator's ability to effectively enable integrated United Nations policy advice at country level. For example, Resident Coordinator office staff and country team members interviewed noted the importance of political acumen and diplomacy, so as not to isolate key country partners or other stakeholders, expertise in managing relations with the government, non-combative advocacy approaches, political independence and impartiality.

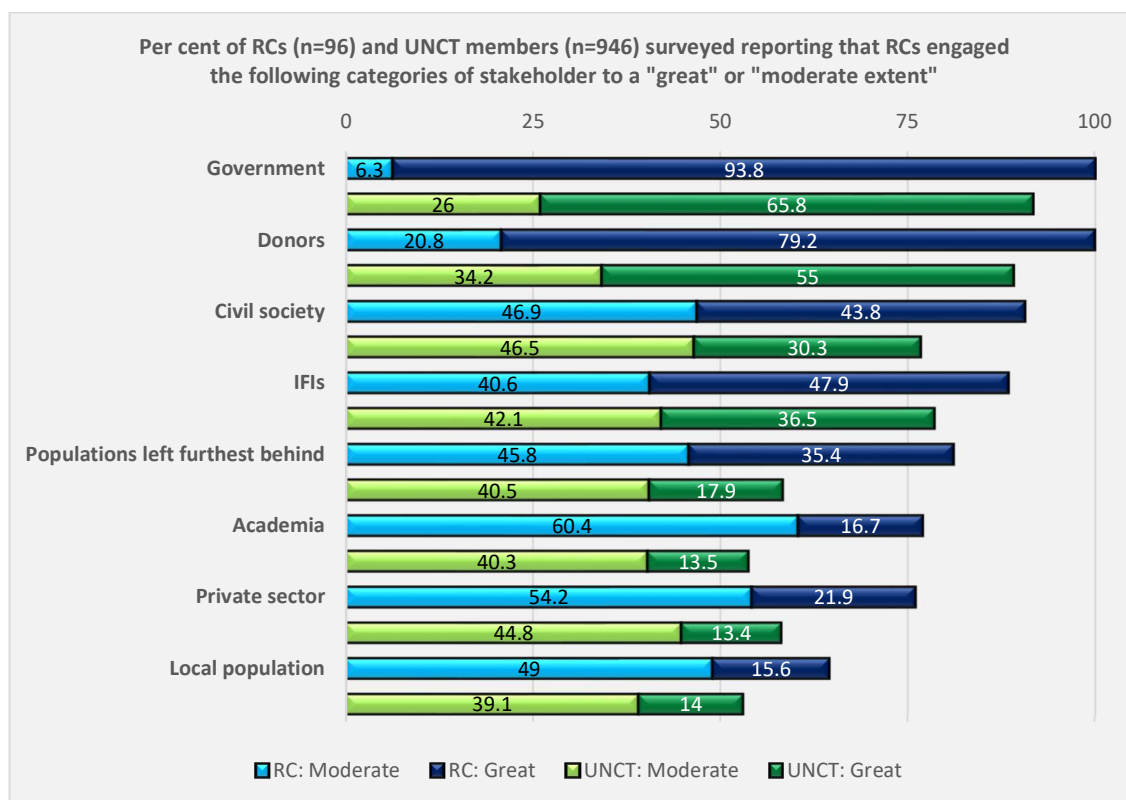
**B. Integrated United Nations policy advice contributed to enhanced government capacity to advance progress on the Sustainable Development Goals**

*i. Resident Coordinators effectively engaged with senior levels of government and other development partners to enable policymaking aligned to Member State needs in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals*

28. Resident Coordinators effectively engaged with the government and donors in multi-stakeholder development dialogues and policymaking processes to enable integrated United Nations policy advice and policymaking aligned to Member State progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. Resident Coordinators primarily interacted with senior officials in central government planning ministries (including ministries of foreign affairs, planning and finance) and in national multi-stakeholder meetings. These included government-led and Resident Coordinator co-chaired roundtables and dialogues with development partners (including donors and international financial institutions), Cooperation Framework Joint Steering Committees, temporary fora formed to address a particular policy or thematic issue and informal dialogues.

