

# Evaluation of the Resident Coordinator system support for graduation in least developed countries

19 February 2026  
IED-25-009



## INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

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

**Project team members include:**

Natalie Angela NEIL, Team Lead

Regina ZHENG, Team Member

Arthur DE LATTRE, Intern

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

**Deborah McWhinney, Chief of Section**

Tel: +1 212-963-2838; e-mail: [deborah.mcwhinney@un.org](mailto:deborah.mcwhinney@un.org)

**Demetra ARAPAKOS, Director**

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

## Contents

Summary .....	0
I. Introduction and objective .....	1
II. Background .....	1
III. Scope and methodology .....	2
IV. Evaluation results.....	4
V. Conclusion.....	17

## Summary

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) assessed the relevance and effectiveness of the Resident Coordinator system in supporting countries to prepare for and achieve graduation from the least developed country (LDC) category. The evaluation focused on 44 countries classified as LDCs.

The Resident Coordinator system support to LDCs on graduation was relevant and aligned to the needs of graduating countries. United Nations expertise was effectively leveraged by the Resident Coordinator system for integrated, high-quality support. In particular, support related to international dialogue on graduation resulted in enhanced government capacity to localize international commitments and financial preparedness for graduation. Additionally, LDC countries were brought together by Resident Coordinators to share experiences on graduation, which further strengthened their own preparedness. The Resident Coordinator system also led collaborative and joined up strategic planning and programming processes that were aligned with national graduation priorities. Engagement by the Resident Coordinator system with the host governments in LDCs was strong and coherence of UN programming had increased.

Despite the Resident Coordinator system support making governments better prepared to graduate, outcomes around the integration of graduation-related priorities into national planning were mixed and engagement with donors, civil society, the private sector and international financial institutions on graduation varied.

Further, considerations relating to graduation and programme of action priorities were integrated into United Nations strategic planning, programming and dialogue to varying degrees across countries. Engagement on and progress towards graduation was also hampered by a lack of government capacity and focus on graduation. Relatedly, the capacity of the Resident Coordinator offices to support graduation was not always adequate.

This is a fluid and dynamic time for the Development Coordination Office (DCO) and Resident Coordinator offices, with several initiatives, including UN80, taking a critical look at both the Office and the larger United Nations system in order to create a more nimble, responsive and effective development system at all levels. OIOS encourages the continued focus on the steps already being discussed to effect this change, including the possible reconceptualization of Cooperation Frameworks and redefinition of the Organization's regional and country-level architecture and functions. Within this context, DCO and the Resident Coordinator system should continue to invest in those areas with the potential for greatest impact in its critical role in contributing to the achievement of the 2030 development agenda – for LDCs on the path to graduation and the remaining host governments that it supports.

## I. Introduction and objective

1. The overall objective of the evaluation was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance and effectiveness of the Resident Coordinator system in supporting countries to prepare for and achieve graduation from the least developed country (LDC) category. The evaluation conforms with the norms and standards for evaluation in the United Nations system.
2. The management response of DCO is provided in the annex. OIOS wishes to acknowledge and thank the evaluation focal points who assisted with the conduct of the evaluation.

## II. Background

### 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.<sup>1</sup> The Resident Coordinator system objective is to contribute “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”.<sup>2</sup>

### Resources

4. The Resident Coordinator system is funded through the Special Purpose Trust Fund comprising three funding streams: (i) Member State voluntary contributions; (ii) a cost-sharing arrangement among the United Nations Sustainable Development Group entities; and (iii) a one per cent coordination levy on tightly earmarked non-core contributions to United Nations entities development activities. The 2025 budget for the Resident Coordinator system was \$281 million USD.<sup>3</sup>

### Structure and roles

5. The Resident Coordinator system is headed by the Secretary-General, with global leadership exercised by the Deputy Secretary-General on his behalf as the Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group. The DCO is responsible for day-to-day management of the Resident Coordinator system under the direction of an Assistant Secretary-General, who reports directly to the Deputy Secretary-General.<sup>4</sup> The United Nations Economic and Social Council is the principal oversight body for the Resident Coordinator system.

### The Resident Coordinator system in LDCs

6. The LDC category was established in 1971 through General Assembly resolution 2768 (XXVI). The LDCs are defined by the Committee for Development Policy (CDP) as low income countries suffering from the most severe structural impediments to sustainable development.<sup>5</sup> To address these impediments, world leaders have articulated commitments to LDCs through

---

<sup>1</sup> [A/RES/72/279](#)

<sup>2</sup> [A/78/6 \(Sect. 1\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [A/RES/79/258](#); <https://unsdg.un.org/SPTF>

<sup>4</sup> [A/RES/72/279](#)

<sup>5</sup> [E/2023/33](#). Committee for Development Policy. Report on the twenty-fifth session (20-24 February 2023).

successive programmes of action.<sup>6</sup> The current LDC programme of action was endorsed by the General Assembly in April 2022.<sup>7</sup> Countries are recommended for LDC graduation following two consecutive triennial reviews of the list of LDCs, a review of country-specific analyses and consultation with the country in question and also once they have met two of three criteria for income, human assets and economic and environmental vulnerability.<sup>8</sup> In the first three years after eligibility for graduation is confirmed, the government leads work to prepare a smooth transition strategy, which is finalized between years three and six.

