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Programme questions: evaluation

Evaluation of the Development Coordination Office regional support

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) has determined the relevance and effectiveness of the regional offices of the Development Coordination Office in supporting and enabling resident coordinators to fulfil their critical coordination and leadership role, as envisaged by United Nations development system reform. It assessed two immediate outcomes: (a) well-informed and capacitated resident coordinators; and (b) enhanced coordination and coherence of United Nations development activities at the country and regional levels, including better transboundary responses, to advance sustainable development. The OIOS evaluation was conducted through surveys, interviews, direct observation of meetings, case studies, workload analyses and document reviews.

The regional office support enhanced the capacity of resident coordinators to better fulfil their leadership roles. The primary role of the regional offices, to support resident coordinators, has been implemented as intended in the development system reform and has been widely accepted. Regional offices allocated 65 per cent of their time to country-level work, 20 per cent to regional-level work and 15 per cent to global-level work. They provided a variety of helpful types of country-level support to resident coordinators, including, for example, support on cooperation frameworks and operations and performance issues. Resident coordinators were largely satisfied with the support that they received. Regional offices also supported resident coordinators with regard to humanitarian and crisis response, providing advice and guidance, as well as access to United Nations system expertise and surge capacity. Resident coordinators were less widely satisfied with support provided in this area compared with more routine, day-to-day support.

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** [E/AC.51/2023/1](#).



The regional office support enhanced the capacity of resident coordinators to better fulfil their programme coordination role. The regional offices supported resident coordinators in their programme coordination role through the peer support group mechanism and directly supported programming processes. Resident coordinators were highly satisfied with both modes of support. Regional office support also enhanced the capacity of resident coordinators to coordinate United Nations programming at the country level by connecting them with regional expertise and analysis. Where expertise was available, the regional offices effectively supported the mainstreaming of normative agendas into joint programming.

The regional offices have also provided resident coordinators with helpful support on transboundary responses through various means, mainly by convening resident coordinators and United Nations system entities, reviewing common country analyses and cooperation frameworks and supporting regional analyses. All five regional offices have supported resident coordinators on transboundary responses. This support has been limited, however, by the complexity of the issues and their own limited office capacity.

Given the highly demand-driven nature of their work and their significant reliance on extrabudgetary post resources, the regional offices may not be able to sustain their current level of support. This highly demand-driven and uncapped work involved open-ended and wide-ranging requests for support that made planning difficult. The regional offices have added capacity to meet demand from resident coordinators and the Development Coordination Office in New York with the use of temporary staff, secondments and United Nations volunteers. Despite having added capacity, the regional offices still experienced challenges with meeting the demand for their support.

The role of the regional offices in connecting resident coordinators to the regional-level United Nations architecture was still evolving. Resident coordinators were less satisfied with this role. In contrast to their peer support group role, the regional offices' role with regard to the regional collaborative platform was more broadly defined in the management accountability framework, and the means of working were not as precisely described. The regional offices have therefore implemented the regional collaborative platform role differently, with some taking a more active connector role. Nevertheless, the regional offices have been able to connect resident coordinators to the regional United Nations to some extent through the platform. They faced broader organizational structure challenges in connecting resident coordinators to regional United Nations expertise and strategies, including uneven responsiveness of issue-based coalitions, lack of United Nations entity incentives and accountability, and still-evolving reforms at the regional level.

OIOS makes two important recommendations to the Development Coordination Office:

- Conduct a resident coordinator/resident coordinator office needs assessment and a mapping exercise of which types of support the Development Coordination Office is best placed to provide through its regional or New York offices.
- Work under the leadership of the Chair of the regional collaborative platform to further clarify the regional offices' role as a platform connector, and communicate the outcome clearly both to resident coordinators and platform members.

I. Introduction and objective

1. The overall objective of the evaluation by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance and effectiveness of the regional offices of the Development Coordination Office in supporting and enabling resident coordinators to fulfil their critical coordination and leadership role, as envisaged by United Nations development system reform. It assessed the following two immediate outcomes: (a) well-informed and capacitated resident coordinators and United Nations country teams that are better able to support countries to meet the Sustainable Development Goals; and (b) enhanced coordination and coherence of United Nations development activities at the country and regional levels, including better transboundary responses, to advance sustainable development.
2. The evaluation meets the United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards. The management response of the Development Coordination Office is provided in the annex.

II. Background

A. Mandate and objective

3. General Assembly resolution [72/279](#) on the repositioning of the United Nations development system guides the scope and implementation of resident coordinator system activities. In line with the resolution, the substantive mandates of the resident coordinator system are derived from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 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, 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.¹
4. The resident coordinator system budget outlines the following three expected results for 2022:²
 - **Result 1.** New generation of resident coordinators and United Nations country teams able to deliver high-quality policy and programming support to countries for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals
 - **Result 2.** 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 3.** Countries enabled to mitigate the effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).
5. The primary function of the Development Coordination Office at the regional level, articulated in the management accountability framework of the United Nations development and resident coordinator system, is to provide strategic support to resident coordinators and country teams to advance the Sustainable Development Goals. According to the resident coordinator system budget, the regional coordination function of the system focuses on overseeing and supporting the coherent and effective delivery of operational activities for development by resident coordinators and United Nations country teams through integrated policy programming and operational support, together with the regional teams of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and United Nations regional economic and social commissions.³

¹ A/76/6 (Sect. 1).

² Ibid.

³ A/76/6 (Sect. 1), para. 1.465.

6. In all five regions, two of the support mechanisms through which the regional offices perform their role in coordinating regional support for the resident coordinator system are the regional collaborative platform and the peer support group:

(a) **Regional collaborative platforms.** The five regional collaborative platforms provide overall regional coordination and are each chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, with the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions and the Regional Directors of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) acting as Vice-Chairs. The membership of each platform comprises the regional directors of United Nations entities. The regional offices are full members of the platforms and provide secretariat functions as part of the tripartite secretariat with UNDP and the regional commissions, though the prominence of the secretariat role of the Development Coordination Office varies across regions. In each platform, issue-based coalitions (or opportunity- and issue-based coalitions in Africa) are region-specific, time-bound coalitions of United Nations entities responding to country needs. The regional operations management team is also part of the platform;

(b) **Peer support groups.** The five peer support groups are chaired by the Regional Director of the Development Coordination Office and comprise regional experts from United Nations entities. The groups provide quality assurance and strategic planning support to the common country analysis and cooperation framework processes at the country level. They are also part of the regional collaborative platform.

B. Structure

7. The resident coordinator system is led by the Secretary-General, with day-to-day oversight exercised on his behalf by the Deputy Secretary-General as Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group. The United Nations Sustainable Development Group is the most senior internal platform for development coordination at the Headquarters level, with oversight for the resident coordinator system provided by the Economic and Social Council. The Development Coordination Office at the Secretariat supports the management of the resident coordinator system under the leadership of an Assistant Secretary-General reporting directly to the Deputy Secretary-General.⁴ At the country level, 130 resident coordinators, supported by their resident coordinator offices, lead 132 country teams operating in 162 countries and territories.⁵ Resident coordinators are supported by the five regional offices of the Development Coordination Office. At the time of the evaluation, each regional office had a core capacity of five professional-level staff members: Regional Director; Senior Regional Coordination Officer and Team Leader; Regional Cooperation Framework Partnership and Programme Officer; Regional Administration and Business Operations Specialist; and Regional Liaison Officer (based in New York).

C. Resources

8. The resident coordinator system is funded through the Special Purpose Trust Fund.⁶ The total budget of the Trust Fund for the resident coordinator system for 2022 was \$281.8 million. Most of the funding – \$238.6 million (84.7 per cent) – was allocated to coordination at the country level. The total amount allocated to the 2022 programme of work for regional coordination was \$10.4 million, as shown in figure I.⁷

⁴ General Assembly resolution 72/279.