29. Resident Coordinators and country team members surveyed additionally reported that Resident Coordinators also engaged civil society, the private sector, academia and local communities to enable integrated United Nations policy advice, but to a lesser extent, as shown in Figure IV below. In three of five case studies, Resident Coordinators and country team members interviewed agreed with survey respondents that Resident Coordinators engaged with civil society and the private sector, although to a lesser extent than with government. In these case studies, Resident Coordinators more commonly engaged with civil society and the private sector through national stakeholder coordination mechanisms and in voluntary national review taskforces.

**Figure IV: Majorities of Resident Coordinators and country team members surveyed indicated that Resident Coordinators actively engaged with the government and donors around the United Nations system’s collective support to the 2030 Agenda and to enable integrated United Nations policy advice, when relevant, to a "great" extent<sup>23</sup>**



*ii. Policy advice was coherent and aligned to needs*

30. Government officials largely viewed United Nations policy advice as coherent. Most government officials interviewed (77 per cent) in three case studies considered that United Nations policy advice to their government was coherent.<sup>24</sup> Quadrennial comprehensive policy review monitoring data also showed that a majority of governments agreed that they received integrated policy advice from the United Nations and that, since the implementation of the new Resident Coordinator system in 2019, “the Resident Coordinator has displayed increased or strengthened coherence (reducing duplication of efforts)”.<sup>25</sup> All Resident Coordinators (100 per cent) and a majority of country team members (83.4 per cent) surveyed agreed that the Resident Coordinator effectively enabled integrated United Nations policy advice to the government.

31. Further, in four case studies, a majority of government officials interviewed stated that policy advice was also aligned to national needs. This corresponded with data from the monitoring and reporting framework of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, which reported that most

<sup>23</sup> Extent to which the Resident Coordinator, and by extension the Resident Coordinator office, actively engaged external stakeholders was rated on a four-point Likert scale (not at all; to a small extent; to a moderate extent; to a great extent). Figure IV represents percentages of Resident Coordinators and country team members noting that the Resident Coordinator had actively engaged these stakeholders “to a moderate extent” or “to a great extent”.

<sup>24</sup> See paragraph 37

<sup>25</sup> QCPR indicator 3.3.4: SGR 2023 value

governments surveyed agreed that they received integrated policy advice from the United Nations development system that was tailored to their national needs and priorities.<sup>26</sup>

32. Governments were largely satisfied with the policy advice they had received. Most government officials interviewed in the five case studies (73 per cent) were satisfied with the policy advice they had received through the Resident Coordinator. This included appreciation for Resident Coordinator policy support on strategic planning, on the COVID-19 response, for fostering increased collaboration between the government and the United Nations and in strengthening coordination amongst United Nations entities.

*iii. Integrated policy advice resulted in strengthened government capacity and, at times, policy changes*

33. In all five case studies, there were examples showing that integrated United Nations policy advice, that had been enabled by the Resident Coordinator and developed in close collaboration with the country team, had strengthened government capacity and, at times, resulted in new or revised policies or policy frameworks that were aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals. These included:

(a) **Strengthened national development plans and financing strategies aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals:** On behalf of and in close collaboration with the country team, Resident Coordinators provided substantive support to national planning and policy design processes in four of five case study countries. This included:

- *Support to multi-stakeholder consultation and dialogue to enable integrated United Nations policy advice and strengthen national planning processes:* In four case study countries, this included support with meeting logistics (including the organization of national consultations with development partners), meeting facilitation and substantive inputs, including presentations, during the course of meetings.
- *Support to aligning national plans with Agenda 2030 commitments:* This included coordinating and/or leveraging expertise for United Nations cross-sectoral policy analysis, input to national plan review processes, advisory services on mapping policy synergies and trade-offs to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and support to integrating Agenda 2030 indicators into national plans. For example, in one case study country, the Resident Coordinator led United Nations support to the government to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals into a national development policy and subsequently, into sub-national development plans.
- *Support on financing for development:* This included support to country teams in their consultations with governments on Integrated National Financing Frameworks, compiling country team member inputs on related documents and national financing strategies and supporting the government on stakeholder consultations. For example, in one case study country, the Resident Coordinator provided support to multiple national stakeholder dialogues on, and the drafting of, a national financing strategy.