7. At country level, 43 Resident Coordinators have responsibilities in 44 countries classified as LDCs. Six of these countries are scheduled to graduate between 2026 and 2029. Resident Coordinator roles and responsibilities are detailed in the Resident Coordinator job description, and in LDCs, Resident Coordinators have additional informal roles and responsibilities to support countries on graduation. These include:
  - support to the mainstreaming of the Doha Programme of Action in United Nations and national development plans;
  - assistance to countries to prepare smooth transition strategies;
  - prioritization of support that enhances statistical capacities;
  - and support to national resilience-building.<sup>9</sup>
8. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) handbook on LDC graduation also articulates several Resident Coordinator system roles, including: participate as observers in preparatory triennial review meetings for the graduation process; provide additional information for consideration when countries are recommended for graduation; and facilitate consultative processes to prepare and ensure smooth transition strategies, which is mandated by General Assembly Resolution 67/221.

### III. Scope and methodology

9. The evaluation period covered 31 July 2020 to 31 July 2025 and was conducted with the following scope:
  - (a) Resident Coordinator system at country level; and
  - (b) Resident Coordinator system roles and responsibilities in 44 countries categorized as LDCs and 3 countries that have graduated from LDC status since 2020.<sup>10</sup>
10. The evaluation employed a mixed-method approach comprising:
  - (a) **Three surveys of:**
    - i. Resident Coordinators;
    - ii. Country team members; and
    - iii. LDC national focal points.
  - (b) **Three country case studies** of Nepal, Zambia and São Tomé and Príncipe, the first two of which were conducted in person and the latter remotely, that included:

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.un.org/ldcportal/content/comprehensive-programmes-action-ldcs>

<sup>7</sup> A/RES/76/258

<sup>8</sup> A/79/504

<sup>9</sup> The [DPoA roadmap](#) provides guidance for the implementation of the Doha PoA and identifies specific actions for LDC governments, development partners, the United Nations system and other stakeholders to achieve the Doha PoA targets.

<sup>10</sup> Vanuatu (2020), Bhutan (2023) and São Tomé and Príncipe (2024).

- i. **88 interviews** with: Resident Coordinator system staff members; country team members; DCO headquarters and regional staff; United Nations partners; government counterparts; donors; civil society representatives; International Financial Institution (IFI) representatives; private sector representatives; and donors.
    - ii. **Document reviews.**
    - iii. **Direct observation** of five meetings.
  - (c) **13 supplementary interviews with LDC national focal points, Resident Coordinators and United Nations headquarters staff members.**
  - (d) **Structured review of 222 documents**, including: national development plans; annual country team reports; Cooperation Frameworks; Cooperation Framework evaluation reports; smooth transition strategies; and Voluntary National Reviews.
  - (e) **Secondary data review** of the 2025 quadrennial comprehensive policy review survey data.
  - (f) **Direct observation** of global United Nations meetings as relevant to graduation, including meetings of least developed countries' national focal points and least developed countries-related sessions in Economic and Social Council and DCO-convened Resident Coordinator meetings.
11. The evaluation team convened an evaluation reference group comprising representatives from five United Nations entities to provide confidential input into the evaluation scope, design and early findings.

## IV. Evaluation results

### A. The Resident Coordinator system facilitated relevant and high-quality support to governments on LDC graduation processes

*Support on graduation processes was relevant and aligned to LDC needs*

12. Resident Coordinators were seen as trusted advisors to the government who provided valuable assistance to countries on LDC graduation that met their needs for support. They reported providing the following types of specific support:
  - (a) Acting as the primary United Nations focal point for the government on graduation and therefore connecting the government to United Nations entities at the national, regional and global levels.
  - (b) Sensitizing governments to graduation processes, which included: accompanying governments in initial consultations with the Committee for Development Policy (CDP) and the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (OHRLLS) after their countries had been identified as eligible for graduation; ensuring that government counterparts understood the graduation timeline, process and implications; and responding to specific government concerns.
  - (c) Convening, or assisting the government to convene, relevant stakeholder consultations on graduation at the national or sub-national level.
  - (d) Supporting ex-ante assessments of the impacts of graduation and vulnerability assessments undertaken by different entities in the United Nations system.
  - (e) Convening and/or participating in inter-agency task forces on graduation to coordinate and streamline resources and expertise.
  - (f) Preparing briefs, research and position papers, including collating inputs for graduation vision papers that identified critical areas of focus to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.
  - (g) Supporting governments to prepare a roadmap and/or smooth transition strategy, including through consultation with and inputs from relevant country team members.
  - (h) Conducting ongoing advocacy, such as developing position papers about graduation for the country team to use in dialogue with external stakeholders and using the Resident Coordinator's social media posts for positive messaging about graduation.
13. Alongside graduation processes, Resident Coordinators also championed a programmatic and policy focus on sectors and thematic areas that directly impacted progress towards graduation. This included assisting governments to identify priority areas and facilitating consultations on topics such as macroeconomic stability, trade, jobs and social protection, climate and democracy strengthening.