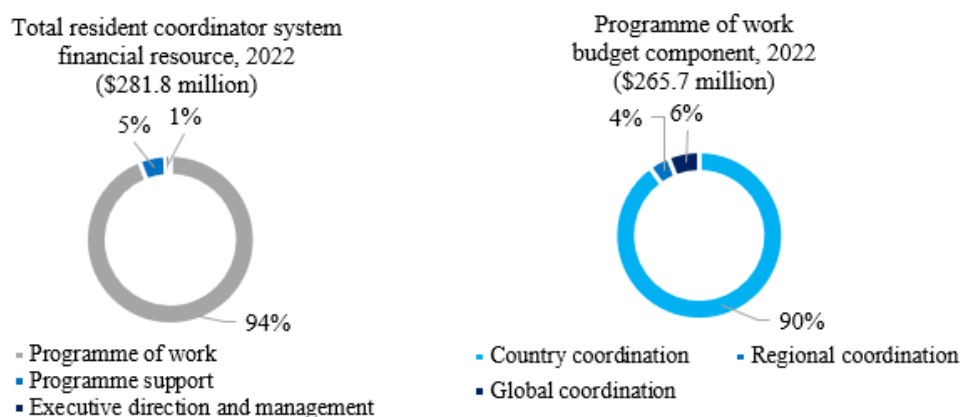
⁵ https://data.uninfo.org/Home/_LBRCStatistics.

⁶ <https://unsdg.un.org/SPTF>.

⁷ A/76/6 (Sect. 1).

Figure I
Budget of the resident coordinator system, 2022

(United States dollars)



9. A total of 1,254 staff posts were allocated to the resident coordinator system in 2022. This included 1,220 posts for the programme of work, 20 posts for programme support and 14 posts for executive direction and management. Within the programme of work, 1,142 posts were allocated to country coordination, 35 posts to regional offices and 43 posts to Headquarters.⁸ The distribution of the 35 regional office posts is presented in the table below.

Regional offices of the Development Coordination Office

Office	Staff	Countries	RCOs
Africa (Addis Ababa)	10: D-2 x 1; P-5 x 4 (1 P-5 based Addis, 2 P-5s based in Dakar and 1 P-5 based in Lusaka); P-4 x 2; P-3 x 1; GS x 2	54	53
Latin America and the Caribbean (Panama)	6: D-2 x 1; P-5 x 1; P-4 x 2; P-3 x 1; GS x 1	42	26
Asia Pacific (Bangkok)	5: D-2 x 1; P-5 x 1; P-4 x 1; P-3 x 1; GS x 1	38	25
Europe and Central Asia (Istanbul)	5: D-2 x 1; P-5 x 1; P-4 x 1; P-3 x 1; GS x 1	18	18
Arab States (Amman)	5: D-2 x 1; P-5 x 1; P-4 x 1; P-3 x 1; GS x 1	10	10
Development Coordination Office New York	Regional Liaison Officer x 5 (for AS, AFR, AP and ECA regions; LAC RLO post vacant at time of writing)		

Source: Development Coordination Office data (December 2022).

Abbreviations: AFR, Africa; AP, Asia and the Pacific; AS, Arab States; D, Director; ECA, Europe and Central Asia; GS, General Service; LAC, Latin America and the Caribbean; P, Professional; RCO, resident coordinator office; RLO, Regional Liaison Officer.

⁸ Ibid.

III. Scope and methodology

10. The evaluation covered the period from January 2019 to September 2022 and had the following scope:

(a) **Formative and immediate outcome focus.** The evaluation had a formative focus, in addition to assessing progress towards evaluable immediate outcomes, to account for the relatively recent articulation of the role of the regional offices in the September 2021 management accountability framework;

(b) **Focus on Development Coordination Office regional roles and responsibilities, and not the implementation of reforms in the entities of the wider United Nations system.** The evaluation sought to assess the role of the regional offices in the context of the various United Nations system entities that provided direct support to resident coordinators and country teams, and not the implementation of regional level reforms beyond the Office's responsibilities;

(c) **Exclusion of funding mechanisms and support for United Nations Sustainable Development Group efficiency workstreams.** The evaluation did not conduct a systematic assessment of the regional office role in supporting regional resource mobilization and funding mechanisms or United Nations Sustainable Development Group efficiency workstreams.

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

(a) Global client survey of resident coordinators to assess satisfaction with the support received from the regional offices;⁹

(b) Time allocation/workload analysis of each regional office, including assessment of time commitment to country-, regional- and Headquarters-level demands;

(c) Interviews with key stakeholders in each of the five regions, including:

(i) Regional Directors and all regional office staff (n=51);

(ii) Both vice-chairs of the regional collaborative platform secretariat (regional commission Executive Secretary and UNDP Regional Director) and one other entity (n=16);

(iii) Peer support group technical members, with size of United Nations entity taken into account when selecting interviewees to ensure that different- sized entities were represented (n=10);

(d) Direct observation of five peer support group and four regional collaborative platform meetings across the five regions;

(e) Regional office embedding of the team from the Inspection and Evaluation Division of OIOS for one week in each of the three regional offices selected for missions (Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean);

(f) Case studies of five discrete examples of regional office support at the country-level across the three regions.

12. The Inspection and Evaluation Division convened an evaluation reference group comprising representatives from United Nations regional entities¹⁰ to provide confidential input into the scope, design and early findings of the evaluation.

⁹ The global client survey was conducted in June and July 2022 and had a response rate of 84 per cent (n=109).

¹⁰ United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, International Labour Organization and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

IV. Evaluation results

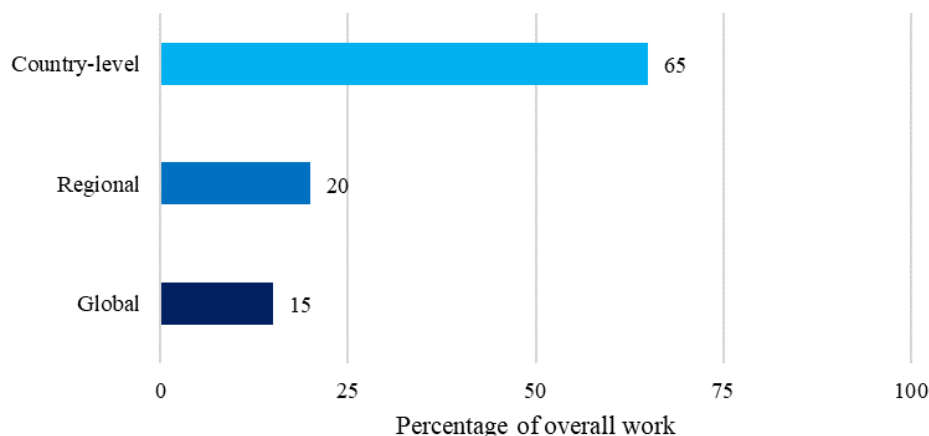
A. Regional office support enhanced the capacity of resident coordinators to better fulfil their leadership roles

Regional offices' primary role, to support resident coordinators, has been implemented as intended in the development system reform and has been widely accepted

13. The Development Coordination Office has implemented its model for regional offices – with a focus on resident coordinator support – as intended at the outset of the development system reform. The model envisioned was for 70 per cent of regional office working time to be allocated to the country level, 20 per cent to the regional level and 10 per cent to the global level.¹¹ This distribution of work was confirmed by the workload analysis presented in figure II.

