

Evaluation of the Development Coordination Office (DCO) Regional Support

29 December 2022

Assignment No: IED-22-013



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](#)).

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Contents

- I. Introduction and objective 5
- II. Background 5
 - A. Mandate and objective 5
 - B. Structure 6
 - C. Resources 7
- III. Scope and methodology 8
- IV. Evaluation results..... 9
 - A. DCO regional office support enhanced the capacity of RCs to better fulfil their leadership roles .. 9
 - B. DCO regional office support enhanced the capacity of RCs to better fulfil their programme coordination role 14
 - C. DCO regional offices have provided helpful support to RCs on transboundary responses, though their support has been limited by the complexity of the issues and their own office capacity..... 18
 - D. Given the highly demand driven nature of their work and their significant reliance on extrabudgetary post resources, DCO regional offices may not be able to sustain their current level of support..... 20
 - E. The role of DCO regional offices on connecting RCs to the regional level UN architecture was still evolving..... 23
- V. Recommendations 26

Executive Summary

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

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

DCO regional office support enhanced the capacity of RCs to better fulfil their programme coordination role. DCO regional offices supported RCs on their programme coordination role through the Peer Support Group (PSG) mechanism and with direct support to programming processes, and RCs were highly satisfied with both modes of support. DCO regional office support also enhanced the capacity of RCs to coordinate UN programming at the country level by connecting them with regional expertise and analyses. Where expertise was available, DCO regional offices effectively supported mainstreaming normative agendas into joint programming.

DCO regional offices have also provided helpful support to RCs on transboundary responses through various means, mainly by convening RCs and UN system entities, reviewing common country analyses (CCA) and CFs and supporting regional analyses; all five DCO regional offices have supported RCs 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, DCO regional offices may not be able to sustain their current level of support. The work of DCO regional offices was highly demand driven and uncapped, with open-ended and wide-ranging requests for support that were difficult to plan for. DCO regional offices have added capacity to meet demand from RCs and DCO New York with the use of temporary staff, secondments and UN volunteers. Despite having added capacity, DCO regional offices still experienced challenges with meeting the demand for their support.

The role of DCO regional offices on connecting RCs to the regional level UN architecture was still evolving, and RCs were less satisfied with this role. In contrast to their PSG role, the DCO regional office Regional

Collaborative Platform (RCP) role was more broadly defined in the management accountability framework (MAF) and the means of working not as precisely described. DCO regional offices have therefore implemented the RCP role differently, with some taking a more active connector role. Nevertheless, DCO regional offices have been able, to some extent, to connect RCs to the regional UN through the RCP. DCO regional offices faced broader organizational structural challenges in connecting RCs to regional UN expertise and strategies, including uneven responsiveness Issues Based Coalitions (IBCs), the lack of agency incentives and accountability and the still evolving reforms at regional level.

OIOS makes two important recommendations to DCO:

- Conduct an RC/RCO needs assessment and a mapping of which types of support DCO is best placed to provide via its regional or New York offices.
- Work under the leadership of the RCP Chair to further define, agree on and codify in a standardized terms of reference the DCO regional offices' RCP connector role, and communicate that clearly to both RCs and RCP 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 Development Coordination Office (DCO) regional offices in supporting and enabling Resident Coordinators (RCs) to fulfil their critical coordination and leadership role, as envisaged by United Nations Development System (UNDS) reform. The evaluation assessed the following two immediate outcomes: (a) well informed and capacitated RCs and United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) that are better able to support countries to meet the 2030 Agenda goals; and (b) enhanced coordination and coherence of UN development activities at country and regional levels, including better transboundary responses, to advance sustainable development.
2. The evaluation conforms with the United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards. The management response of DCO is provided in the annex.

II. Background

A. Mandate and objective

3. General Assembly resolution A/RES/72/279 on the repositioning of the UNDS guides the scope and implementation of RC system activities. In line with resolution A/RES/72/279, the substantive mandates of the RC system are derived from the 2030 Agenda. The objective to which the RC system contributes is to “accelerate Member States’ progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through strengthened UN 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 RC system budget document outlines the following three expected results for 2022:²
 - **Result 1:** New generation of RCs and UNCTs able to deliver high-quality policy and programming support to countries for achieving the SDGs;
 - **Result 2:** Scaling up delivery on the decade of action for the SDGs through strengthened RC leadership for more joined-up support to governments; and
 - **Result 3:** Countries enabled to mitigate the effects of COVID-19.
5. The primary function of DCO at the regional level, articulated in the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF), is to provide strategic support to RCs and country teams to advance the SDGs.³ The RC system budget document further elaborates that the “regional coordination function of the Resident Coordinator system focuses on overseeing and supporting the coherent and

¹ A/76/6 (Sect. 1)

² A/76/6 (Sect. 1)

³ Management and Accountability Framework of the UN Development and RC system (MAF), 15 September 2021.

effective delivery of operational activities for development by Resident Coordinators and UN country teams through integrated policy programming and operational support, together with the regional teams of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) and UN regional economic and social commissions".⁴

6. In all five regions, two of the support mechanisms through which DCO regional offices perform their role in coordinating regional support to the RC system are the Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP) and the Peer Support Group (PSG), described as follows:

- RCP: The five RCPs provide overall regional coordination and are each chaired by the Deputy Secretary General (DSG), with the Regional Economic Commissions (RECs) Executive Secretaries and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Regional Directors acting as Vice-Chairs, and the membership comprising the regional directors of UN entities in the region. DCO regional offices are full members of the RCP and provide secretariat functions as part of the tripartite secretariat with UNDP and the RECs, though the prominence of DCO's secretariat role varies across regions. In each RCP, Issues-Based Coalitions (IBCs; or Opportunities and Issues Based Coalitions (OIBCs) in Africa) are region-specific, time-bound coalitions of UN entities responding to country needs. The regional Operations Management Team is also part of the RCP.
- PSG:⁵ The five PSGs are chaired by the DCO Regional Director and comprise regional experts from UN entities. PSGs quality assure and provide strategic planning support to the Common Country Analysis (CCA) and Cooperation Framework (CF) processes at the country level. The PSGs are also part of the RCP.

B. Structure

7. The RC system is led by the Secretary-General, with day-to-day oversight exercised by the DSG on his behalf as Chair of the UNSDG. The UNSDG is the most senior internal platform for development coordination at the headquarters level, with oversight for the RC system provided by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). DCO at the UN Secretariat supports the management of the RC system under the leadership of an Assistant Secretary-General reporting directly to the DSG.⁶ At the country level, 130 RCs, supported by their RC offices (RCOs), lead 132 UNCTs operating in 162 countries and territories.⁷ RCs are supported by five DCO regional offices. At the time of the evaluation, each DCO regional office had a core capacity of five professional-level staff members. This included the following roles: Regional Director, Senior Regional Coordination Officer and Team Leader, Regional Cooperation Frameworks Partnerships and Programmes Officer, Regional Administration and Business Operations Specialist and a Regional Liaison Officer (based in New York).

⁴ A/76/6 (Sect. 1), para 1.465

⁵ UNSDG. Standard Terms of Reference for Regional Peer Support Group (PSG). March 2021

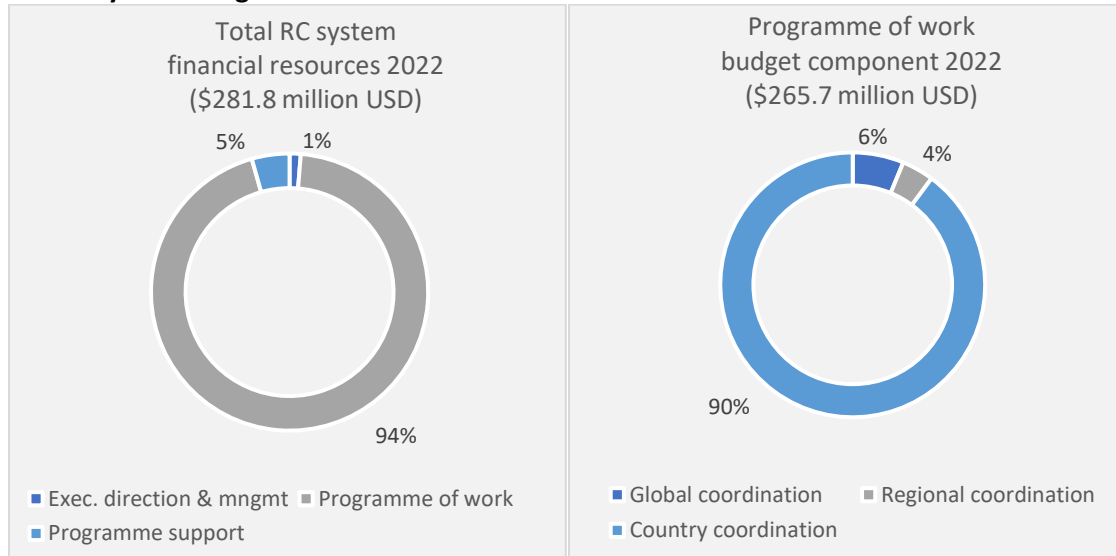
⁶ A/RES/72/279

⁷ https://data.uninfo.org/Home/_LBRCStatistics

C. Resources

8. The RC system is funded through the Special Purpose Trust Fund (SPTF).⁸ The total budget of the RC system SPTF for 2022 was \$281.8 million USD. Most funding, \$238.6 million USD (84.7%), 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 USD, as shown in Figure 1.⁹