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<sup>26</sup> QCPR indicator 1.3.1: Government survey respondents representing MICs (79% 2019 to 93% SGR 2023 value), SIDS (73% 2019 to 95% SGR 2023 value ) and LLDCs (76% 2019 to 85% SGR 2023 value) agreed that they received integrated policy advice from the United Nations development system that is tailored to their national needs and priorities. Declines noted for LDCs (92% in 2021 to 86% in 2023), Africa (85% to 83%) and conflict-affected countries (94% to 75%).



- *Support to coordinated planning and response to national emergencies and crises, including during the COVID-19 pandemic.*
  - *Support to LDC graduation processes.*
- (b) **Direct policy changes or impacts on policy design:** Examples of direct policy changes in the five case studies included:
- A framework for youth employment, and a youth entrepreneurship programme, drafted with advisory services provided by the Resident Coordinator and ILO;
  - A revised national legislative and policy framework on victim's rights and accountability, resulting from a Resident Coordinator-led Spotlight Initiative on gender-based violence; and
  - A multi-stakeholder informed LDC graduation strategy.
- (c) **Improved data quality and quantity to inform evidence-based policymaking and to support monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals.** Some discrete examples included:
- *Support to strengthening national statistics with high frequency data:* In one case study country, with support from four country team member agencies, the Resident Coordinator office managed a high frequency data project on ethnic minorities to inform United Nations policy advice to the government and an anti-discrimination policy.
  - *Mapping and needs assessments for evidence-based policymaking:* In one case study country, the Resident Coordinator supported a national assessment examining the extent to which each of the Sustainable Development Goals were addressed in national policymaking, including on funding distribution, and conducted a mapping of development partners working in each issue area.
  - *Support to primary data collection:* In one case study country, the Resident Coordinator supported data collection on food security and the triple crisis in the region to inform policy development in this area.
  - *Support to reducing data gaps and improving data quality:* In one case study country, the Resident Coordinator supported the government to address data deficits and data quality issues to improve progress monitoring on the Sustainable Development Goals.
- (d) **Increased government capacity to engage with global development dialogue:** This included support to government engagement with regional and international development summits such as the 2022 Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Transforming Education Summit. Support included the provision of briefing notes, drafted in close collaboration with the country team, and accompanying government delegations to the summits.
- (e) **Strengthened national awareness-raising campaigns for the Sustainable Development Goals:** This included direct advocacy through meetings with government officials and communication campaigns targeted, for example, at schools and local populations. In one

case study country, the Resident Coordinator, alongside the Humanitarian Country Team, actively supported and contributed to a national awareness-raising campaign on early action and prevention to increase herder resilience to climate shocks.

*iv. Resident Coordinators also supported the advancement of human rights and the Leave No One Behind principle - both central to the sustainable development agenda - in national policymaking dialogue*

34. Resident Coordinators supported the advancement of human rights and the LNOB principle in national policymaking dialogue. The following specific examples of Resident Coordinator support to the integration of human rights and LNOB principles into national policymaking were noted in the five case studies:

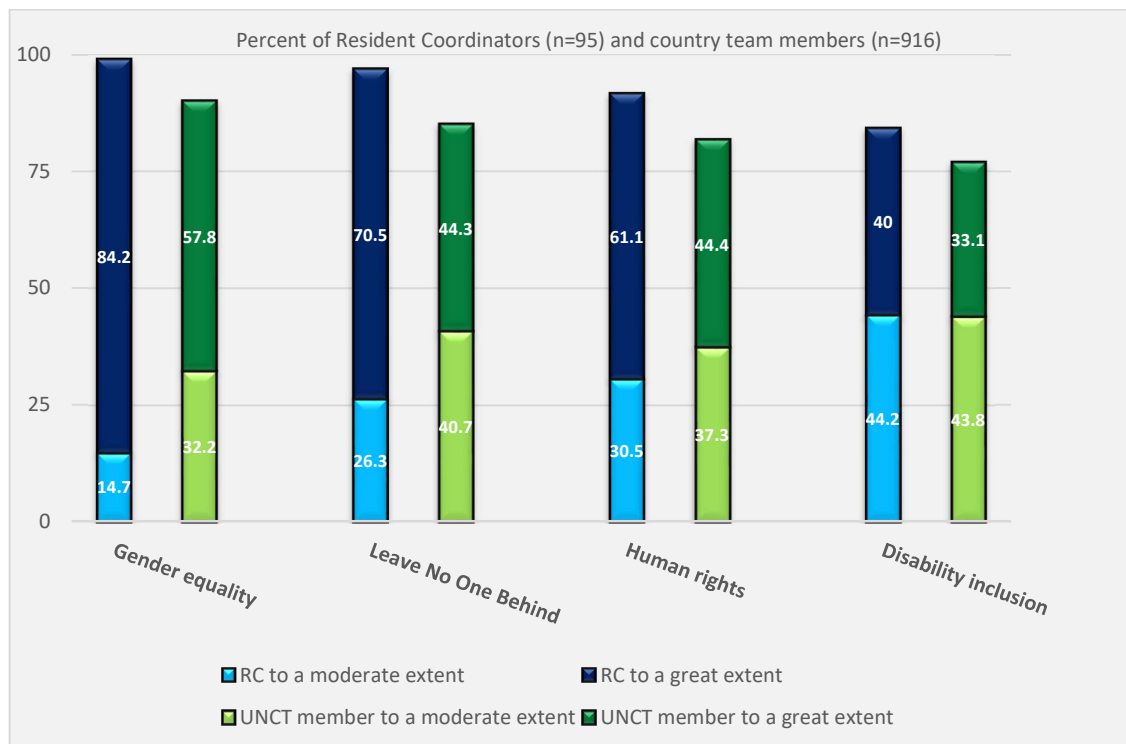
- (a) **Direct advocacy:** In all five case studies, Resident Coordinators advanced human rights and LNOB-related considerations in bilateral and multi-stakeholder meetings with the government, raised awareness about vulnerable groups and issued formal statements on areas of concern. In one case study country, the Resident Coordinator advocated to the justice system to address issues related to the exclusion and protection of a particular vulnerable group in society and facilitated the attendance of civil society representatives working in this area at a meeting with the African Union. In another case study country, the Resident Coordinator transmitted a formal letter to the government on behalf of the country team to advocate on the human rights and climate-related implications of a national infrastructure project.
- (b) **Enabling integrated policy advice to the government on normative issues on behalf of the country team:** In all five case studies, Resident Coordinators enabled integrated United Nations policy advice to the government on normative issues on behalf of the country team. This included: facilitating country team support to the government on mainstreaming normative issues in national planning and policy development; coordinating inputs on human rights and LNOB-related issues in the Common Country Analysis, Cooperation Framework and voluntary national review processes; supporting LNOB-focused data strengthening (for example, building capacities on disability and gender-sensitive data); and supporting policy analysis, and compiling policy briefs on behalf of the country team, on normative issues.

35. Most Resident Coordinators and country team members surveyed reported that the Resident Coordinator had effectively supported the mainstreaming of normative issues (including gender, LNOB, human rights and disability inclusion) in national policymaking, with some variation between the effectiveness perceived between Resident Coordinators and country team members, as shown in Figure V below. Most country team members surveyed (95 per cent) for the quadrennial comprehensive policy review in 2022 agreed that the Resident Coordinator fostered a coherent and strategic engagement on the United Nations' normative agenda.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> QCPR indicator 3.2.9: SGR 2023 value

**Figure V: A majority of Resident Coordinators and country team members surveyed reported that the Resident Coordinator effectively supported and enabled the mainstreaming of normative issues in national policymaking dialogue and processes to a “moderate” or “great” extent**



36. Resident Coordinators and country team members surveyed additionally cited several barriers to mainstreaming normative issues (including LNOB, human rights, gender and disability inclusion) in national policymaking, as shown in Table 1 below. A greater proportion of Resident Coordinators than country team members stated that the cultural context acted a key barrier to mainstreaming normative issues.