Figure II

Regional offices spent most of their working time on country-facing tasks



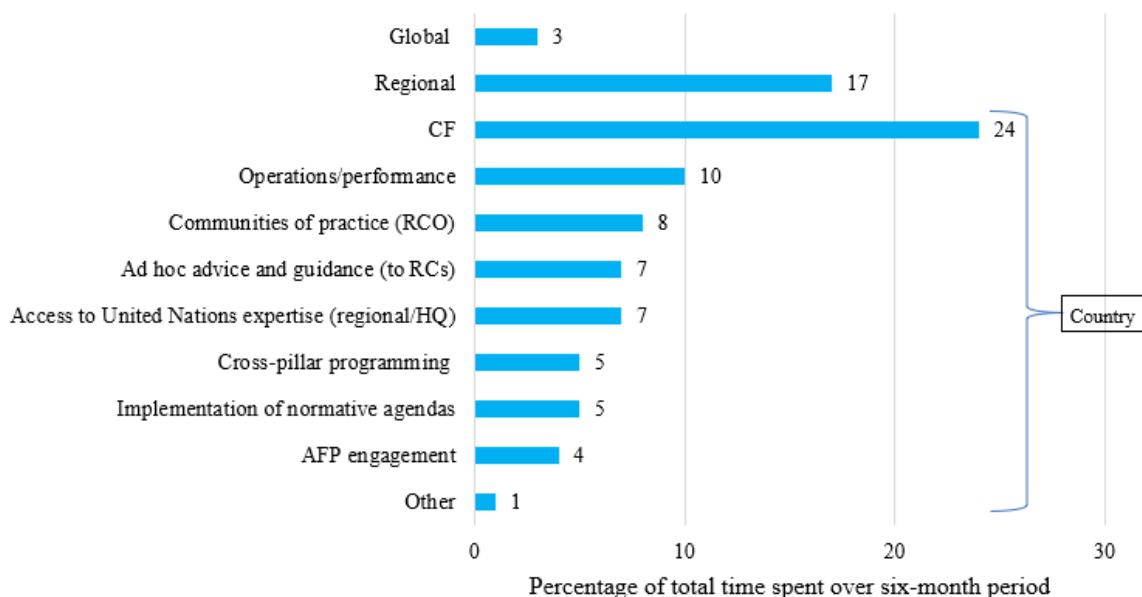
14. The primary role of the regional offices, to support resident coordinators and resident coordinator offices at the country level, was clear and accepted. According to most of the resident coordinators surveyed (75 per cent), the role of the regional offices in providing support at the country level was clear. This view was shared by nearly all regional collaborative platform and peer support group members and regional office staff interviewed. Regional office staff described their jobs as primarily country focused and said that they involved bridging, facilitating, connecting and problem-solving for resident coordinators and resident coordinator offices.

Regional offices provided a variety of types of helpful country-level support to resident coordinators, with which the latter were largely satisfied

15. As shown in figure III, the regional offices provided a wide array of support to resident coordinators at the country level, most commonly support on the cooperation frameworks process, as discussed further under result B (i.e. sect. IV.B).

¹¹ According to Development Coordination Office internal documents, the intended distribution of activities of regional office staff was: 70 per cent country-facing support (including regional offices' role as Chair of the peer support groups and support for knowledge-sharing, operations and performance); 20 per cent support for regional collaboration and coherence (including role as regional collaborative platform secretariat member); and 10 per cent support for global coordination.

Figure III
Regional offices provided a range of support to resident coordinators at the country level



Note: Cooperation framework support includes strategic support, quality assurance, knowledge-sharing and evaluation. The most time was spent on cooperation framework strategic support, including facilitating United Nations country team retreats, providing training on programming principles, supporting theory of change development and consulting with resident coordinators on country team configuration.

Abbreviations: AFP, agencies, funds and programmes; CF, cooperation frameworks; RCO, resident coordinator office.

16. Regional office staff described four main areas of country-level support, in addition to cooperation frameworks, provided to resident coordinators (identified in figure III):

(a) Supporting resident coordinator offices on operations- and performance-related issues, including queries and requests related to the business operations strategy, common premises, common back offices, procurement and human resources (such as onboarding/induction of new resident coordinators, training, and troubleshooting resident coordinator office staffing issues, as well as facilitating resident coordinator recruitment by convening regional collaborative platform members for panel interviews, and convening Regional Directors for midterm and end-of-year performance reviews);

(b) Managing resident coordinator office communities of practices, including convening resident coordinator office staff by functional area to exchange good practices and share their experience at virtual workshops and in-person retreats and through WhatsApp groups;

(c) Providing ad hoc advice and guidance, including on data and reporting, United Nations reform and policy interpretation, planning in challenging contexts, climate action and communications;

(d) Facilitating access for resident coordinators and resident coordinator offices to United Nations expertise at various entity Headquarters and regional offices.

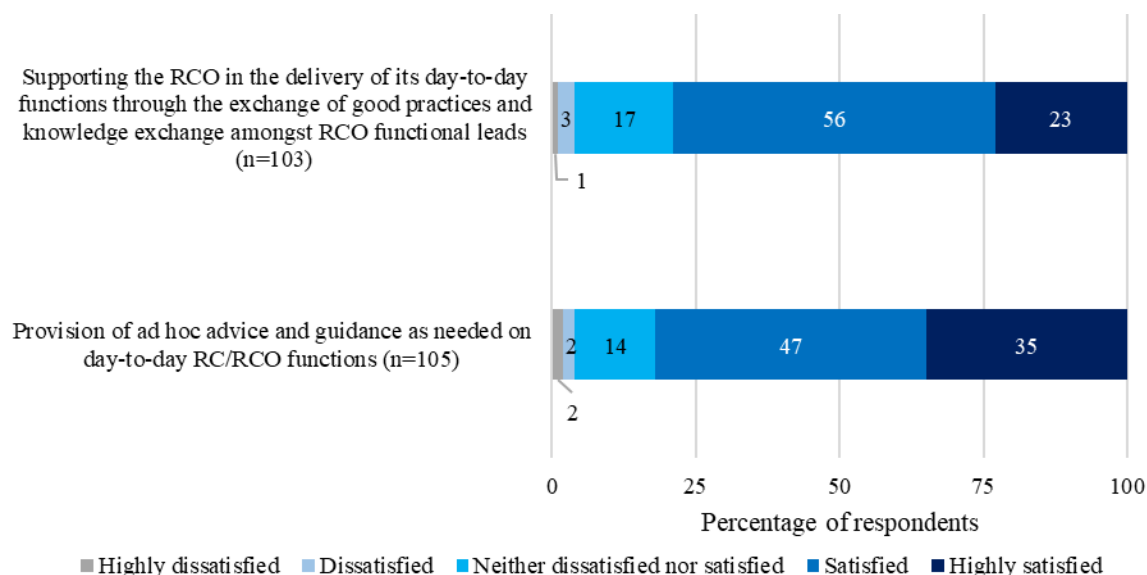
17. The regional offices also supported resident coordinators through structured interactions, including monthly meetings, “resident coordinator clinics” for countries

developing the cooperation frameworks, and resident coordinator retreats. They further worked with the Office's New York divisions to deliver support to resident coordinators, especially on cooperation frameworks and communities of practice.

18. Overall, the surveyed resident coordinators were largely satisfied with the routine day-to-day support that they received from the regional offices, as shown in figure IV. Furthermore, most resident coordinators were satisfied with the overall quality of regional office support received (74 per cent) and response time (79 per cent), which, according to the workload analysis, was typically one to two days.

Figure IV

Majority of surveyed resident coordinators were satisfied with routine day-to-day support provided by regional offices (excluding crisis situations)



Abbreviations: RC, resident coordinator; RCO, resident coordinator office.

Regional offices supported resident coordinators on humanitarian and crisis response, though resident coordinators were less widely satisfied with support provided in this area compared with more routine support

19. The regional offices have also supported resident coordinators in countries experiencing crises, including humanitarian situations. On the basis of a workload analysis, regional offices reported that over one third (36 per cent) of the global total of 148 countries that they had directly supported over a six-month period were experiencing a crisis.¹² In their interviews, the regional staff described delivering the following support in crisis situations:

(a) Providing advice and guidance in response to requests for support on crisis response. For example, in one region, the regional office was reportedly instrumental in facilitating guidance from United Nations Headquarters on cooperation frameworks in the context of non-constitutional changes in government. Another regional office developed a joint workplan with the Department of Political and

¹² According to the UN INFO data portal, 162 countries are supported by the resident coordinator system (https://data.uninfo.org/Home/_LBRCStatistics). In response to a workload analysis questionnaire, all regional offices reported that they had supported all countries in their regions (through direct interaction with and/or provision of support to the resident coordinator/resident coordinator office) in the previous six months, listed for OIOS as follows: Africa: 54; Arab States: 10; Asia and the Pacific: 25; Europe and Central Asia: 18; Latin America and the Caribbean: 41 (total 148).