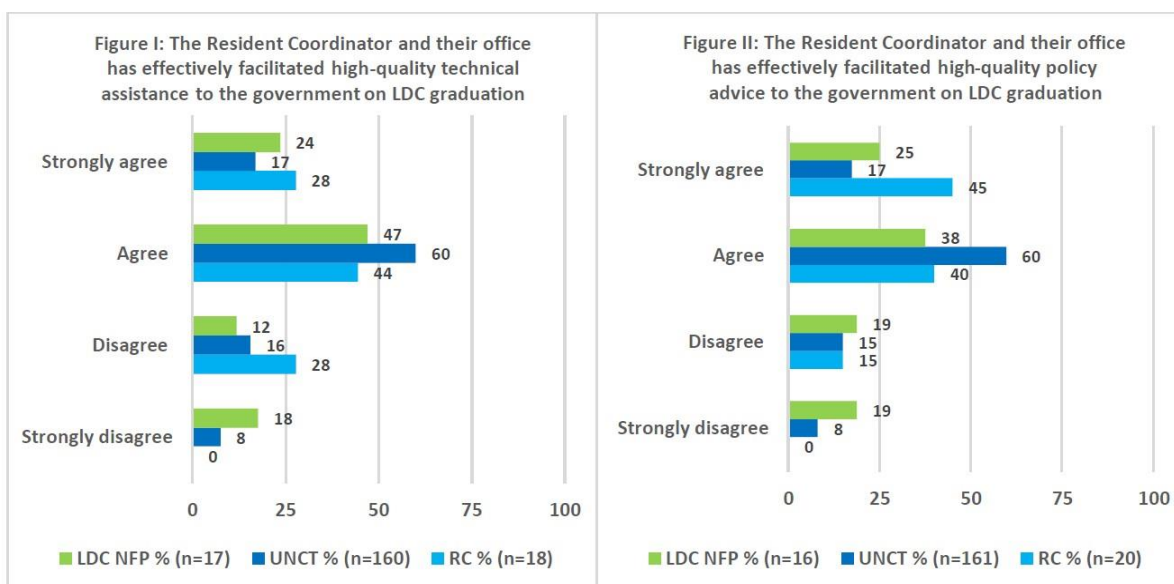
*The Resident Coordinator system effectively leveraged United Nations expertise for integrated high-quality support*

14. Resident Coordinators and country team members agreed that the Resident Coordinator system provided integrated and coherent high-quality support to governments as they

prepared for graduation. Most Resident Coordinators (78 per cent) and country team members (80 per cent) surveyed agreed that the Resident Coordinator office effectively leveraged expertise from resident country team members for joined-up technical assistance and advice to the government on graduation. Most surveyed also agreed that the Resident Coordinator office had effectively leveraged expertise from non-resident country team members (76 per cent of Resident Coordinators and 74 per cent of country team members respectively) as well as global and regional specialized United Nations entities (66 per cent of Resident Coordinators and 73 per cent of country team members respectively). Three-fourths further reported that the Resident Coordinator effectively facilitated coherent United Nations support - including technical assistance and policy advice - to the government on graduation.

15. This integrated support was rated as being of high quality. Figures I and II below present the positive assessments in this regard of the Resident Coordinators, country team members and LDC national focal points surveyed.

**Figures I and II – All groups surveyed agreed that the Resident Coordinator and their office had effectively facilitated high quality support to governments on LDC graduation**



16. Government officials interviewed in the three case studies gave specific examples of the high-quality support provided. This included preparations for the Summit of the Future conference, provision of analytical inputs on financing for development and drafting of research papers as a contribution to the drafting of the Smooth Transition Strategy.

*Resident Coordinators' engagement with IFIs, donors, civil society and the private sector on graduation varied*

17. Engagement with important graduation stakeholders, such as IFIs, donors, civil society and the private sector, was uneven. These stakeholders are typically identified by the government itself. United Nations staff members interviewed in all three cases study countries and some Resident Coordinators surveyed (18 per cent) noted that stakeholder engagement on graduation was a key challenge. With regard to engagement with IFIs, eight of nine Resident Coordinators interviewed described engagement with IFIs during national development meetings to include sharing information about graduation, accessing technical expertise and discussing progress towards and the implications of graduation. Furthermore, donors were often kept abreast of graduation-related developments through donor coordination

platforms. Further, in all three case study countries, civil society representatives interviewed stated that they were unclear about the Resident Coordinator's role with regard to graduation and reported that they had been inconsistently engaged on graduation.