**Table 1: According to Resident Coordinators and country team members surveyed, the country context and a lack of government engagement were the primary barriers to mainstreaming normative issues (including LNOB, human rights, gender and disability inclusion) in national policymaking**

Per cent of Resident Coordinators and country team members citing as barrier to mainstreaming normative issues	Country team members (n=596)	Resident Coordinators (n=78)
Lack of government ownership/engagement with the United Nations on normative issues (including human rights and LNOB)	27%	29%
Challenging context for advancing human rights dialogue (and dialogue on other normative issues) due to humanitarian, crisis and/or emergency context	15%	18%
Cultural context inconducive to national dialogue on certain normative issues (for example, due to conservative or traditional values)	15%	36%
Government lacks capacity to focus on normative issues	12%	Not reported
Disability: Lack of resources for investment in infrastructure, education, health and labour	7%	18%

C. Funding shortfalls and structural impediments at times hindered a fully coherent approach and impeded Resident Coordinator capacity to effectively coordinate and enable integrated policy advice

i. *Integrated policy approaches were, at times, hindered by a lack of coordination on policy advice and limited capacity to collaborate on strategic approaches*

37. Resident Coordinators and country team member survey respondents, and interviewees in four of five case study countries, consistently identified challenges related to internal collaboration and the coherence of United Nations policy advice. In four of five case study countries, interviewees noted the following challenges:

(a) **Lack of coordination on policy advice provided to the government:** As noted above in paragraph 30, most government officials interviewed in three of five case study countries considered that United Nations policy advice to the government was coherent. However, some Resident Coordinator office staff, country team members and government officials interviewed in two further case study countries commented on a lack of coherence in this regard. For example, four of five government officials interviewed in one of these case study countries referred to conflicting policy advice, a lack of coordination on national policymaking processes, competition between agencies and a lack of coordinated requests to the government, as shown in the quote in Box 2 below. Some Resident Coordinator office staff across the case studies also commented on uneven information-sharing from individual country team members to the Resident Coordinator, including on policy approaches, advice and initiatives developed bilaterally with the government that impacted on, and/or diverged from, joint positions or approaches that had been agreed with and by the country team.

**Box 2**

“What was lacking at the high-level event was coordination between the UN system – it was very weak. There was some broken linkage between sectoral work on [one sector] and others. I feel that there is still coordination that needs to be improved. With UN agencies, it can feel that the coordination is quite fragmented. When we look at the [national] strategy, the ultimate objective is to consolidate resources. We don’t want to duplicate resources and time and staff and so on. [While developing the] strategy...along the way we felt that UN agencies were fighting to be in the spotlight. They were competing, which conflicts with the intention of the strategy.”

Government official

(b) **Limited capacity to collaborate on strategic policy priorities and long-term approaches.** Some Resident Coordinator office staff and country team members interviewed in three case study countries suggested that project-based approaches and the focus on individual agency programme delivery negated longer-term, strategic thinking on policy approaches including discussions on how to align national plans and policies with the Sustainable Development Goals. In two of these case study countries, Resident Coordinator office staff and country team members interviewed noted that country team meetings were mostly procedural and that the country team has not engaged at a strategic and substantive level.

- ii. *Challenges related to inconsistent coordination and collaboration on policy advice were attributed to disparate United Nations entity funding arrangements and programming and the burden of increased coordination and reporting processes*

38. Resident Coordinator office staff and country team members interviewed in four case study countries, and over half (54.0 per cent) of Resident Coordinators surveyed, suggested that disparate governance, funding and reporting arrangements impacted country team member engagement, and capacity to engage, with the wider country team and Resident Coordinator on integrated policy approaches and advice. Key challenges related to:

- (a) **Disparate funding arrangements:** In four case study countries, Resident Coordinator office staff and country team members noted the negative impacts of programme and project-based earmarked funding and bilateral relationships between donors and United Nations agencies on integrated policy approaches. This engendered competition for funding between agencies and meant that agencies, at times, prioritized their own respective projects, programmes, agendas and performance metrics over a collective approach, as shown in the quote in Box 3 below. Resident Coordinator office staff and country team members interviewed in four case study countries, and almost one fifth (15.9 per cent) of Resident Coordinators surveyed, reported that agency competition for funding hindered policy coherence. Some interviewees noted the lack of, and decreasing, development finance and funding opportunities available globally and the subsequent need for agencies to retain or increase their entity’s visibility to mobilize resources to sustain and expand programmes and staffing. Two respondents suggested that recurrent crises (including the COVID-19 pandemic) have also increased agency competition for funding. This issue of bilateral funding undermining coherence has been highlighted in multiple reviews, including assessments by the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network<sup>28</sup> and OIOS in 2021.<sup>29</sup>

**Box 3**

“The biggest challenge [to coherent United Nations policy advice] is that the agencies are too focused on their own agenda, when more focus should be given on complementarity and collaboration.”