Figure 1: RC system budget 2022



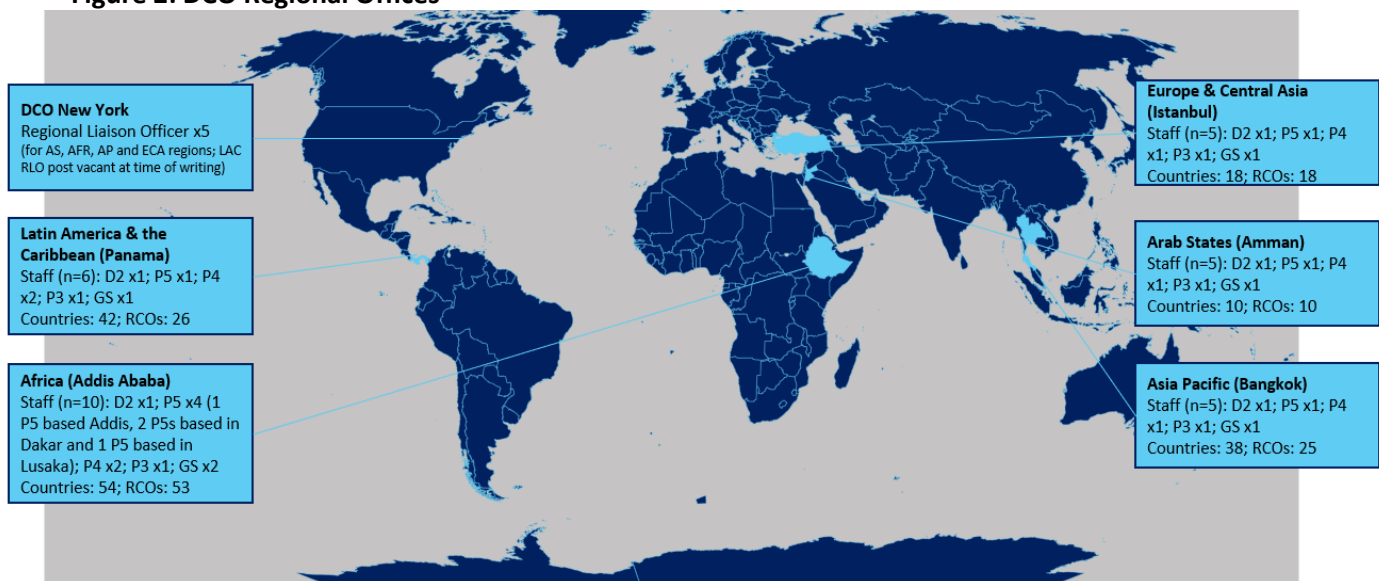
9. A total of 1254 staff posts were allocated to the RC system in 2022. This included 1220 posts for the programme of work, 20 posts for programme support and 14 posts for executive direction and management. Within the programme of work, 1142 posts were allocated to country coordination, 35 posts to regional offices and 43 posts to headquarters.¹⁰ The distribution of the 35 regional office posts is presented in Figure 2.

⁸ UNSDG <https://unsdg.un.org/SPTF>

⁹ A/76/6 (Sect. 1)

¹⁰ A/76/6 (Sect. 1)

Figure 2: DCO Regional Offices



Source data: DCO, December 2022

III. Scope and methodology

10. The evaluation covered the period from 1 January 2019 to mid-2022 and had the following scope:

- a) **Formative and immediate outcome focus:** The evaluation had a formative focus, as well as assessing progress towards evaluable immediate outcomes, to account for the relatively recent articulation of the role of DCO regional offices in the September 2021 MAF.
- b) **Focus on DCO regional roles and responsibilities, and not the implementation of reforms in the wider UN system entities:** The evaluation sought to assess the role of DCO regional offices in the context of the various UN system entities that provided direct support to RCs and country teams, and not the implementation of regional level reforms beyond DCO responsibilities.
- c) **Exclusion of funding mechanisms and support to UNSDG efficiency workstreams:** The evaluation did not conduct a systematic assessment of the DCO regional office role in supporting regional resource mobilization and funding mechanisms or UNSDG efficiency workstreams.

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

- a) **Global client survey of RCs** to assess satisfaction with the support received from DCO regional offices.¹¹

¹¹ Response rate: 84 per cent (n = 109). Survey conducted during June-July 2022

- 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:
 - Regional Directors and all DCO regional office staff (n = 51)
 - Both vice chairs of the RCP Secretariat (REC Executive Secretary and UNDP Regional Director) and one other agency (n = 16)
 - PSG technical members with mix by agency size (n = 10)
 - d) **Direct observation** of five PSG and four RCP meetings across the five regions.
 - e) **DCO regional office embedding** of the OIOS-IED team for one week in each of the three DCO regional offices selected for missions (Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean).
 - f) **Case studies** of five discrete examples of DCO regional office support to country-level across three regions (Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean).
12. OIOS-IED convened an evaluation reference group comprising representatives from UN regional entities¹² to provide confidential input into the evaluation scope, design and early findings.

IV. Evaluation results

- A. DCO regional office support enhanced the capacity of RCs to better fulfil their leadership roles

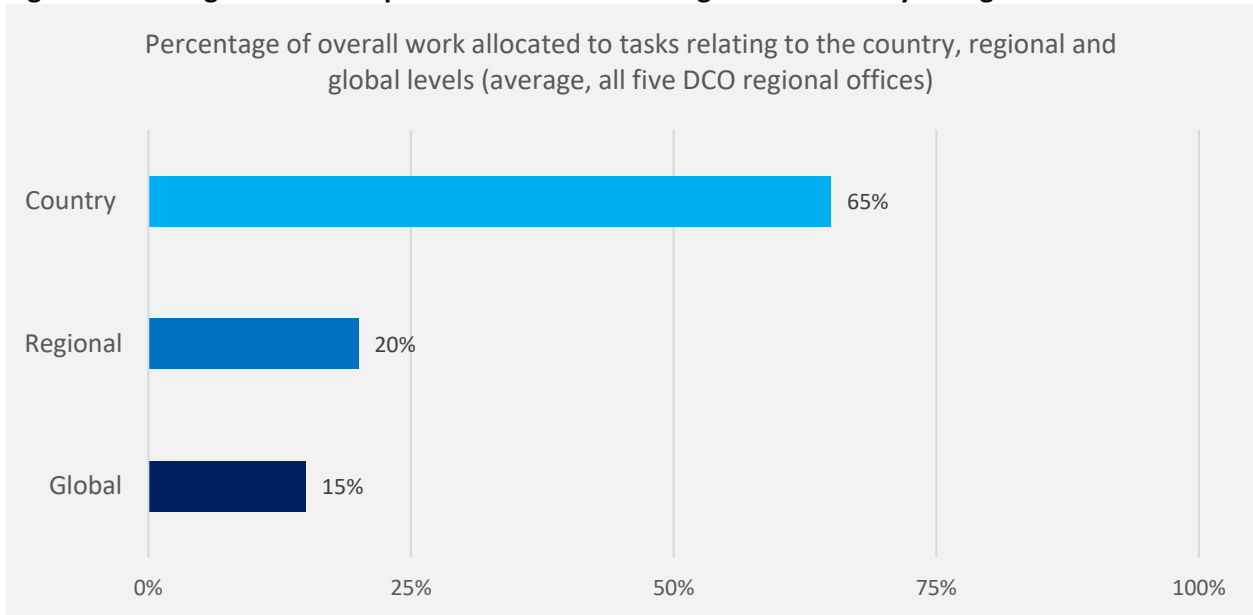
The DCO regional office primary role to support RCs has been implemented as intended with development system reform and has been widely accepted

13. DCO has implemented their model for regional offices – with a focus on RC support – as intended at the outset of development system reform. The model envisioned was for 70 per cent of DCO 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.¹³ This distribution of work was confirmed by the workload analysis presented in Figure 3.