Peacebuilding Affairs, UNDP, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which included cross-pillar analysis and a regional crisis risk dashboard;

(b) Facilitating access to United Nations system-wide expertise at times of crisis, including by providing resident coordinators with expert guidance in politically challenging situations (e.g. by engaging Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs) and mobilizing system-wide support for countries in crisis through briefings and other communications;

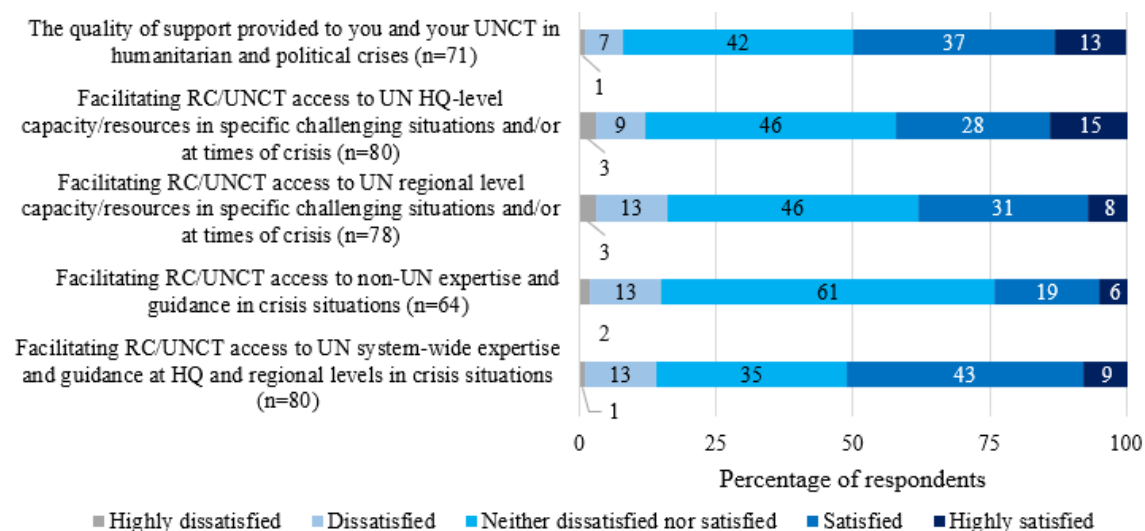
(c) Facilitating access to surge capacity, including funding and deployment of surge staff from across the system and the regional offices. The regional office staff interviewed in each region reported that their offices had facilitated access to surge capacity for resident coordinator offices during crises;

(d) Providing guidance on communications messaging during crises. For example, in one region, the regional office convened resident coordinator office staff and communications colleagues from agencies, funds and programmes at a three-day virtual crisis communications workshop.

20. Approximately one half or fewer of the surveyed resident coordinators were satisfied with the support received for humanitarian and crisis response, as shown in figure V, which is lower than their satisfaction with the more routine day-to-day support. In their interviews, some of the regional office staff mentioned a lack of clarity and capacity regarding the role of the regional offices in crisis situations. Still, a majority of the resident coordinators were in fact satisfied with regional teams' facilitation of access to regional and global United Nations system expertise during crises. According to Development Coordination Office staff, they leveraged their networks and connections with Headquarters and regional entities to provide support where needed, and they were well placed to know where to go for that support.

Figure V

Overall, surveyed resident coordinators were moderately satisfied with support provided by regional offices in challenging situations, including humanitarian and political crises



Abbreviations: RC, resident coordinator; UNCT, United Nations country team.

B. Regional office support enhanced capacity of resident coordinators to better fulfil programme coordination role

Regional offices supported resident coordinators on their programme coordination role through the peer support group mechanism and provided direct support for programming

21. The regional offices supported resident coordinators on programme coordination through the peer support groups. The role of the Development Coordination Office Regional Directors in chairing the groups was clear to and accepted by Office staff, resident coordinators and peer support group members and was undertaken effectively. In the peer support group meetings observed, Regional Directors appeared to be empowered to fulfil the role of group Chair. They actively coordinated the meetings, moderated discussions, engaged members for feedback, provided thoughtful responses and identified action items.

22. In addition to their peer support group role, the regional offices provided direct support to countries on programming. Through both the groups and direct programming support, the regional offices:

(a) Provided direct support, guidance and troubleshooting where programming processes were off track, including on the common country analysis and cooperation framework processes, United Nations Development Assistance Framework evaluations, country-level implementation of cooperation framework guidance from the Development Coordination Office in New York and integration of the guiding principles and thematic issues into programming processes;

(b) Provided quality assurance on the road map, common country analyses and cooperation frameworks, which included coordinating input from peer support group members;

(c) Shared knowledge and experience across and between resident coordinator offices and agencies, funds and programmes;

(d) Communicated the support needs of resident coordinators and country teams to peer support group members and facilitated country office attendance at group meetings for direct assistance and guidance;

(e) Supported countries on analysis, messaging and stakeholder engagement;

(f) Assisted with issues related to funding and fundraising;

(g) Identified consultants.¹³

Resident coordinators were highly satisfied with support from the regional offices on programming processes

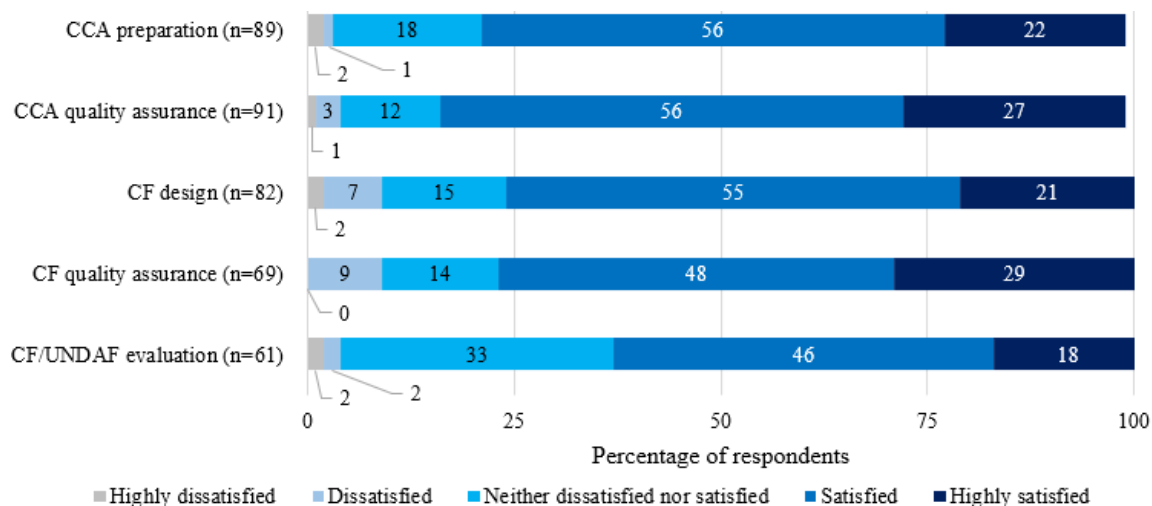
23. Overall, surveyed resident coordinators were highly satisfied with regional office support on programming processes, as shown in figure VI. This support has enhanced their capacity to fulfil their role in coordinating country programming. In addition, most of the peer support group members interviewed across all five regions

¹³ According to the Development Coordination Office, the New York divisions also provided direct and indirect support to resident coordinators and resident coordinator offices in all aspects listed here. Furthermore, a cross-unit team of Policy and Programming Branch staff carries out quality assurance on every draft common country analysis and cooperation framework, forming a significant part of the regional office/peer support group feedback sent to resident coordinators and United Nations country teams.

reported that the regional offices had supported the development of high-quality cooperation frameworks through the peer support group mechanism.