Country team member

- (b) **Onerous coordination and reporting processes:** Resident Coordinator office staff and country team members interviewed in three case study countries suggested that an increase in coordination processes impacted country team member capacity to engage substantively on integrated policy approaches. This included challenges related to:
- a. **An expanded coordination architecture** at country level with an increase in coordination mechanisms. This included an increase in the number of working groups (such as Cooperation Framework results groups and thematic work groups) and associate meetings requiring country team member attendance. One country team member, for example, noted, “the number of meetings we have to participate in has

<sup>28</sup> Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment (MOPAN). “Is This Time Different? United Nations development system reform: Progress, Challenges and Opportunities.” 2021.

<sup>29</sup> [E/AC.51/2022/2](#)

increased exponentially; the workload has increased for many agencies". Coordination structures were, at times, described as "heavy".

- b. **An increase in communications and requests for time sensitive inputs from the Resident Coordinator office:** Some country team members noted the increase in time sensitive requests that they had received from the Resident Coordinator office, including in relation to integrated policy advice. For example, this included urgent requests from the Resident Coordinator office to country team members to input on work plans, reports, policy briefs, strategy documents and data entry exercises. Given their existing commitments, some country team members noted the challenges they faced at times to provide an informed response to requests within the stipulated timeframe. Some country team members suggested that they would need an additional staff member in their offices to effectively respond to all requests in a timely manner.
- c. **Dual reporting requirements:** Some country team members commented on challenges related to dual reporting requirements and suggested the need to streamline reporting. For example, one country team member noted: "it's the process-heavy mechanism that's drowning out the substance of our work [...] at [agency name] we have our own results framework and the UN has a different results framework and we need to report on that in a different way and space. I don't know how the UN in New York could do more work on how to streamline and get to substantive [work] rather than process work."

iii. *Resident Coordinator ability to effectively coordinate and support the country team on integrated policy advice was also impacted by Resident Coordinator system funding shortfalls in addition to heavy workloads and the lack of expertise on normative issues and integrated policy approaches*

39. As detailed above in section A, Resident Coordinators effectively leveraged system-wide expertise to enable integrated policy advice. Nevertheless, a majority of Resident Coordinator office staff interviewed (70 per cent) noted a lack of capacity and in four of five case study countries, the lack of Resident Coordinator office capacity was cited by Resident Coordinator office staff and country team members as one of the most significant challenges affecting the Resident Coordinator's ability to effectively enable integrated United Nations policy advice.

40. Capacity challenges related primarily to the impacts of the Resident Coordinator system funding shortfall on Resident Coordinator office core staff member recruitment (and implications on the work of the Resident Coordinator), Resident Coordinator office staffing being incommensurate with workload and priorities, a lack of expertise on cross-cutting issues and a lack of expertise on cross-sectoral policymaking to enable integrated policy advice, as follows:

- (a) **The Resident Coordinator system funding shortfall impacted the recruitment of core staff members:** 39.8 per cent of Resident Coordinators surveyed confirmed that Resident Coordinator offices were not currently staffed with core staff members fulfilling the five key functions outlined in the management and accountability framework. A majority of Resident Coordinator office staff interviewed in case study countries also noted staffing shortages and that the Resident Coordinator had been unable to recruit Resident Coordinator office staff members as posts had been frozen due to Resident Coordinator system funding shortfalls. Staffing shortages were reported in all functional areas. Staff members commented on the direct impact of these staffing shortages on the Resident Coordinator's ability to manage current workloads and capacity to support integrated policy approaches. Some interviewees noted a reliance on United Nations Volunteers to fill staffing gaps and added that the staffing situation was not sustainable. A 2022 OIOS assessment of Development Coordination Office

regional teams similarly highlighted the unsustainability of staffing arrangements in view of the funding situation affecting the Resident Coordinator system, which created an overreliance on temporary staff, secondments and United Nations Volunteers.