¹² United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN Women, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

¹³ According to DCO internal documents, the intended distribution of activities of regional office staff was as follows: 70 per cent of work being country-facing support (including DCO regional’s role as PSG Chair as well as all support to knowledge sharing, operations and performance); 20 per cent to support regional collaboration and coherence (including role as RCP Secretariat member); and 10 per cent to support global coordination.

Figure 3: DCO regional offices spent most of their working time on country-facing tasks

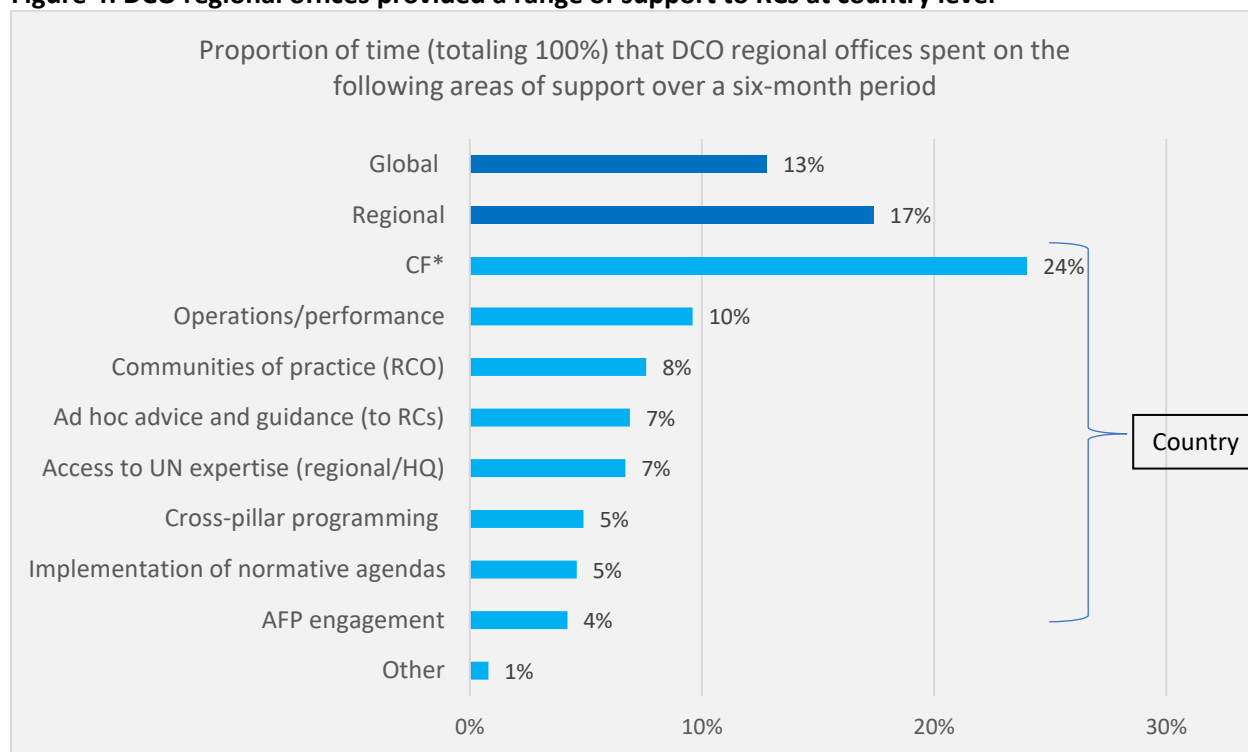


14. The primary role of DCO regional offices to support RCs and RCOs at the country level was clear and accepted. Most RCs surveyed (75 per cent) agreed that the role of the DCO regional offices in supporting the country level was clear. This view was shared by nearly all RCP and PSG members and DCO regional office staff interviewed. DCO regional office staff described their jobs as being primarily country focused - bridging, facilitating, connecting and problem-solving for RCs and RCOs.

DCO regional offices provided a variety of types of helpful country-level support to RCs, with which they were largely satisfied

15. As shown in Figure 4, DCO regional offices provided a wide array of support to RCs at the country level. Most common amongst these was support on the CF process, discussed further in result B below.

Figure 4: DCO regional offices provided a range of support to RCs at country level



*CF includes strategic support, quality assurance, knowledge sharing and evaluation. The most time was spent more generally on CF strategic support including, for example, facilitating UNCT retreats, providing training on programming principles, supporting theory of change development and consulting with RCs on UNCT configuration.

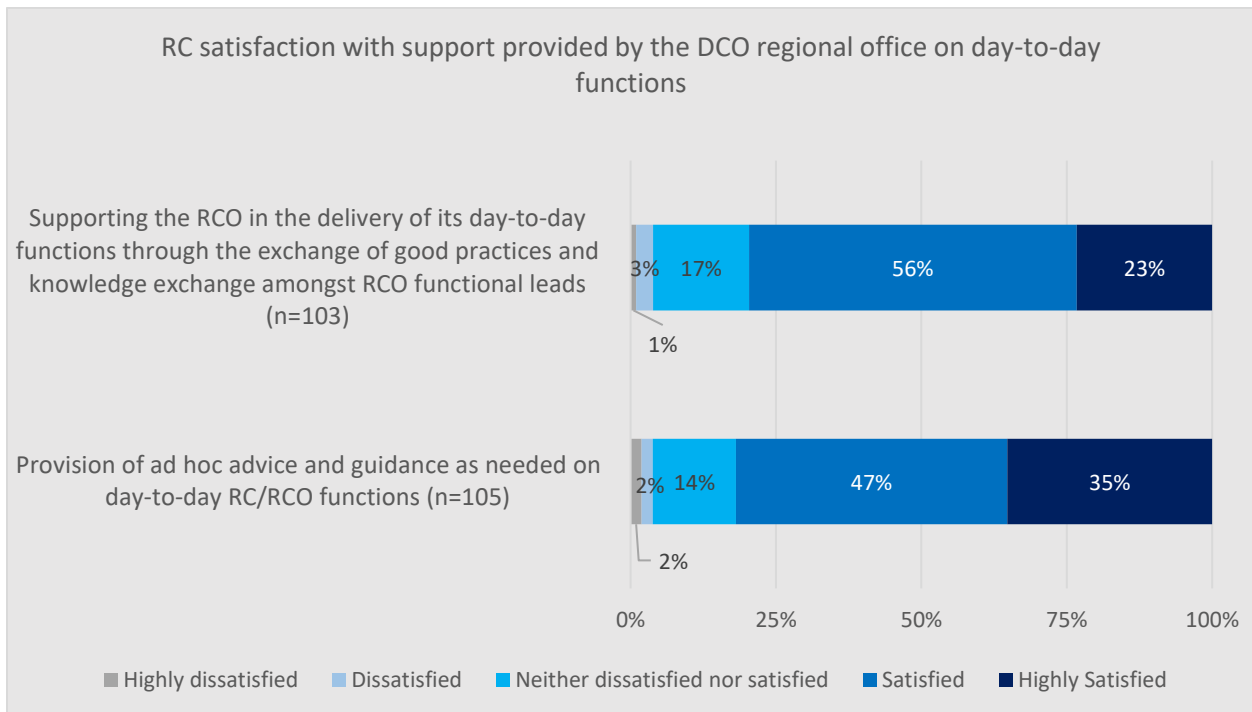
16. In addition to support on the CF, DCO regional office staff described four other main areas of country-level support provided to RCs (identified in Figure 4) as follows:

- **Supporting RCOs on operations and performance-related issues**, including queries and requests related to the Business Operations Strategy (BOS), common premises, common back offices, procurement and human resources (such as onboarding/induction of new RCs, training, troubleshooting RCO staffing issues and certifying travel requests, as well as facilitating RC recruitment by convening RCP members for panel interviews, mid-term and end of year performance reviews including by convening Regional Directors);
- **Managing RCO communities of practices**, including convening RCO staff by functional area to exchange good practices and share experience in virtual workshops, in-person retreats and through WhatsApp groups;
- **Providing ad hoc advice and guidance**, including on data and reporting, UN reform and policy interpretation, planning in challenging contexts, climate action and communications; and
- **Facilitating access for RCs and RCOs to UN expertise** at various entity headquarters and regional offices.