Figure VI

Resident coordinators were highly satisfied with regional office support on programming



Abbreviations: CCA, common country analysis; CF, cooperation framework; UNDAF, United Nations Development Assistance Framework.

Regional office support enhanced the capacity of resident coordinators to coordinate United Nations programming at the country level by connecting them with regional expertise and analysis

24. The regional offices enhanced resident coordinator and resident coordinator office capacity by connecting resident coordinators with United Nations expertise at the regional level. In four out of five case studies, the regional offices connected resident coordinators and resident coordinator offices with regional expertise in joint programming processes.¹⁴ This included, for example, connecting resident coordinators with expertise available through the peer support group, regional experts on thematic issues, including at OHCHR for human rights and at the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for the environment. In addition, the regional offices engaged United Nations experts from across the system on subregional issues, including migration and post-conflict transitions. In one case study, a regional office directly supported the resident coordinator and country team by facilitating connections with United Nations experts at the regional level (see box 1).

¹⁴ The limited evidence of positive outcomes in the fifth case study may be attributed to the relatively recent engagement of the regional office.

Box 1

Case study: support on joint programming processes

The regional office support on the cooperation framework process included providing quality assurance through the peer support group, exchanging knowledge, interpreting guidance from the Development Coordination Office in New York, connecting the resident coordinator and United Nations country team with system-wide expertise and supporting the consultation of national stakeholders. The Regional Director also liaised with regional directors of agencies to encourage coherent support on the cooperation framework. According to all of the government representatives interviewed, the common country analysis and cooperation framework were of high quality and were developed in a consultative way. The resident coordinator and resident coordinator office interviewees reported that regional office support had contributed to positive outcomes in the cooperation framework process and had enhanced system-wide coherence, as exemplified in the two quotes below.

The resident coordinator commented, “Without the backup of the Development Coordination Office regional team, that support, in an environment where [agency] regional directors are ultimately accountable to their agency leadership, that kind of relationship-building and agreement of the management accountability framework at the global level and how that then cascades down to the country team – without that platform, we would already be at a disadvantage”.

A resident coordinator office staff member noted, “What was most useful in terms of those processes, especially in doing the common country analysis, was that the regional office was the interpreter for us of the various cooperation framework guidance documents that came from Headquarters ... they were very helpful in terms of informing us about what is happening and trends at the global and regional level.... The support we received contributed to making those products – the common country analysis, cooperation framework and cooperation framework evaluation – higher quality products”.

25. The regional offices additionally enhanced capacity by ensuring that country-level programming reflected the wider regional context. For example, some regional offices led or contributed to regional analyses to inform programming. In peer support group meetings, Development Coordination Office Regional Directors provided the regional context to situate discussions and frame country-level programming. For example, in one of the group meetings observed, the Office encouraged consideration of regional issues in the development of cooperation framework indicators.

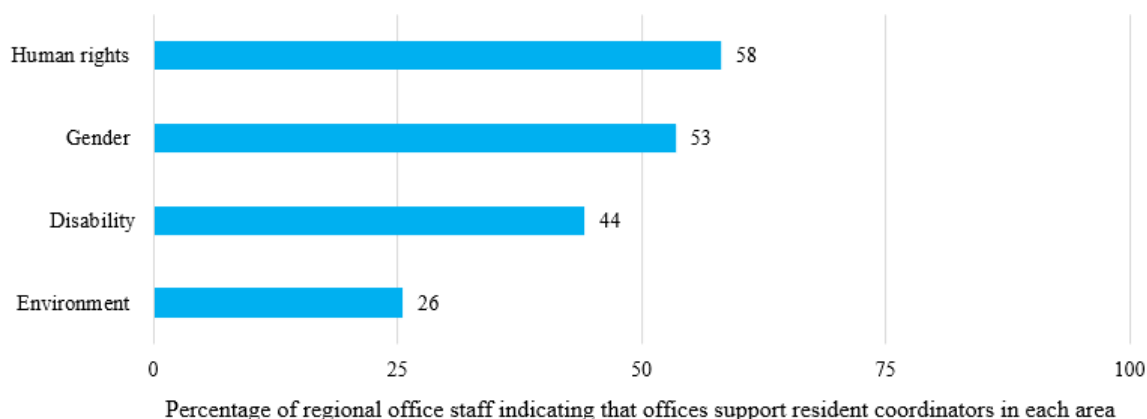
26. Lastly, the regional offices enhanced the capacity of resident coordinators to coordinate United Nations programming at the country level by connecting and convening resident coordinators, country teams and regional directors of agencies, funds and programmes to address discrete thematic issues pertinent to the region. For example, resident coordinators were convened to discuss thematic issues, such as migration, to consider possible joint approaches and to encourage experience-sharing and learning to strengthen programming.

Where expertise was available, regional offices were effective in supporting the mainstreaming of normative agendas in joint programming

27. The regional offices have provided support on the mainstreaming of normative agendas (including human rights, gender, the environment and disability inclusion), as shown in figure VII. They accomplished this support primarily by connecting resident coordinators and country teams with United Nations mainstreaming expertise at the regional and global levels and by fulfilling their quality assurance role with respect to the peer support groups to ensure that cross-cutting issues were mainstreamed in cooperation frameworks. According to nearly all of the group members interviewed, the Development Coordination Office had engaged thematic experts from the agencies, funds and programmes, including experts on gender, human rights and the environment, to support mainstreaming efforts.

Figure VII

Regional offices have provided support on human rights and gender but less on disability inclusion and environment mainstreaming



28. The majority of the surveyed resident coordinators (59 per cent) reported being satisfied with regional office support on mainstreaming issues. Some regional office staff members attributed lower levels of support in this area to a lack of regional office capacity and expertise.

C. Regional offices have provided helpful support to resident coordinators on transboundary responses, though their support has been limited by the complexity of the issues and regional office capacity

Through various means, all five regional offices have supported resident coordinators on transboundary responses

29. The regional offices have provided support to resident coordinators on transboundary responses, mainly by convening resident coordinators and United Nations system entities, reviewing common country analyses and cooperation frameworks and supporting regional analyses. The 2022 workplans of all five offices included up to three activities on supporting transboundary responses. The three types of support were:

(a) **Convening resident coordinators and other United Nations system entities.** The type of support most frequently mentioned by the regional office staff and by the regional collaborative platform and peer support group members

interviewed was the regional offices' facilitation of conversations among resident coordinators and country teams on issues, such as water quality, migration and climate change. The regional offices also connected resident coordinators to Secretariat and wider United Nations system entities and networks at the regional and global levels, including the United Nations network of economists, global task forces and various subregional platforms;

(b) **Reviewing common country analyses and cooperation frameworks.** The regional offices supported resident coordinators and country teams by reviewing common country analysis and cooperation framework chapters on transboundary issues, which included checking that relevant regional strategies were integrated into cooperation frameworks (e.g. the strategy for the Sahel), facilitating the inclusion of regional data from peer support group entities, and drafting sections of regional chapters in the common country analyses;

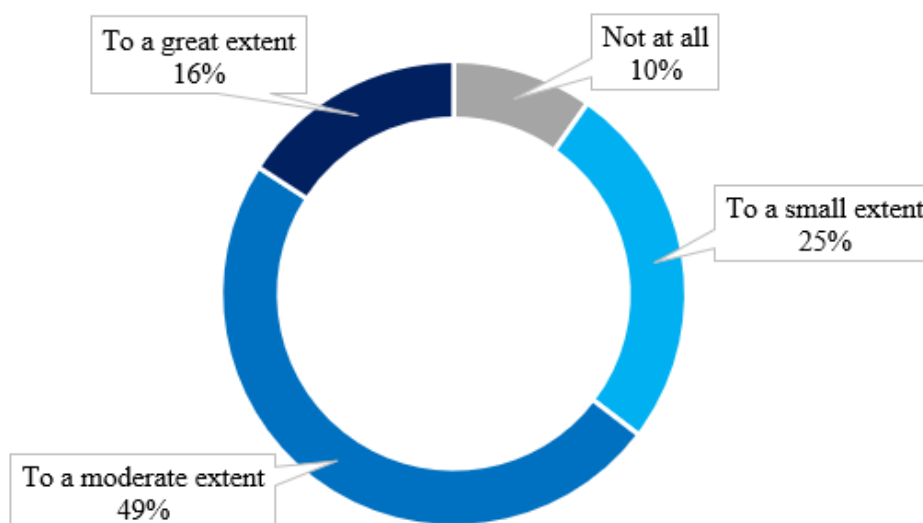
(c) **Supporting regional analyses.** Some regional office staff reported developing analyses on issues that had an impact on the region more broadly, such as regional conflicts or migration.