## **B. Support provided through the Resident Coordinator system directly to host governments at the national level contributed to their enhanced preparedness for LDC graduation**

### *Resident Coordinator system support made governments better prepared to graduate*

18. The support presented in Result A above contributed to better government readiness for LDC graduation. More specifically, the following six outcomes, which indicated enhanced government preparedness, were attributed to the Resident Coordinator system-facilitated support to governments on graduation:

- (i) Increased government awareness about graduation processes, approaches and implications;
- (ii) Enhanced government capacity, including knowledge and expertise, to plan and prepare for graduation;
- (iii) New or revised government bills, policies and strategies relating to private sector and foreign direct investment and adjustments to national financing strategies to support sustainable graduation;
- (iv) Achievement of graduation milestones, such as drafting related strategies;
- (v) Increased focus on the Sustainable Development Goals and development priorities affecting sustainable graduation, including democracy and institution strengthening; and
- (vi) Mobilization of funds for projects directly impacting progress towards graduation.

### *Despite concerted efforts, outcomes around integration of graduation-related priorities into national planning were mixed*

19. Most Resident Coordinators, country team members and LDC national focal points surveyed (68, 55 and 90 per cent respectively) stated that programmes of action for LDCs were highly relevant to their country context. Resident Coordinators surveyed were also clear about how to mainstream relevant programmes of action in national plans, as well as their role in this regard.

20. Resident Coordinators specifically enabled the integration of graduation-related priorities into national planning in the following ways:

- (a) Helping governments localize the multiple regional and international commitments and agendas, including those relating to graduation, as expressed by a government official in the adjacent quote;
- (b) Coordinating input from country team members and external experts on graduation-related sections of national plans and strategies and providing consolidated United Nations feedback;
- (c) Periodically raising graduation and the integration of programmes of action in government-convened

“[The Resident Coordinator Office] follows up to see how we are integrating those outcomes in the development process. I remember we did an exercise and aligned the different priorities of the Programme of Action (PoA) into the four main pillars of our development plan. The six priority areas of the Doha PoA are aligned.”  
Government official

national development planning committee meetings and presenting on this topic on request;

- (d) Supporting the strengthening of data and analysis to enable progress tracking on graduation to inform planning;
- (e) Supporting national mid-term reviews of the Doha Programme of Action (PoA); and
- (f) Contributing to Voluntary National Review processes.

21. Despite the support described above, the extent to which programmes of action featured in national development plans varied between countries. Three of 39 national development plans reviewed referred to programmes of action for least developed countries; nine of 39 national development plans referenced graduation. Graduation was also more frequently referred to in the context or background sections of national development plans, while some plans dedicated chapters or sections to graduation and its implications. Furthermore, alignment between national plans and programmes of action was more likely to result from alignment to the Sustainable Development Goals than a deliberate effort to align national development plans with programmes of action.

### **C. Critical Resident Coordinator system support to governments for engaging in international graduation-related dialogue, as well as facilitating country-to-country exchanges, also strengthened their readiness for graduation**

#### *Support related to international dialogue on graduation resulted in enhanced government capacity*

22. Resident Coordinator support to governments on international dialogue on graduation increased government capacity, including awareness and knowledge about approaches to preparing for graduation and ensuring that graduation was sustainable. In one case study country, the Resident Coordinator supported the government's participation in plenary and focus group sessions at the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in Doha, which enhanced its awareness about approaches to and implications of graduation. The Resident Coordinator then supported subsequent consultations at the country level to sensitize other stakeholders to graduation and to support the integration of commitments into national discourse and planning.

23. Resident Coordinator support for government engagement in international dialogue also resulted in improved country positioning in international negotiations impacting sustainable graduation. In one case study country, Resident Coordinator assistance to the government to engage in financing for development and climate negotiations improved country positioning in international negotiations more generally. One government official stated that this assistance helped the government to better prepare for financing for development and trained them how to be better negotiators on financing.