DCO regional offices also supported RCs through structured interactions including with monthly meetings, “RC clinics” for countries developing the CF and RC retreats. DCO regional offices further worked with DCO New York divisions to deliver support to RCs, especially on CF-related matters and communities of practice.

17. Overall, RCs surveyed were largely satisfied with the routine day-to-day support they received from the DCO regional offices, as shown in Figure 5. Furthermore, most RCs were satisfied with the overall quality of DCO 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 5: Majorities of RCs surveyed were satisfied with routine day-to-day support provided by DCO regional offices (excluding crisis situations)



DCO regional offices supported RCs on humanitarian and crisis response, though RCs were less widely satisfied with support provided in this area compared with more routine support

18. DCO regional offices have also supported RCs in countries experiencing crises, including humanitarian situations. Based on 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

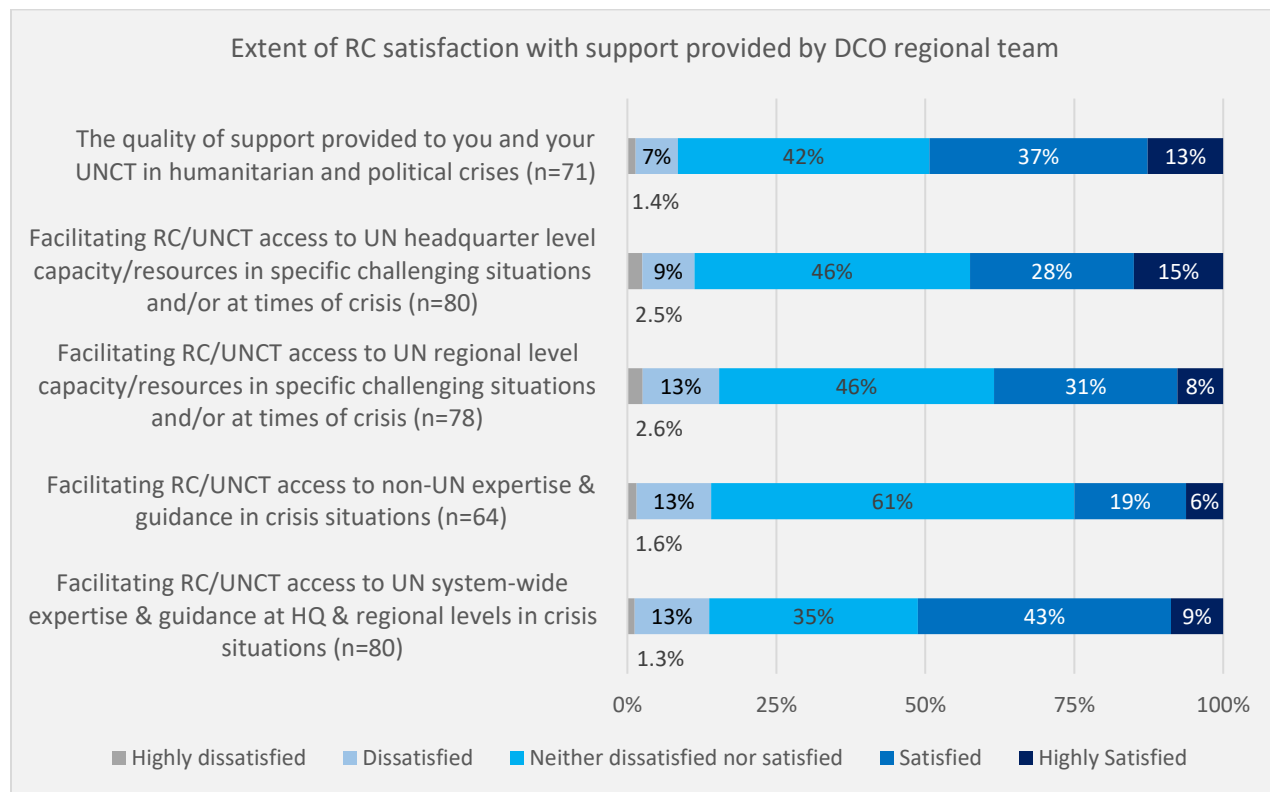
period were experiencing a crisis.¹⁴ DCO regional staff interviewed described delivering the following support in crisis situations:

- **Providing advice and guidance** in response to specific requests for support on crisis response. For example, in one region, the DCO regional office was reportedly instrumental in facilitating guidance from UN headquarters on CFs in the context of non-constitutional changes in government. In another region, the DCO regional office developed a joint work plan with the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), UNDP, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) that included cross-pillar analysis and a regional crisis risk dashboard.
- **Facilitating access to UN system-wide expertise** at times of crisis, including providing RCs with expert guidance in politically challenging situations (by engaging DPPA, for example) and mobilizing system-wide support for countries in crisis through briefings and other communications.
- **Facilitating access to surge capacity** including facilitating funding and deployment of surge staff from across the system and DCO regional offices. DCO regional office staff interviewed in each region reported that their office had facilitated access to surge capacity for RCOs at times of crisis.
- **Providing guidance on communications messaging during crises.** For example, in one region, the DCO regional office convened RCO staff and Agency Funds and Programmes (AFP) communications colleagues in a three-day virtual crisis communications workshop.

19. Approximately one-half or fewer of RCs surveyed were satisfied with the support received for humanitarian and crisis responses, as shown in Figure 6, which is lower than satisfaction on more routine day-to-day support. Some DCO regional office staff interviewed mentioned that there was a lack of clarity and capacity regarding the role of the DCO regional offices in crisis situations. Having said that, a majority of RCs surveyed were in fact satisfied with DCO regional teams' facilitation of access to regional and global UN system expertise during crises. DCO staff interviewed explained that they leveraged their networks and connections with headquarters and regional entities to support where needed, and were well placed to know where to go for that support.

¹⁴ UN INFO cites 162 countries supported by the RC system (<https://data.uninfo.org/Home/LBRCStatistics>). Through a workload analysis questionnaire, regional offices listed the countries that their teams had directly supported (through direct interaction with and/or provision of support to the RC/RCO) over the past 6 months. All regions reported that they had provided support to all countries in their regions during this period. Numbers of countries supported were listed as follows: AFR: 54; AS: 10; AP: 25; ECA: 18; LAC: 41 (total 148).

Figure 6: Overall, RCs surveyed were moderately satisfied with support provided by DCO regional offices in supporting challenging situations, including humanitarian and political crises



B. DCO regional office support enhanced the capacity of RCs to better fulfil their programme coordination role

DCO regional offices supported RCs on their programme coordination role through the PSG mechanism and with direct support to programming

20. DCO regional offices supported RCs on programme coordination through the PSG. The DCO Regional Director role as PSG Chair was clear to and accepted by DCO staff, RCs and PSG members, and it was undertaken effectively. In the PSG meetings observed, DCO Regional Directors appeared to be empowered to play their role as PSG Chair: they actively coordinated the meetings, facilitated and moderated discussions, engaged members for feedback, provided thoughtful responses and identified action points.