Regional office support for resident coordinators has contributed to better transboundary responses

30. The surveyed resident coordinators reported that the support that they received from the regional offices had contributed to better transboundary responses, as shown in figure VIII. The interviewed regional office staff noted positive results of support on transboundary issues, including common messaging from resident coordinators on regional issues, increased applications to multi-partner trust funds on regional issues, and the signing of cross-border programme documents.

Figure VIII

Most resident coordinators reported that regional office support had contributed to better transboundary responses



31. Two of the five case studies demonstrated the effectiveness of the regional offices in supporting the development of joint programming for transboundary issues. This involved guiding the completion of joint programming processes and connecting country teams with wider perspectives and expertise from throughout the United Nations system. One of these case studies is detailed in box 2.

Box 2

Case study: regional office support on transboundary joint programming

A regional office supported the completion of a complex joint programming process between two country teams and a peacekeeping mission. It was said to have taken ownership of the work process, which included fulfilling a neutral convening role and organizing the work by developing an action plan and guiding the participants through it. Meanwhile, the regional office left the subject matter work to the relevant members of the resident coordinator office, mission and country team. It also filled gaps in country-level expertise by reaching out to the appropriate entities and individuals at Headquarters. The result of this support was the completion of a joint transboundary programme document. Interviewees from United Nations entities and the resident coordinator office noted that the regional office approach and the process that it had established for developing the complex joint programme might be a good template for replication.

In an interview, one staff member of the resident coordinator office summarized the value of the regional office support, saying that the Development Coordination Office “is very well positioned at the regional office to make the necessary connections. They knew the colleagues in Headquarters and knew the colleagues in the field. My counterpart and I ... identified the right agencies in countries, but otherwise it was the Office making the process work”.

Support on transboundary responses has, however, been limited by the complexity of issues and capacity constraints

32. According to approximately one third of the regional office staff and almost half of the regional collaborative platform and peer support group members interviewed, support on transboundary responses was an area where more should be done. This view was consistent with a March 2022 global review of common country analyses and cooperation frameworks, in which the Development Coordination Office found that, although cross-border and regional challenges were covered in the majority of common country analyses and cooperation frameworks, opportunities to develop transboundary responses were not well analysed, implications for Sustainable Development Goal achievement were missing and engagement with stakeholders on those issues was weak.

33. The main challenges identified that could hamper increased support on transboundary responses were the complexity of transboundary issues and Office capacity constraints. According to some of the regional office staff and regional collaborative platform and peer support group members interviewed, the complexity of support on transboundary issues was complex due to a lack of clarity on how to connect regional strategies to the country-level programmes of country team entities, as well as to the difficulty of working across country teams and the number of actors involved. Some regional staff also noted that their offices had limited capacity to coordinate and convene and to commit desk time to thinking about transboundary issues. One interviewee from a United Nations entity voiced a common opinion in stating, “I do think the Development Coordination Office Regional Director and the regional specialist are trying to do this, but ... this continues to be a major weakness of the United Nations as a whole. We are not good at ‘thinking transboundary’ or across country teams. It is a struggle”.

D. Given the highly demand driven nature of their work and their significant reliance on extrabudgetary post resources, regional offices may not be able to sustain their current level of support

The work of regional offices was highly demand-driven and uncapped

34. The work of the regional offices has been primarily driven by demand at the country level; over a six-month period, each of the five offices provided support to every country in its respective region. Nearly all of the interviewed regional office staff described their work as mostly driven by resident coordinator and resident coordinator office demand. One regional office staff member described a common approach of striving to be completely demand-driven. The observation of staff meetings and workshops in all three regional office missions further confirmed a demand-driven orientation. For example, at all of the staff meetings observed, the regional office teams reviewed specific requests for support from resident coordinators. In some cases, regional offices were being asked to provide workshops for country teams on aspects of the cooperation framework process with very little advance notice.

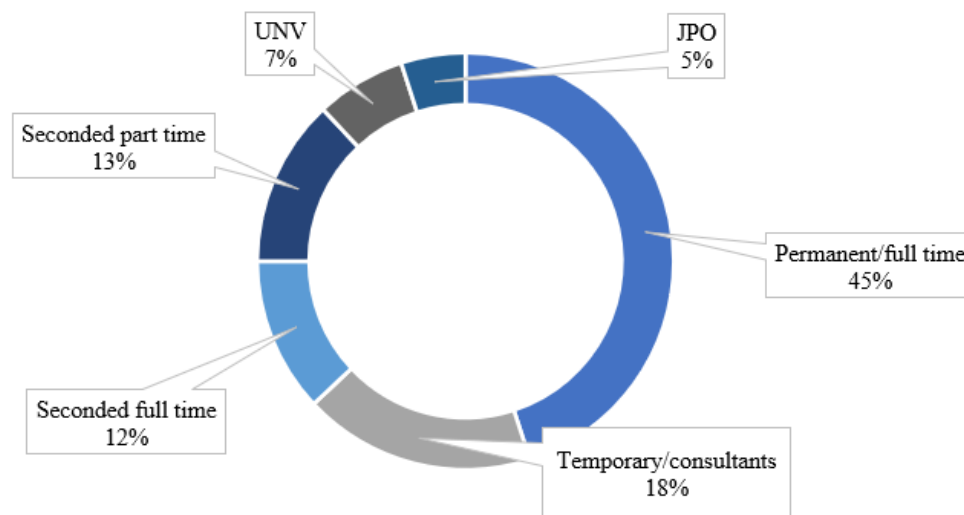
35. In addition to responding to demand at the country level, the regional offices also responded to urgent support requests from the Development Coordination Office in New York, which were difficult to plan for. The requests included support on global inter-agency decision-making and coordination mechanisms (e.g. regional monthly reviews and meetings of the Executive Committee and Deputies Committee). The regional offices responded to requests for background papers, briefing notes, talking points, reporting with short turnaround time and the designation of regional focal points for a growing number of priority areas. According to some of the regional office staff, responding to the many urgent requests from Headquarters was challenging; one staff member said that the approach did not work well for staff time management and work-life balance, because it meant that the regional teams were assigned tasks by many people and at all hours of the day.

36. The requests for support at both the country and Headquarters levels have been largely uncapped. The highly demand-driven nature of the regional office work, combined with the open-ended and wide-ranging scope of the support requests from resident coordinators and resident coordinator offices, has made it particularly difficult to plan office workloads. According to some of the regional staff interviewed, working in such a demand-driven environment made it difficult to prioritize their work. The regional office workplans for 2022 showed that most activities were “ongoing” in nature and described with open-ended language, rather than specific interventions with specific time frames for delivery. For example, some of the more broadly described activities in the workplan included “facilitate opportunities for peer exchange” and “provide advice and guidance to resident coordinator offices”.

Regional offices have had to add capacity to meet demand from resident coordinators and Headquarters with the use of temporary staff, secondments and United Nations volunteers

37. To meet the demand from resident coordinators and the Development Coordination Office in New York for support, all five regional offices have added capacity beyond their initial budgeted post allocations, as shown in figure IX. According to some of the regional office staff interviewed, their offices would have been unable to meet demands for support without relying on temporary staff and secondments. In fact, according to regional office staff and regional collaborative platform and peer support group members, lack of capacity was the main challenge faced by the regional offices in meeting demand.