24. Further, government engagement in international dialogue ensured that issues critical to LDC graduation were elevated in international discourse, as noted in the adjacent quote from a government official. In one case study country, the Resident Coordinator supported the government to take a lead role in advancing relevant aspects of the climate agenda in an international multi-stakeholder forum focusing on the impacts of climate change on least developed countries. This elevated the

“The Resident Coordinator’s office [has] been very instrumental to build capacity and also to provide our country with international platforms so that we can present our issues and also get international support.”  
Government official

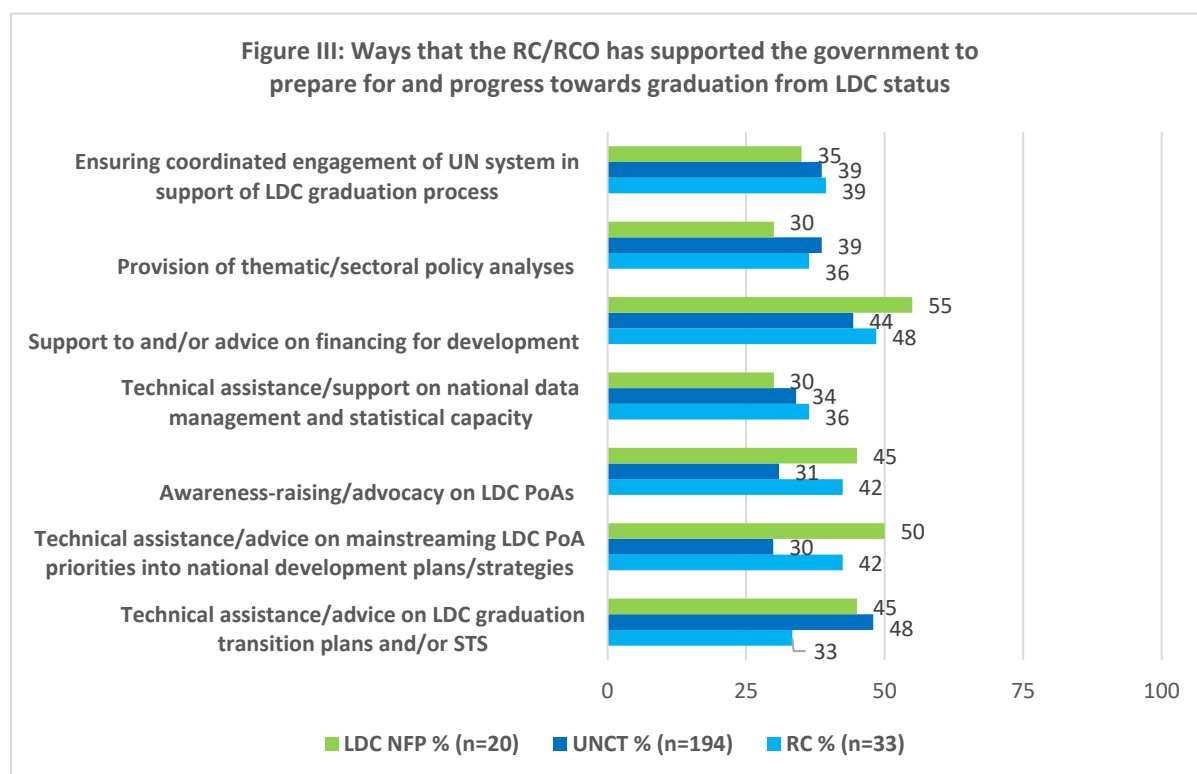
country's profile, advanced discussions in an area of climate impacting the country and served as a forum for renewing commitments that directly affected the development trajectories of least developed countries.

25. Resident Coordinators assisted governments to prepare for and attend international graduation-related conferences and meetings. These included the 2023 LDC conference in Doha, the 2024 capacity building workshop for LDC NFPs in Istanbul and the Summit of the Future in New York, and the 2025 Future Forum for LDCs in Lusaka. Resident Coordinators helped government counterparts to convene preparatory stakeholder consultations ahead of these events and coordinated United Nations entity input to event briefs and position papers. Resident Coordinators also assisted with logistics and physically accompanied delegations to events.

*The Resident Coordinator system played a critical role to support government participation in international dialogue on financing for development, which enhanced their financial preparedness for graduation*

26. Resident Coordinators, country team members and LDC national focal points surveyed cited support on financing for development as the primary way that Resident Coordinators assisted governments on graduation, as shown in Figure III below.

**Figure III: Resident Coordinators, country team member and LDC national focal points surveyed indicating strong support to and/or advice on financing for development**



27. Resident Coordinators specifically supported countries on financing for development in the following six ways:

- (a) Supporting the government's direct participation in international dialogue on financing for development, including organizing preparatory stakeholder consultations and

supporting the government to lead side events with other LDCs on climate smart financing and sustainable graduation;