21. In addition to their PSG role, DCO regional offices provided direct support to countries on programming. Through both means, DCO regional offices:

- Provided direct support, guidance and troubleshooting where programming processes were off track. This included on the CCA and CF processes, United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) evaluations, implementing CF guidance from DCO New York at the

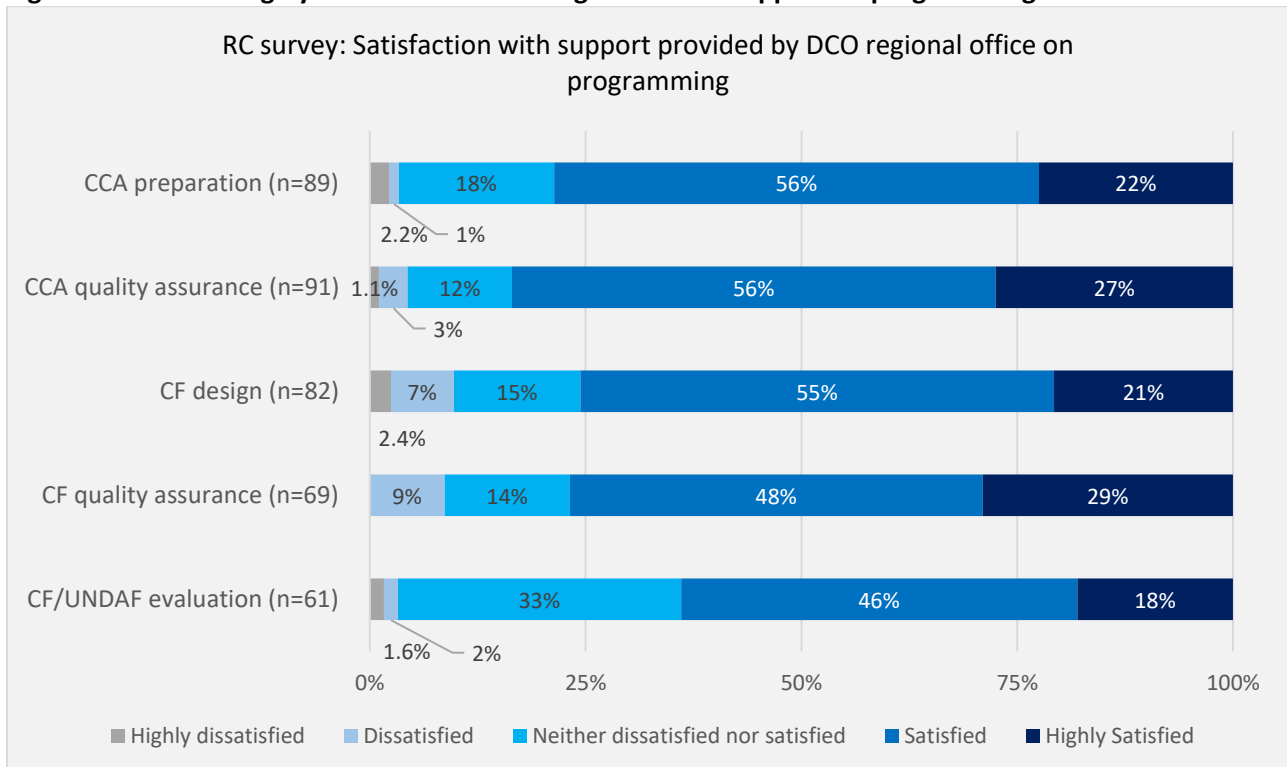
country level and integrating the guiding principles and thematic issues into programming processes;

- Quality assured the roadmap, CCA and CF, which included coordinating PSG member input;
- Shared knowledge and experience across and between RCOs and AFPs;
- Communicated RC and UNCT support needs to PSG members and facilitated country office attendance at PSG meetings for direct assistance and guidance;
- Supported countries with analysis, messaging and stakeholder engagement;
- Assisted with issues relating to funding and fundraising; and
- Identified consultants.¹⁵

RCs were highly satisfied with support given by DCO regional offices on programming processes

22. Overall, RCs surveyed were highly satisfied with DCO regional office support on programming processes, as shown in Figure 7. This has enhanced their capacity to undertake their country programming coordination role. Additionally, most PSG members interviewed across all five regions reported that DCO regional offices supported the development of high-quality CFs through the PSG mechanism.

Figure 7: RCs were highly satisfied with DCO regional office support on programming



¹⁵ According to DCO, the New York divisions also provided both direct and indirect support to RCs and RCOs on all aspects listed here. Further, a cross-unit team of staff from the PPB branch quality assures every draft CCA and CF, forming a significant part of the regional office/PSG feedback sent to RCs and UNCTs.

DCO regional office support enhanced the capacity of RCs to coordinate UN programming at the country level by connecting them with regional expertise and analyses

23. DCO regional offices enhanced RC and RCO capacity by connecting RCs to UN expertise at the regional level. For example, in four of five case studies, DCO regional offices connected RCs and RCOs with regional expertise in joint programming processes.¹⁶ This occurred, for example, by connecting RCs with expertise available through the PSG, regional experts on thematic issues, including at OHCHR for human rights and at the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) on the environment. As well, DCO regional offices engaged UN experts from across the system on sub-regional issues including migration and post-conflict transitions. The box below describes one case study where the DCO regional office directly supported the RC and UNCT by facilitating connections to UN experts at the regional level.

Case study support example: Support to joint programming processes

In one case study, DCO regional office support to the CF process included providing quality assurance through the PSG, exchanging knowledge, interpreting guidance from DCO New York, connecting the RC and UNCT to system-wide expertise and supporting national stakeholder consultation. The DCO Regional Director also liaised with agency Regional Directors to encourage coherent support to the CF. All government representatives interviewed reported that the CCA and CF were of high quality and were developed in a consultative way. The RC and RCO interviewees reported that DCO regional office support had contributed to positive outcomes on the CF process and enhanced system-wide coherence, as exemplified in the two quotes below.

The RC commented: *“Without the back-up of the DCO 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 MAF at global level and how that then cascades down to the country team. Without that platform, we would already be at a disadvantage.”*

An RCO staff member also noted: *“What was most useful in terms of those processes, especially in doing the CCA, was that DCO regional was the interpreter for us of the various [CF] guidance [documents] that came from headquarters [...] they were very helpful in terms of informing us about what’s happening and trends at the global and regional level. [...] The support we received contributed to making those products – the CCA, CF and CF evaluation – higher quality products”.*

24. DCO regional offices additionally enhanced capacity by ensuring that country-level programming reflected the wider regional context. For example, some DCO regional offices led, or contributed to, regional analyses to inform programming. In PSG meetings, DCO Regional Directors provided the regional context to situate discussions and frame country-level programming. For

¹⁶ The limited evidence of positive outcomes in the fifth case study may be attributed to the relatively recent engagement of the DCO regional office.

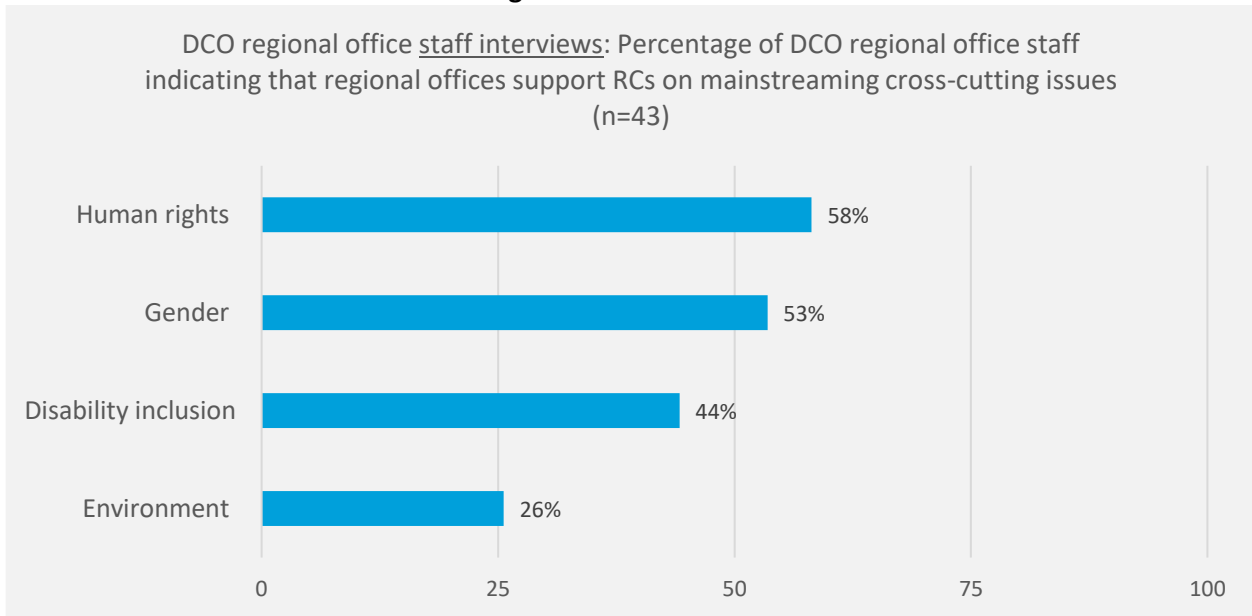
example, in one PSG meeting observed, DCO encouraged consideration of regional issues in the development of CF indicators.