Figure IX
A minority of regional office staff are full-time permanent staff



Abbreviations: JPO, Junior Professional Officers; UNV, United Nations Volunteers.

Despite having added capacity, the regional offices still experienced challenges in meeting the demand for their support

38. Even with the added capacity, the regional offices have faced the following challenges in meeting demand:

(a) **Broad range of country-specific requests.** In four out of five case studies, regional offices did not have sufficient capacity to fully respond to country-specific requests for support, including not being able to engage earlier in joint programming processes and provide more tailored country-specific support. In addition, according to some of the regional staff members interviewed, there were gaps in expertise and functional areas in their offices that they felt would need to be addressed to fully respond to all resident coordinator all requests for support. Examples of this included a lack of staff capacity in the fields of human resources and climate change and a lack of Arabic- and French-speaking staff members;

(b) **Increasing need to provide surge capacity.** Several regional office staff members expressed concern that they were increasingly being asked to provide surge support to backstop resident coordinator office functions in situations in which capacity was weaker, there had been staff turnover, crises requiring support were unfolding and subject matter expertise was needed for cooperation framework or common country analysis processes. In one observed staff meeting, the regional office team discussed challenges in meeting future resident coordinator office demand for surge support, while in another meeting, the urgency of completing staff recruitments was discussed in the context of upcoming support needs;

(c) **High logistical demand of coordinating regional collaborative platform and/or peer support group meetings.** Some of the interviewed regional collaborative platform and peer support group members noted a prevalence of last-minute meetings and short lead time to review materials, which they attributed to not having enough capacity in the regional offices to fulfil their secretariat roles. Platform members in four regions also suggested that regional offices did not have the resources to adequately perform their platform secretariat role, alongside the regional commissions and UNDP, including to be able to connect resident coordinators with platform discussions and adequately promote issue-based coalition work to resident

coordinators. Meanwhile, some regional office staff members noted that the majority of the work of the tripartite joint platform secretariat was given to the Development Coordination Office, reflecting an uneven distribution, and that doing more would be difficult without further resources or a change in structure;

(d) **Misdirected requests for support from resident coordinators.** The division of labour between the Development Coordination Office in New York and the regional offices was not always clear to resident coordinators, with just 58 per cent of surveyed resident coordinators saying that it was clear. While most regional office staff said that the division of labour was generally clear, they also described instances in which the division was unclear, including the provision of support on human resources issues, performance management, recruitment and business operations, all of which could have been more directly handled by the Office in New York.

E. The role of the regional offices in connecting resident coordinators with the regional-level United Nations architecture was still evolving

In contrast to their peer support group role, the regional offices' role with regard to the regional collaborative platforms was more broadly defined

39. Compared to their role with regard to the peer support group, the role of the regional offices with regard to the regional collaborative platforms was more broadly defined in the management accountability framework, and the means of working were not as precisely described. In addition to their role in the tripartite joint secretariat, the management accountability framework defines the regional offices' role as encompassing two functions: (a) facilitating interaction between the platforms and resident coordinators/country teams and (b) coordinating engagement with the platform, providing resident coordinators/country teams with access to regional expertise and strategic advice, including through the issue-based coalitions, and facilitating guidance and support from platform members. However, the framework does not specify how these two broad functions will be fulfilled. In practice, regional office staff described their work in the platform secretariat as primarily administrative, including, for example: organizing the logistics of the platform meetings; helping to design platform meeting agendas; preparing background documents; taking notes at platform meetings; and preparing workplans for approval by the platform vice-chairs and membership and tracking their implementation. In all five regions, interviewed platform members confirmed that the secretariat role fulfilled by the Development Coordination Office encompassed those activities, and that they were important to the functioning of the platforms. However, platform members (including the vice-chairs) said that the regional offices should better articulate resident coordinator needs to the platforms (and the issue-based coalitions) and leverage platform expertise.

40. The role of the Development Coordination Office with regard to the regional collaborative platforms was not consistently clear to resident coordinators and regional staff. Just 51 per cent of surveyed resident coordinators responded that the role of the Office in that regard was clear to them (compared with 65 per cent who said that the peer support group role was clear). Meanwhile, just under half of the regional office staff who spoke about the platforms indicated that the role with regard to the platforms was clear, and many said it was still evolving. The two quotes from Office staff in the table contrast the clarity of the role with regard to the group and the role with regard to platforms.

Contrast in clarity between peer support group role and regional collaborative platform role

Peer support group role

“Chairing the peer support group is one of the most clearly defined and accepted functions for the regional office and the Regional Director.” – Development Coordination Office Staff

Regional collaborative platform role

“The regional-level and regional collaborative platform and joint secretariat interaction is not yet clear. It’s in the management accountability framework but not clear in practice. The expectation isn’t matched with reality. We have a limited mandate on regional collaborative platform” – Development Coordination Office staff

Regional offices have implemented the regional collaborative platform role differently

41. The regional collaborative platform role of the Development Coordination Office was implemented differently across the five regions. Some regional offices fulfilled a more active connector role with regard to the platforms by bringing members of the platforms together to build consensus on issues related to the alignment of cooperation frameworks with country programme documents or to discuss regional responses to global priorities. Meanwhile, for others, the role was mainly administrative. Across regions, interviewees from the platforms and interviewees from the Office who were involved in the platforms reported that its functioning was more a product of negotiated arrangements and personalities, rather than implementation of a clearly described relationship, as in the case of the peer support group mechanism. The observation of platform meetings in four regions showed a wide range of Office involvement as compared with the group meetings observed. For example, in one meeting, one of the Office’s Regional Directors answered questions pertaining to the resident coordinators in the region; in another, the Office Director actively chaired the meeting and facilitated the discussion; in two meetings, the vice-chairs facilitated the discussion; and in another, a Regional Director spoke at the end of the meeting to summarize the discussion.

Nevertheless, the regional offices have been able, to some extent, to connect resident coordinators with the regional United Nations through the regional collaborative platform

42. The regional offices have, to varying degrees, connected the resident coordinators with regional United Nations expertise and discussions in their regional collaborative platform secretariat role. In four of five regions, interviewed regional office staff and platform and peer support group members noted that the regional offices had helped to connect the work of the issue-based coalitions with the resident coordinators. For example, some of the regional offices participated in the issue-based coalition secretariats themselves and invited issue-based coalition chairs to meetings with resident coordinators and resident coordinator offices. In addition, in three out of the four platform meetings observed, the Development Coordination Office played a connector role by linking the discussions to resident coordinator requests for support and needs in the region and inviting a resident coordinator to address the platforms directly to solicit input. The regional offices appeared well prepared, engaged and consultative in the majority of the platform and peer support group meetings

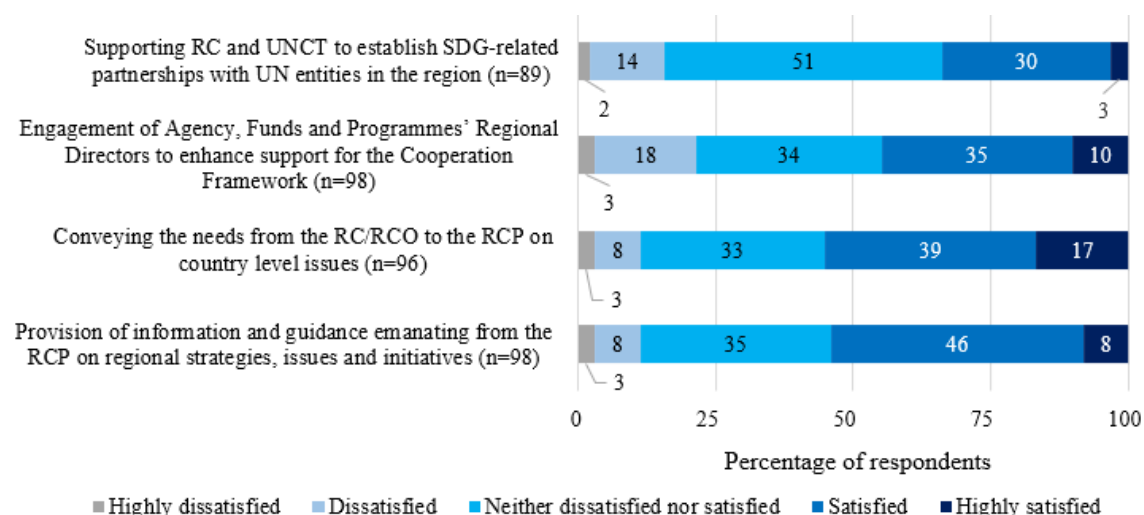
observed; however, given their greater leadership role in the groups, engagement was notably higher in group meetings compared to platform meetings.