- (b) Convening, or supporting the government to convene, national stakeholder dialogues on financing for development, including discussions ahead of the Financing for Development Summit;
  - (c) Bringing relevant United Nations entities together with the relevant government ministries for ongoing discussions about financing for development;
  - (d) Providing consolidated, expert advice on financing for development on behalf of the United Nations, which included compiling inputs from United Nations entities for research and position papers on financing for development and delivering those papers to government counterparts;
  - (e) Informing budgeting and resource allocation, which included in one case study country facilitating a mapping exercise to define priorities and action points on the potential reorientation of United Nations and government resources in response to financing adjustments from graduation; and,
  - (f) Facilitating access to development financing through alternative funding sources to mitigate potential losses following graduation, which was specifically expressed as a concern by government officials interviewed in one case study country.
28. This support on financing for development enhanced host government graduation preparedness by expanding knowledge of and access to a broader range of investment opportunities. Resident Coordinator office staff interviewed in one case study country suggested that the strong focus on financing for development was due to the likely loss of funding, including official development assistance (ODA) concessional financing, as well as international trade support measures, following graduation. In another case study country, the Resident Coordinator participated in a dialogue focused on increasing the inflow of resources from external development partners, private sector engagement and national resource mobilization to ensure a sustainable and irreversible graduation.

*Support to prepare for and attend key international graduation-related events and meetings contributed to greater capacity to localize international commitments*

29. Following attendance at international graduation-related events, Resident Coordinators subsequently supported governments to localize approaches and commitments. This included meeting with the government and facilitating national stakeholder consultations to discuss how to operationalize commitments in their specific country context. In the case study countries, Resident Coordinator offices jointly coordinated national stakeholder consultations with Regional Economic Commissions and national committees on the integration of the Doha Programme of Action priorities into the smooth transition strategies; they also supported multi-stakeholder consultations throughout the country.

*Resident Coordinators effectively convened countries for experience-sharing on graduation, which enabled them to learn from each other in strengthening their own preparedness*

30. Resident Coordinators supported countries' capacity and preparedness for sustainable graduation by connecting government officials from graduating and graduated countries. This included facilitating information and experience exchange between countries, assisting countries to prepare for joint events at international conferences and supporting governments to lead discussions about issues impacting sustainable graduation in their

countries. These discussions focused on experience exchange about status, common issues and implications for graduating countries and approaches to ensuring sustainable graduation. In one case study country, the Resident Coordinator engaged experts from graduated countries to share approaches with graduating countries to mitigating impacts from the potential loss of ODA following graduation.

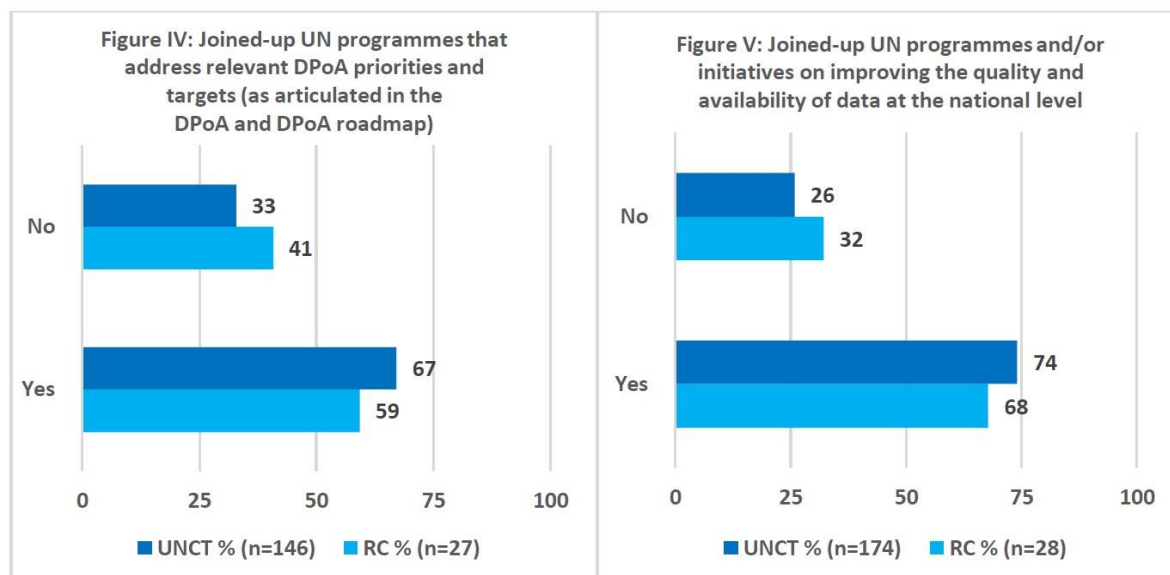
31. Government officials interviewed were highly appreciative of this facilitation of lesson-learning. In one case study country, a government official interviewed noted how helpful it was to connect with other countries through Resident Coordinator networks and gain access to government ministries in other countries; the official suggested that it would have been difficult to coordinate with ministries in other countries without such facilitation. Another interviewed in the same case study country noted that one Resident Coordinator-facilitated meeting with other least developed countries directly informed government financing strategies. One country team member interviewed in the same country also praised such dialogues for providing countries with the opportunity to share information about negotiating preferential tariff agreements as they progress towards graduation.