25. Lastly, DCO regional offices further enhanced the capacity of RCs to coordinate UN programming at the country level by connecting and convening RCs, UNCTs and AFP Regional Directors on discrete thematic issues pertinent to the region. For example, this included convening RCs on thematic issues such as migration to discuss joint approaches and to encourage experience sharing and learning to strengthen programming.

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

26. DCO regional offices have provided support to mainstreaming normative agendas (including human rights, gender, the environment and disability inclusion), as shown in Figure 8. They accomplished this primarily by connecting RCs and UNCTs to UN mainstreaming expertise at the regional and global levels and by ensuring cross-cutting issues are mainstreamed in CFs through their PSG quality assurance role. Nearly all PSG members interviewed noted that DCO had engaged AFP thematic experts, including on gender, human rights and the environment, to support mainstreaming efforts.

Figure 8: DCO regional offices have supported on human rights and gender and less so on disability inclusion and environment mainstreaming



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

- C. DCO regional offices have provided helpful support to RCs on transboundary responses, though their support has been limited by the complexity of the issues and their own office capacity

Through various means, all five DCO regional offices have supported RCs on transboundary responses

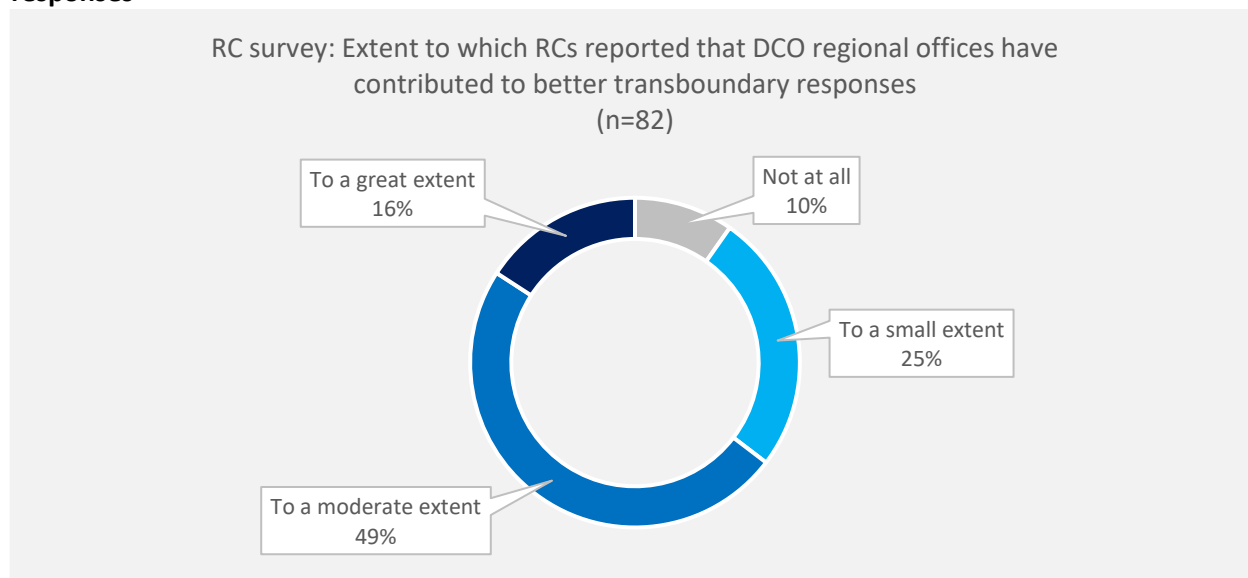
28. DCO regional offices have provided support to RCs on transboundary responses, mainly by convening RCs and UN system entities, reviewing CCAs and CFs and supporting regional analyses; all five office workplans for 2022 included up to three activities on supporting transboundary responses. These three types of support specifically entailed:

- **Convening RCs and other UN system entities.** As the most frequently mentioned support by both DCO regional staff and RCP and PSG members interviewed, DCO regional offices facilitated conversations across RCs and UNCTs on issues such as water quality, migration and climate change. DCO regional offices also connected RCs to both Secretariat and wider UN system entities and networks at the regional and global levels, including the UN network of economists, global task forces and various sub-regional platforms.
- **Reviewing CCAs and CFs.** DCO regional offices supported RCs and UNCTs by reviewing CCA and CF chapters on transboundary issues. This included checking that relevant regional strategies were integrated into CFs (the strategy for the Sahel, for example), facilitating inclusion of regional data from PSG entities and drafting sections of regional chapters in the CCA.
- **Supporting regional analyses.** Some DCO regional office staff reported developing analyses on issues that impacted the region more broadly such as impacts of regional conflicts, or migration.

DCO regional office support to RCs has contributed to better transboundary responses

29. RCs surveyed reported that the support they received from DCO regional offices has contributed to better transboundary responses, as shown in Figure 9. DCO regional office staff interviewed also noted positive results from support on transboundary issues, including common RC messaging on regional issues, increased applications to multi-partner trust funds on regional issues and the signing of cross border programmes.

Figure 9: Most RCs reported DCO regional office support has contributed to better transboundary responses



30. Two of the five case studies demonstrated the effectiveness of DCO regional offices at supporting the development of joint programming for transboundary issues. This involved guiding the completion of joint programming processes and connecting UNCTs to both wider perspectives and expertise throughout the UN system. One of these case studies is detailed in the box below.

Case study: DCO regional office support to transboundary joint programming

In one case study, the DCO regional office supported the completion of a complex joint programming process between two UNCTs and a peacekeeping mission. The DCO regional office was said to have taken ownership of the work process, which included playing a neutral convening role, organizing the work by developing an action plan and then guiding the participants through the plan. Meanwhile, the DCO regional office left the subject matter work to the relevant RCOs, mission and UNCT members. The DCO regional office 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. UN entity and RCO interviewees noted that the DCO regional office approach and the process that they had established for developing this complex joint programme may also be a good template that could be replicated for developing similar transboundary joint programmes.

One RCO staff member interviewed summarized the value of the DCO regional office support as follows: “[DCO] 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. Me and my counterpart ... identified the right agencies in countries, but otherwise it was DCO making the process work.”

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

31. About one third of DCO regional office staff and almost half of RCP and PSG members interviewed noted that support to transboundary responses was an area where more should be done. This view was consistent with a DCO March 2022 global review of CCAs and CFs¹⁷ that found that, while cross-border and regional challenges were covered in the majority of CCAs and CFs, opportunities to develop transboundary responses were not well analyzed, implications for SDG achievement were missing and engagement with stakeholders on these issues was weak.

32. The main challenges identified with increasing support to transboundary responses were the complexity of transboundary issues and DCO capacity constraints. Some interviewed DCO regional office staff and RCP and PSG members explained that supporting on transboundary issues was complex due to it being unclear how to connect regional strategies to UNCT agency programmes that were focused on the country level, working across country teams and the number of actors involved. Some interviewed DCO regional staff also noted that their offices had limited capacity to coordinate, convene and to commit desk time to thinking about transboundary issues. One UN agency interviewee voiced a common opinion in stating, “I do think the DCO Regional Director and the regional specialist are trying to do this, but [...] this continues to be a major weakness of the UN as a whole. We are not good at thinking transboundary or across UNCTs. It’s a struggle.”

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

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

33. The work of DCO regional offices has been primarily driven by demands from the country level; over a six-month period, each of the five offices provided support to every country in their respective region. Nearly all DCO regional office staff interviewed described their work as mostly driven by RC and RCO demand; one DCO regional office staff member voiced a common approach in stating: “We strive to be completely demand driven”. Observations of staff meetings and workshops in all three regional office missions further confirmed a demand driven orientation. For example, in all staff meetings observed, the regional office teams reviewed specific requests for support from RCs and, in some cases, DCO regional offices were being asked to provide workshops for UNCTs on aspects of the CF process with very little advance notice.