- (b) **Core Resident Coordinator office staffing was perceived by some staff members as insufficient to manage workloads and meet demand:** Resident Coordinator office staff members in four case study countries indicated that five core staff members were insufficient to manage the prescribed workload. Some of these staff members suggested that the Resident Coordinator office was not yet fit for purpose in view of the disparity between capacity and demand and noted that process-related demands also inhibited Resident Coordinators from playing a more strategic and thought-leadership role. One Resident Coordinator interviewed, for example, captured a common view in commenting that “expectations are way over what one can achieve” considering the number of reporting and performance-related tasks assigned to Resident Coordinators, despite continually working extensively beyond prescribed working hours and days.
- (c) **Some Resident Coordinator office staff and country team members noted the need for human rights, and peace and development, advisors:** Some Resident Coordinator office staff interviewed and surveyed noted the importance of the human rights and peace and development advisor posts to support the Resident Coordinator and country team’s policy work. Some staff members noted capacity gaps in this regard which were, at times, due to a lack of funding for the post. For example, in one case study country, a Resident Coordinator office staff member commented that they had “hoped for a human rights advisor but they [sic] came to a conclusion to dismantle the trust fund”.
- (d) **Some staff members suggested that Resident Coordinator offices would benefit from additional expertise in integrated policy approaches and systems-thinking:** Some Resident Coordinator office staff and country team members interviewed in the case study countries, and surveyed, suggested the need for additional expertise within the Resident Coordinator office to support the country team on integrated policy approaches, including expertise to support the mapping of linkages and synergies between policy areas. Some country team members surveyed suggested the need for increased analytical skills in the Resident Coordinator office, for example “to conduct integrated policy analysis and identify strategic issues”, “to support the integration of country team member inputs to enhance the country team response”, for “strategic engagement with stakeholders” and to enable “analytical work needed in addressing implementation challenges in advancing the 2030 Agenda”. Several staff members also noted the need for expertise in systems-thinking and forecasting required for enabling the integrated policy transformations that Resident Coordinators and country teams have been tasked to advance.

*iv. At times, Resident Coordinator ability to engage with the government and support policymaking aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals was impeded by limited government capacity and engagement, and crisis contexts*

41. Almost one quarter (24.4 per cent) of all country team members surveyed (n=715) cited contextual issues impacting on government engagement and capacity as amongst the most significant challenges affecting the Resident Coordinator's ability to enable integrated United Nations policy advice. Some of these country team members noted limited government engagement with the United Nations and challenges related to the country context, as shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Country team members cited limited government engagement with the United Nations, political instability and the crisis context as amongst the most significant challenges affecting the Resident Coordinator’s ability to enable integrated policy advice<sup>30</sup>**

Challenges related to country context and government engagement	Frequency (UNCT) (n=173)	Per cent of 173 UNCT members
Limited government engagement with the United Nations and/or receptivity to United Nations policy advice	29	17%
Political instability/barriers and/or changing political context*	29	17%
Crisis/emergency/security context	24	14%
Limited government capacity/willingness for inter-ministerial coordination/policy coherence	18	10%
Limited government capacity*	12	7%

42. Resident Coordinator office staff and country team members interviewed in four case study countries agreed that limited government capacity for inter-ministerial coordination, and siloes in government, presented a challenge to policy coherence. Some staff members interviewed in these countries also commented on the lack of government capacity in general to engage on all aspects of the Sustainable Development Goals (particularly in instances where the government was operating in a crisis or emergency context and/or had limited capacity to respond to even basic development needs) and the impacts of high government staff turnover on engagement.

## V. Conclusion

Resident Coordinators have played key roles in enabling integrated United Nations policy advice and have supported country teams to enhance government capacity to advance on the Sustainable Development Goals. These outcomes have been reached through the collective work of the country team, and rest on assumptions of clearly defined Resident Coordinator and country team member roles and accountabilities, common strategic intent and adequate capacity among country team members to collaborate and ensure the complementarity of their overall work planning and programming to support host governments.