**D. While the Resident Coordinator system promoted more joined up United Nations approaches to LDC graduation, the outcomes of this support varied and its ability to coordinate effectively was hampered by structural issues**

*The Resident Coordinator system led collaborative and joined up strategic planning and programming processes that were aligned with national graduation priorities*

32. Country team members and governments generally perceived strategic planning and programming processes as collaborative and joined up. Resident Coordinators and their offices were seen to be facilitating joint programmes that addressed relevant Doha Programme of Action priorities, as shown in Figures IV and V below.

**Figures IV and V: Facilitation of joined-up programmes by the Resident Coordinator and their office**



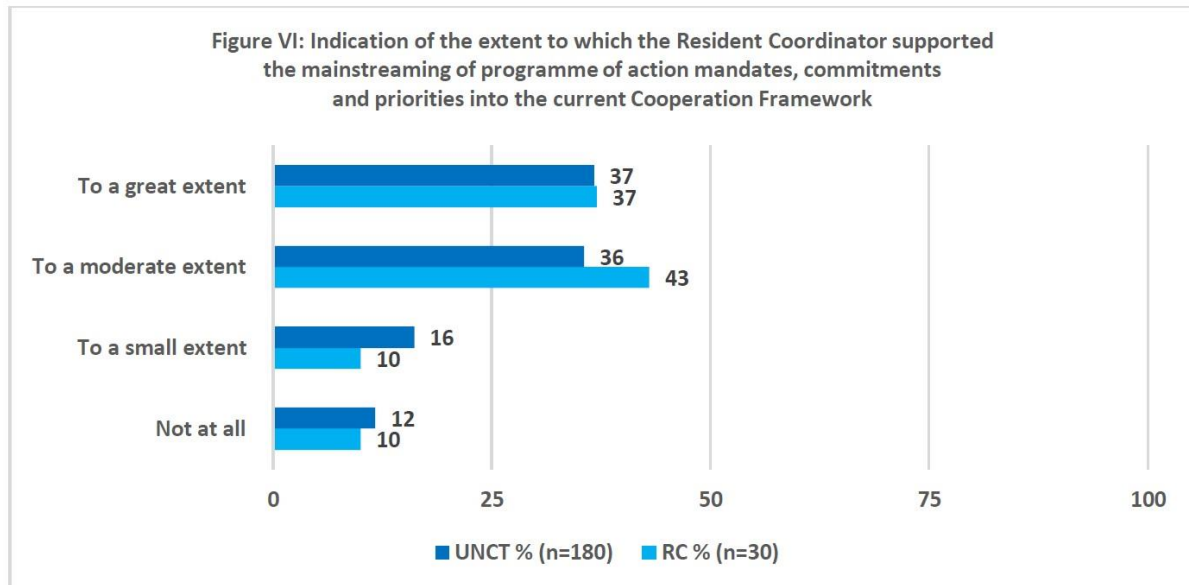
33. In addition, Resident Coordinators ensured close collaboration within the country team on graduation through the following activities:

- (a) Leading Common Country Analysis and Cooperation Framework drafting processes that considered and integrated issues related to graduation. This included focused discussions,

coordinating input from country team members and drafting to ensure that graduation and programme of action focus areas were embedded into Common Country Analysis reports and Cooperation Frameworks, and that these documents reflected key issues relating to graduation, including potential impacts.

- (b) Periodically sharing information about graduation with the country team. This included conducting briefings for the country team about the status and impacts of graduation, inviting expert speakers, actively communicating about any issues arising in the course of bilateral discussions with the government and sharing information about how other countries were preparing for graduation.
  - (c) Leading annual country team retreats. This included planning for graduation with a focus on progress towards, implications of and adjustments needed for sustainable graduation. In one case study country, four of six country team members interviewed commented on the high utility of Resident Coordinator-facilitated country team retreats that enabled in-depth strategic planning and foresight exercises to help the team identify priority areas for coordination.
  - (d) Facilitating Sustainable Development Goal Leadership Labs. In one case study country, a series of Sustainable Development Goal Leadership Labs allowed the country team to think strategically about graduation and development priorities overall. In this series of workshops, the Resident Coordinator led the country team in discussions about graduation, Sustainable Development Goal accelerators, priorities and the focus of joint work.
34. Resident Coordinators also engaged closely with the government on United Nations strategic planning, including through Cooperation Framework Joint Steering Committees. In one case study country, government officials commented positively that the Resident Coordinator had effectively engaged the government in this regard, including ensuring that relevant sectoral ministries were part of the process of formulating the Cooperation Framework. These findings aligned with the 2025 quadrennial comprehensive policy review, where 93 per cent of government officials surveyed in LDCs agreed that they were sufficiently involved in the development of the Cooperation Framework in order to ensure national ownership.
35. In addition to being highly collaborative, strategic planning processes were aligned with national priorities for graduation. In one case study country, the Cooperation Framework was well aligned to the national development plan and relevant regional and international agreements; one government official interviewed in this country expressed their satisfaction that the Cooperation Framework had effectively incorporated the national development plan, the Sustainable Development Goals, the regional agenda and relevant programmes of action. These findings aligned with the 2025 quadrennial comprehensive policy review, where 95 per cent of government officials surveyed in LDCs considered the activities of the United Nations development system, as articulated in the Cooperation Framework, to be closely aligned with national needs and priorities.
36. Resident Coordinators played a key role to ensure this alignment by proactively supporting the integration of programmes of action into United Nations strategic plans. As shown in Figure VI below, Resident Coordinators enabled the mainstreaming of programmes of action into Cooperation Frameworks.