34. In addition to demands from the country level, DCO regional offices also responded to urgent support requests from DCO New York, which were often difficult to plan for. This included support to global interagency decision making and coordination mechanisms (for example, Regional Monthly

¹⁷ DCO. CCA Quality Criteria/ CF Quality Criteria - Desk reviews summary_07Mar2022

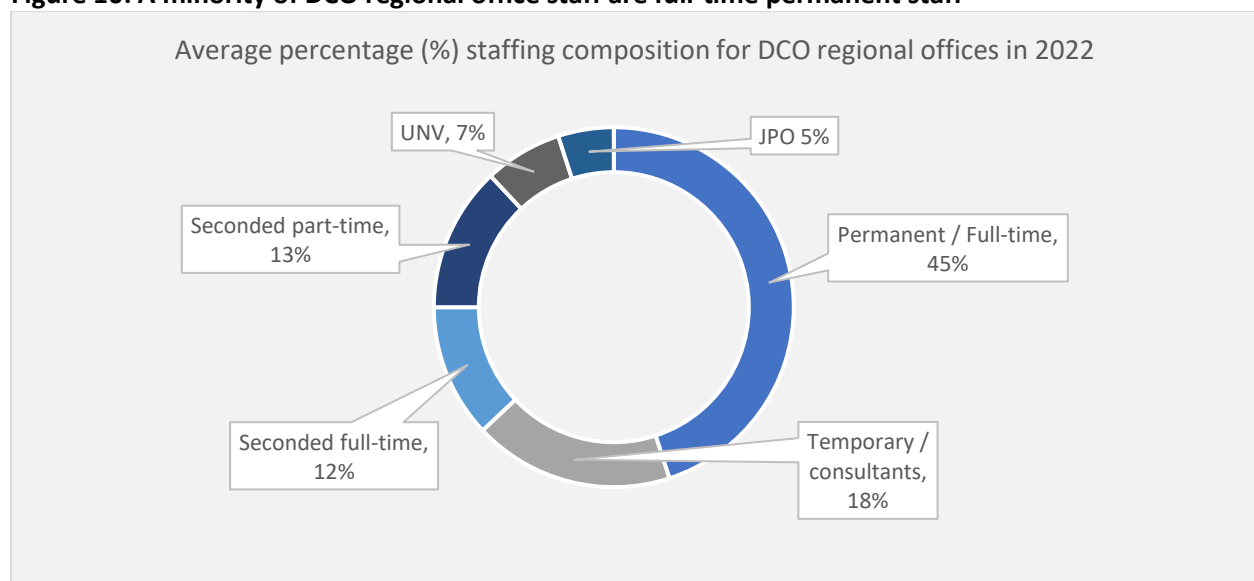
Reviews and Executive Committee/Deputies Committee). DCO regional offices responded to requests for background papers, briefing notes, talking points, reporting with short turn-around times and assigning of regional focal points for a growing number of priority areas. Some interviewed DCO regional staff reported that responding to these many urgent headquarters requests was challenging, as noted by one staff member who stated that “it doesn’t work well for staff time management and work-life balance. It means the regional teams are tasked from many people, and at all hours of the day”.

35. The demands for support from both country and headquarters levels have been largely uncapped. The highly demand driven nature of the DCO regional office work, combined with the open-ended and wide-ranging scope of the support requests from RCs and RCOs, has made it particularly difficult to plan office workloads; some DCO regional staff interviewed noted that working in such a demand driven environment made it difficult to prioritize their work. DCO regional office workplans for 2022 showed that most activities had an “ongoing” timeframe and were described with open-ended language rather than specific interventions with concrete time frames for delivery; for example, some of the activities in the workplan were broadly described as for example “facilitate opportunities for peer exchange” and “provide advice and guidance to RCOs”.

DCO regional offices have needed to add capacity to meet demand from RCs and headquarters with the use of temporary staff, secondments and UN volunteers

36. To meet the demand from RCs and DCO New York for support, all five DCO regional offices have added capacity beyond their initial budgeted post allocations, as shown in Figure 10. Some DCO regional office staff interviewed also noted that their office would have been unable to meet demands for their support without relying on temporary staff and secondments. In fact, according to DCO regional office staff and RCP and PSG members interviewed, the lack of capacity was the main challenge faced by the DCO regional offices in meeting demand.

Figure 10: A minority of DCO regional office staff are full-time permanent staff



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

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

- **A broad range of country-specific requests.** In four of five case studies, regional offices did not have sufficient capacity to fully respond to country-specific requests for support, including being able to engage earlier in joint programming processes and provide more tailored country-specific support. In addition, some DCO regional staff members interviewed reported gaps in expertise and functional areas in their offices that they felt would be needed to be addressed to fully support RCs on all requests received. Examples of this included a lack of capacity in human resource, climate change and Arabic and French-speaking staff members.
- **An increasing need to provide surge capacity.** Several DCO regional office staff members expressed concerns that they were increasingly asked to provide surge support to RCOs to backstop functions where capacity was weaker, there has been staff turnover, crises were unfolding that needed support and subject matter expertise was needed for CF or CCA processes. In one observed staff meeting, the DCO regional office team discussed challenges in meeting future RCO demands for surge support, while in another meeting, the urgency of completing staff recruitments was discussed in the context of upcoming needs for support.
- **High logistical demand of coordinating RCP and/or PSG meetings.** Some RCP and PSG members interviewed noted a prevalence of last-minute meetings and short lead time to review materials, which they attributed to not having enough capacity in the DCO offices to play their secretariat roles. While not in response to specific demands for support, RCP members interviewed in four regions also suggested that DCO did not have the resources to adequately perform their RCP secretariat role, alongside the Regional Commission and UNDP, including being able to connect RCs to RCP discussions and adequately promote IBC work to RCs. Meanwhile, some DCO regional office staff members noted that the majority of the work of the tripartite joint RCP secretariat was unevenly given to DCO, or that doing more would be difficult without further resources or a different structure.
- **Misdirected requests for support from RCs.** The division of labour between DCO New York and regional offices was not always clear to RCs, with just 58 per cent of RCs surveyed saying that it was clear. While most DCO regional office staff said that the division of labour was generally clear, they also described instances where the division was unclear. This included on the provision of support on human resources issues, performance management, recruitment and business operations, all of which could have been more directly handled by DCO New York.

E. The role of DCO regional offices on connecting RCs to the regional level UN architecture was still evolving

In contrast to their PSG role, the DCO regional office RCP role was more broadly defined

38. Compared to their role on the PSG, the role for DCO regional offices on the RCP was more broadly defined in the MAF and the means of working not as precisely described. In addition to their role on the tripartite joint secretariat, the MAF defines the DCO regional office role as encompassing two functions: 1) “Facilitating interaction between the RCP and RCs/UNCTs”, and 2) “coordinating engagement with the RCP, enabling RC/UNCT access to regional expertise and strategic advice, including through the IBCs, and facilitating guidance and support from RCP members”. However, it does not specify how these two broad functions will be fulfilled. In practice, DCO regional office staff described their work on the RCP Secretariat as primarily administrative including, for example: organizing the logistics of the RCP meetings; helping to design RCP meeting agendas; preparing background documents; taking notes of RCP meetings; and preparing work plans for approval by the RCP vice-Chairs and RCP membership and then tracking their implementation. In all five regions, RCP members interviewed confirmed that the secretariat role played by DCO encompassed these activities, and that these were important to the functioning of the RCPs. However, RCP members (including the vice-Chairs) expressed a need for DCO regional offices to better articulate RC needs to the RCP (and the IBCs) and leverage RCP expertise.

39. The role played by DCO on the RCP was not consistently clear to RCs and DCO regional staff. Just 51 per cent of surveyed RCs responded that the role of DCO on the RCP was clear to them (compared to 65 per cent who said it was clear for the PSG). Meanwhile, just under half of DCO regional office staff that spoke about the RCP indicated that the role was clear; many said it was still evolving. The two quotes from DCO staff below contrast the clarity of roles on the PSG and the RCP:

“Chairing the PSG is one of the most clearly defined and accepted functions for the regional office and the Regional Director.” – DCO Staff

Vs.

“The regional level and RCP and joint secretariat interaction is not yet clear. It’s in the MAF but not clear in practice. The expectation isn’t matched with reality. We have a limited mandate on RCP” – DCO staff

DCO regional offices have implemented the RCP role differently

40. The DCO role on the RCP was implemented differently across the five regions. Some regional offices took a more active connector role on the RCP by bringing members of RCP together to build consensus on issues related to alignment of CFs with country programme documents or discuss regional responses to global priorities. Meanwhile for others the role was mainly administrative. Across regions, RCP and DCO interviewees with involvement in the RCP reported that its functioning was more a product of negotiated arrangements and personalities, rather than implementation of a

clearly described relationship such as with the PSG mechanism. Observations of RCP meetings in four regions showed a wide range of DCO involvement as compared to the PSG meetings observed. For example, in one meeting the DCO Regional Director answered questions pertaining to the RCs in their region when asked; in another the DCO Director actively chaired the meeting and facilitated the discussion; in two meetings the vice-Chairs facilitated discussion; and in another the DCO Regional Director spoke at the end to summarize the discussion.