Resident coordinators were less satisfied with the regional offices' role of connecting with the United Nations at the regional level than they were with their country-focused role

43. As shown in figure X, the surveyed resident coordinators expressed mixed levels of satisfaction with the support provided by the regional offices to engage the United Nations at the regional level on their behalf. This contrasts with the much higher levels of satisfaction with the offices' country-focused role, as discussed in results A and B (i.e. sects. IV.A and IV.B).

Figure X

Resident coordinator satisfaction with Development Coordination Office engagement with the regional United Nations architecture was mixed



Abbreviations: RC, resident coordinator; RCO, resident coordinator office; RCP, regional collaborative platform; SDG, Sustainable Development Goals; UNCT, United Nations country team.

Regional offices faced broader organizational structural challenges in connecting resident coordinators with regional United Nations expertise and strategies

44. In addition to the specific challenges discussed above regarding the Development Coordination Office role in the regional collaborative platforms, some of the interviewed Office staff and platform and peer support group members identified significant organizational challenges faced by the regional offices with regard to connecting resident coordinators with substantive regional United Nations support. The most frequently cited challenges included:

(a) Uneven responsiveness of issue-based coalitions. The relationship between the regional offices, the resident coordinators and the issue-based coalitions was described by interviewed staff and regional collaborative platform and peer support group members as still being a work in progress. While there were examples of issue-based coalitions providing helpful support to resident coordinators, some Development Coordination Office staff and regional collaborative platform and group members noted that United Nations regional entities faced barriers to fully participating, including resident coordinator needs not being well articulated or defined and an absence of funding for the agency members of the issue-based coalitions to develop products to support resident coordinators. As one platform

member explained, the regional offices have the power to convene the issue-based coalitions to bring the resident coordinators and agencies together to consider issues, but there is not a means of implementation to follow up on those discussions;

(b) **Lack of incentives and accountability for United Nations entities.** A few regional staff, regional collaborative platform and peer support group members reported a lack of incentives for United Nations entities at the regional level to collaborate, and unclear accountabilities between the Development Coordination Office and regional entities. In four country support case studies, resident coordinator office interviewees explained that the regional offices had to overcome sometimes tense discussions between agencies to negotiate involvement in joint programmes. In one of the case studies, a key United Nations entity reportedly refused to participate in a joint programme that was highly relevant to its mandate;

(c) **Still-evolving reforms at the regional level.** Across regions, some regional office staff noted that more time was needed for the reforms to be operationalized at the regional level. They described challenges in obtaining reform buy-in from the regional United Nations entities and a need to align management and programming structures to match the reforms. While not directly assessing the effectiveness of the regional level reforms, OIOS evaluations and other independent assessments conducted between 2020 and 2022 have consistently identified the incomplete reform of the regional United Nations system as a significant challenge in aligning United Nations regional-level support to country-level needs.

V. Recommendations

45. The Inspection and Evaluation Division makes two important recommendations to the Development Coordination Office.

Recommendation 1 (result D)

46. To address the uncapped and wide-ranging demand for support from resident coordinators/resident coordinator offices and the regional office capacity constraints and the unsustainability of the current approach to meeting demand, the Development Coordination Office should conduct a needs assessment of the resident coordinators/resident coordinator offices and a mapping exercise on which types of support the Office is best placed to provide through its regional or New York offices. The needs assessment and mapping exercise should comprise the following elements:

(a) Assess and categorize resident coordinator/resident coordinator office support needs to understand the primary needs and which, if any, are not being adequately met;

(b) Conduct a mapping exercise on which types of support the regional and New York offices and other United Nations entities are best placed to provide;

(c) Clearly define the support to be provided by the regional offices (including which type of support might be better provided by the New York office);

(d) Develop a plan and timeline for implementing the identified changes to the structure and/or roles and responsibilities of the regional and New York offices;

(e) Communicate support structure, roles and responsibilities to resident coordinators, resident coordinator offices, country teams and the wider United Nations system.

In undertaking this exercise, the demands placed on the regional offices by United Nations Headquarters should also be taken into account.

Indicators of achievement: needs assessment and mapping exercise to determine support areas of the Development Coordination Office and United Nations system conducted; plan and timeline produced; structures, roles and responsibilities communicated through the resident coordinator system and wider United Nations system.

Recommendation 2 (result E)

47. To address the challenges that the regional offices have faced in fully realizing their role in connecting the regional collaborative platforms with the resident coordinators, the Development Coordination Office should continue to work under the leadership of the platform Chair to further clarify the platform connector role of regional office teams and communicate that clearly to both resident coordinators and platform members, taking into account the regional section of the management and accountability framework of the United Nations development and resident coordinator system and the regional collaborative platform functioning and working arrangements document. Ideally, recommendation 2 should be addressed once the needs assessment in recommendation 1 (result D) has been conducted, so that it may inform the role of the regional offices as regional collaborative platform connectors.

Indicators of achievement: discussion with the Chair of the regional collaborative platforms regarding the roles and responsibilities of the Development Coordination Office with regard to the platform; communication of clearly defined roles and responsibilities to resident coordinators, country teams and platform members.

Annex***Comments received from the Officer-in-Charge for Development Coordination**

I am pleased to acknowledge receipt of the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the evaluation of the Development Coordination Office (DCO) regional support, and I welcome the findings of the report. I am particularly pleased that the findings confirm that DCO regional offices, despite being relatively recently established, are already clearly showing results and have enhanced the capacity of Resident Coordinators (RCs) to better fulfil their leadership and programme coordination roles. I am convinced that the report will help us to further strengthen our efforts in this regard, in line with the ambition articulated by United Nations (UN) Member States through General Assembly resolution [72/279](#).

I take this opportunity to appreciate the valuable insights of the report. It makes clear that the regional support to country programming activities is valued by a majority of RCs across the globe. We note the findings that RCs still require clarification about the various regional support mechanisms available to them, as well as the specific role of DCO in harnessing support both from UN counterparts in the region and from non-UN partners within and outside the region.

After careful review, I am pleased to accept the two recommendations set forth in the draft report. As requested, we have also developed a plan of action to address the recommendations, including a timetable for implementing each recommendation.

Specifically, with respect to Recommendation 1, that DCO conduct a Resident Coordinator/Resident Coordinator Office (RCO) needs assessment and a mapping of which types of support DCO is best placed to provide via its regional and/or New York office(s), I confirm that we will undertake such an assessment. We take on board the specific recommendations that this exercise include an assessment of RC/RCO support needs, a mapping of existing capacities of DCO in New York and in the regions, and develop a plan and timeline for effecting the required changes to the structure and modalities of work, with a clearer division of labour between New York and the regions. The region-specific disaggregated data that you have additionally provided will also be helpful inputs to this exercise. DCO will ensure that these changes are communicated clearly with RCs, RCOs and UN country teams, in order to improve our effectiveness going forward.

Secondly, with respect to Recommendation 2, I confirm that DCO will continue to work under the leadership of the Chair of the Regional Collaborative Platforms (RCP) to further clarify the RCP connector role of DCO regional teams and communicate that clearly to both Resident Coordinators and RCP members, taking into account the regional section of the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF) of the UN development and Resident Coordinator system and the RCP Functioning and Working Arrangements document.

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.

* 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.