Nevertheless, there are structural impediments that hinder efforts for more coordinated action and integrated United Nations policy advice. Limitations on funding, both for the United Nations globally and the Resident Coordinator system specifically, and issues relating to the leveraging of policy expertise will need to be addressed in order to realize the full potential of the Resident Coordinator to support integrated policy advice to host governments.

DCO could seek to enhance Resident Coordinator office capacity to support country teams in this regard by contributing to the forthcoming Secretary General’s report on Resident Coordinator system funding with well evidenced assessments of the impact of the funding shortfall on the Resident Coordinator system’s capacity to enable and support coherent policy advice. DCO is also encouraged to continue to explore:

- (i) Greater opportunities to engage with other United Nations entities or coalitions providing policy advice and/or supporting the country team to leverage system-wide

<sup>30</sup> \*No further detail was provided in responses to open-ended survey question on specific aspects or issues related to, or definition of, “political instability” and “limited government capacity”



policy support provided at regional and global levels. Building on recent oversight body feedback, this could, for example, include collaboration with DESA to examine how the Development Account and the Regular Programme for Technical Cooperation could be leveraged to support Member States' requests for integrated policy advice and capacity-support in the six transition areas;

- (ii) The possibility of establishing structured agreements with UNSDG entities for temporary secondments of sectoral policy experts to the Resident Coordinator office to support the country team on integrated United Nations policy advice; and
- (iii) Mechanisms for better connecting existing results groups covering similar topics (e.g., digital, or climate/environment) to policy level discussions, which would also lighten the burden of coordination mechanisms on Resident Coordinators and country team members.

Ensuring that the United Nations development system has the necessary funding and expertise to provide integrated policy advice will strengthen delivery on the outcomes of the Cooperation Frameworks agreed with national governments. In turn, successful implementation of these frameworks will accelerate the progress needed to achieve the ambitions of the 2030 development agenda.

## Annex 1\*

### Comments received from the Development Coordination Office

1. I am pleased to acknowledge receipt of the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) evaluating the extent to which the Resident Coordinator system has led on and enabled coherent United Nations policy advice to enhance host government capacity to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

2. I welcome the findings of the report, noting in particular that the findings confirm that Resident Coordinators have largely fulfilled their role to lead on and enable coherent policy advice, and that this has been broadly acknowledged both by host Governments and by United Nations country teams.

3. I also take note of the findings of the report on barriers to these efforts, namely that funding shortfalls and structural impediments have at times hindered a fully coherent approach and impeded the capacity of Resident Coordinators to effectively coordinate and enable integrated policy advice.

4. After careful review, I am pleased to note the conclusions set forth in the draft report, and propose to take action as follows:

(i) the Development Coordination Officer (DCO) will actively contribute to the forthcoming report of the Secretary General on Resident Coordinator system funding with well-evidenced assessments of the impact of the funding shortfall on the Resident Coordinator system's capacity to enable and support coherent policy advice.

(ii) DCO will explore greater opportunities to engage with other United Nations entities or coalitions providing policy advice and/or supporting the country team to leverage system-wide policy support provided at regional and global levels. In particular, we will explore collaboration with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) to examine how the Development Account and the Regular Programme for Technical Cooperation could be leveraged to support the requests of Member States for integrated policy advice and capacity-support in the six transition areas;

(iii) DCO will review options for structured agreements with United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) entities for temporary secondments of sectoral policy experts to the Resident Coordinator Office to support the country team on integrated United Nations policy advice; and

(iv) DCO will examine opportunities for better connecting existing results groups covering similar topics (e.g., digital, or climate/environment) to policy level discussions, which would also lighten the burden of coordination mechanisms on Resident Coordinators and country team members.

5. In pursuing these follow-up actions, DCO will consult widely on the findings of the OIOS report with members of the UNSDG.

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\* In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services sets out the full text of comments received from the Development Coordination Office. The practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution [64/263](#), following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.

6. I thank you and your office for undertaking this evaluation through a very consultative process and a strong collaborative approach. This is another positive contribution to our work, and I am convinced that the report will help us to further strengthen our efforts to support Member States with integrated policy advice leveraged from across the United Nations system, in line with the ambition articulated by United Nations Member States through General Assembly resolution 72/279.