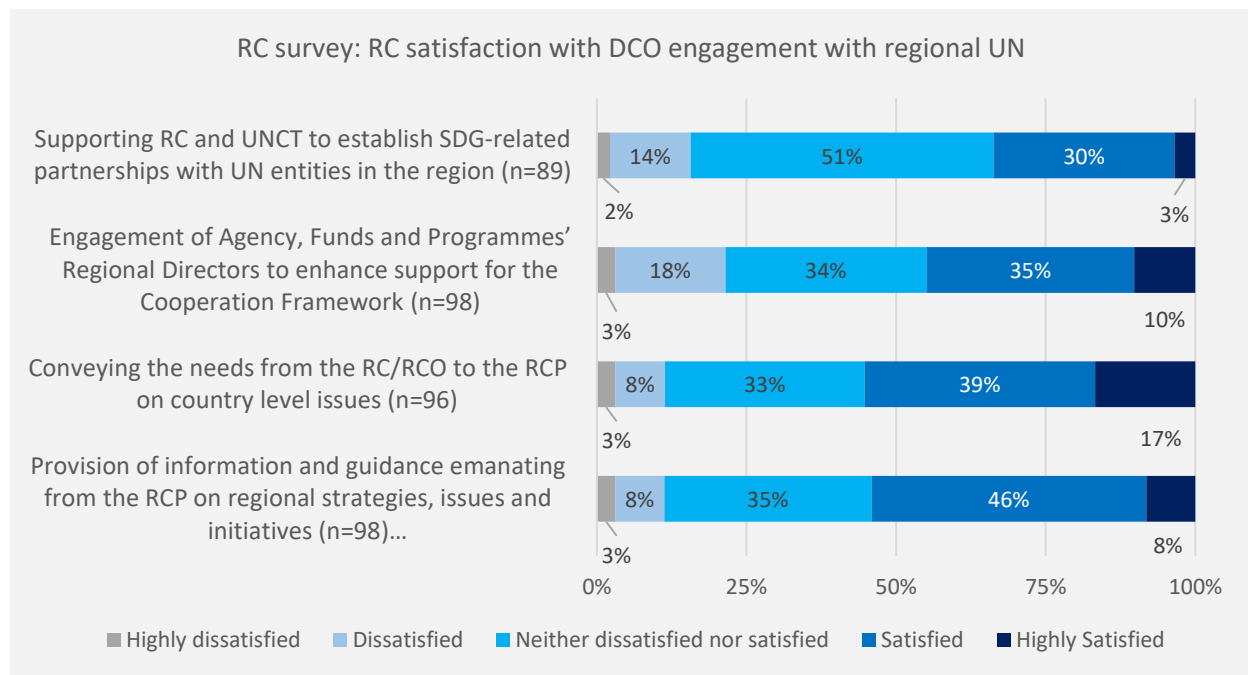
Nevertheless, DCO regional offices have been able, to some extent, to connect RCs to the regional UN through the RCP

41. DCO regional offices have, to varying degrees, connected the RCs to regional UN expertise and discussions through their RCP secretariat role. In four of five regions, DCO regional office staff and RCP and PSG members interviewed noted that the DCO regional offices have helped to connect the work of the IBCs to the RCs. For example, some DCO regional offices participated in the IBC secretariats themselves and invited IBC Chairs to meetings with RCs and RCOs. As well, in three out of four RCP meetings observed, DCO played a connector role by linking the discussions to RC requests for support and needs they had in the region and inviting an RC to address the RCP directly for input. DCO regional offices appeared well-prepared, engaged and consultative in the majority of RCP and PSG meetings observed, though – given their greater leadership role on the PSG - engagement was notably higher in PSG meetings compared to RCP meetings.

RCs were less satisfied with the DCO regional office role on connecting with the regional level UN than they were with its country focused role

42. As shown in Figure 11, RCs surveyed expressed mixed levels of satisfaction with the support provided by DCO regional offices to engage the regional level of the UN on their behalf. This contrasts with the much higher levels of satisfaction for their country-focused role as discussed in results A and B.

Figure 11: RC satisfaction with DCO engagement with the regional UN architecture was mixed



DCO regional offices faced broader organizational structural challenges in connecting RCs to regional UN expertise and strategies

43. In addition to the specific challenges discussed above regarding the DCO role in the RCP, some DCO staff and RCP and PSG members interviewed identified significant organizational challenges faced by DCO regional offices with connecting RCs to substantive regional UN support. The most frequently cited challenges included:

- Uneven responsiveness of IBCs.** The relationship between DCO regional offices, the RCs, and the IBCs was described by staff and RCP and PSG members interviewed as still a work in progress. While there were examples of IBCs providing helpful support to RCs, some DCO and RCP and PSG members interviewed noted that UN regional entities faced barriers to fully participating. These included RC needs not being well articulated or defined and an absence of funding for the agency IBC members to develop supporting products for RCs. As one RCP member explained, *“it’s the convening power of the regional DCO for our IBC to bring the RCs and the agencies together to think about an issue.... Once we’ve identified the issues, we don’t have yet a way to implement them”*.
- Lack of agency incentives and accountability.** A few DCO regional staff and RCP and PSG members reported a lack of regional level agency incentives to collaborate, and unclear accountabilities between DCO and regional entities. In four country support case studies, RCO interviewees explained that DCO regional offices had to overcome sometimes tense

discussions between agencies to negotiate agency involvement in joint programmes. In one of these cases, a key agency reportedly refused to participate in a joint programme that was highly relevant to their mandate.

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

V. Recommendations

44. The Inspection and Evaluation Division makes two important recommendations to the Development Coordination Office (DCO).

Recommendation 1 (result D)

45. To address the uncapped and wide-ranging demand for support from RCs/RCOs, as well as DCO regional office capacity constraints and the unsustainability of the current approach to meeting demand, DCO should conduct an RC/RCO needs assessment and a mapping of which types of support DCO is best placed to provide via its regional or New York offices. The needs assessment and mapping exercise should comprise the following elements:

- a) Assess and categorize RC/RCO support needs to understand the primary needs and which, if any, are not being adequately met.
- b) Conduct a mapping of which types of support DCO regional and New York offices and other UN entities are best placed to provide.
- c) Clearly define the support to be provided by DCO regional offices (including which type of support might be better provided by DCO New York office).
- d) Develop a plan and timeline for implementing the identified changes to structure and/or roles and responsibilities of DCO regional and New York offices.
- e) Communicate support structure, roles and responsibilities to RCs, RCOs, UNCTs and the wider UN system.

In undertaking this exercise, the demands placed on DCO regional offices by UN headquarters should also be taken into account.

Indicators of achievement: Needs assessment and support area mapping of DCO and UN system conducted; plan and timeline produced; structures, roles and responsibilities communicated through the RC system structure and wider UN system.

Recommendation 2 (result E)

46. To address the challenges that DCO regional offices have faced in fully realizing their role in connecting the RCP to the RCs, DCO should continue to work under the leadership of the RCP Chair to further clarify the RCP connector role of DCO regional teams and communicate that clearly to both RCs and RCP members, taking into account the regional section of the Management and Accountability Framework of the UN development and Resident Coordinator system and the RCP functioning and working arrangements document.

Ideally, this recommendation should be addressed once the needs assessment in recommendation 1 (result D) has been conducted, so that it may inform the DCO regional office RCP connector role.

Indicators of achievement: Discussion with the RCP Chair regarding DCO's role and responsibilities on the RCP; communication of clearly defined roles and responsibilities to RCs and UNCTs, and RCP members.

TO: Mr. (Eddie) Yee Woo Guo, Director
A: Inspection and Evaluation Division, Office of
Internal Oversight Services

DATE: 28 December 2022
REFERENCE:
CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

THROUGH:
S/C DE:

FROM: Bakhodir Burkhanov, Officer-in-Charge
DE: Development Coordination Office



SUBJECT: **Draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the evaluation of the**
OBJET: **Development Coordination Office regional support**

1. 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 UN Member States through General Assembly resolution 72/279.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.

5. 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.
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.

cc: Ms. Michelle Gyles-McDonnough, Director, Sustainable Development Unit, Executive Office of the Secretary-General