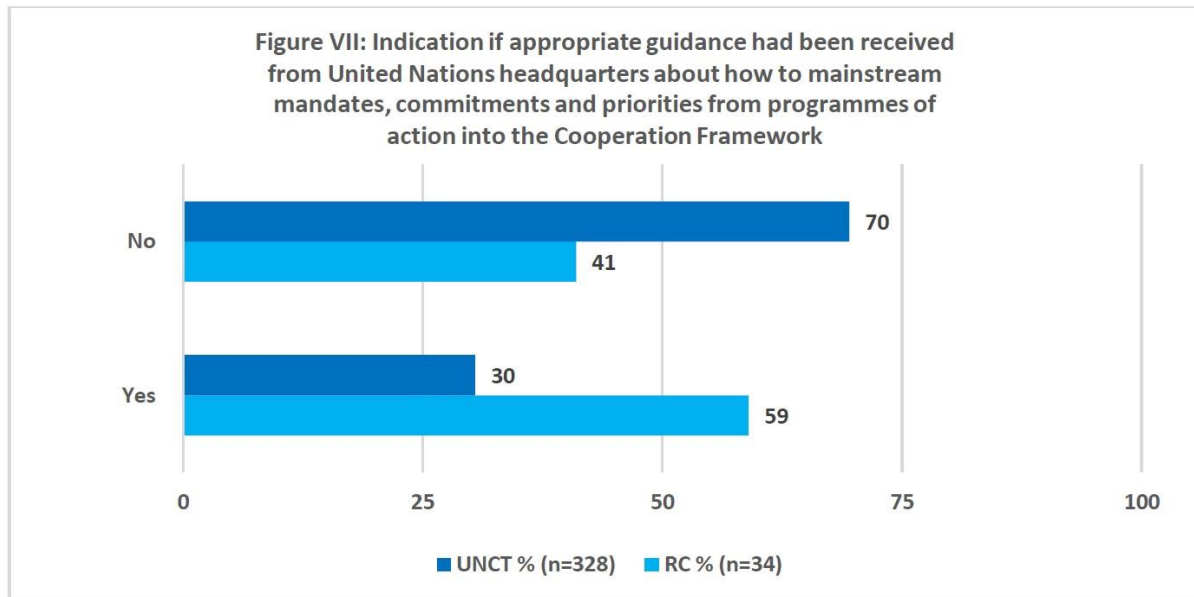
**Figure VI: Resident Coordinators and country team members surveyed agreed that the Resident Coordinator supported the mainstreaming of programme of action mandates, commitments and priorities into the current Cooperation Framework to a moderate or great extent**



*Despite the support provided, considerations relating to graduation and programme of action priorities were integrated into United Nations strategic planning, programming and dialogue to varying degrees across countries*

37. Despite the support discussed above, the extent to which graduation terminology featured in Cooperation Frameworks differed. Few (4 of 43) Cooperation Frameworks reviewed referred to programmes of action, and one quarter (11 of 43) referenced graduation. The extent to which programme of action priorities and considerations were integrated into Cooperation Frameworks also differed. Some Cooperation Frameworks referenced graduation in the context or background section alone, while others incorporated graduation into the text of one or more Cooperation Framework priority areas and aligned priorities with the Doha Programme of Action focus areas for action. Cooperation Frameworks of graduating countries were more likely to refer to graduation and feature substantive integration of graduation considerations.
38. Further, there was little focus on tracking progress on programme of action implementation as part of Cooperation Framework review processes. A majority of Resident Coordinators surveyed (54 per cent) reported that they did not utilize, or only utilized to a small extent, annual Cooperation Framework review processes to discuss progress on programme of action implementation with relevant national or United Nations stakeholders.
39. Some Resident Coordinators and country team members also lacked clarity about how to mainstream these considerations into United Nations strategic planning, and they also reported receiving insufficient guidance in that regard, as shown in Figure VII below.

**Figures VII: A majority of Resident Coordinators surveyed reported that they had not received appropriate guidance from the United Nations headquarters about how to mainstream mandates, commitments and priorities from programmes of action into the Cooperation Framework**



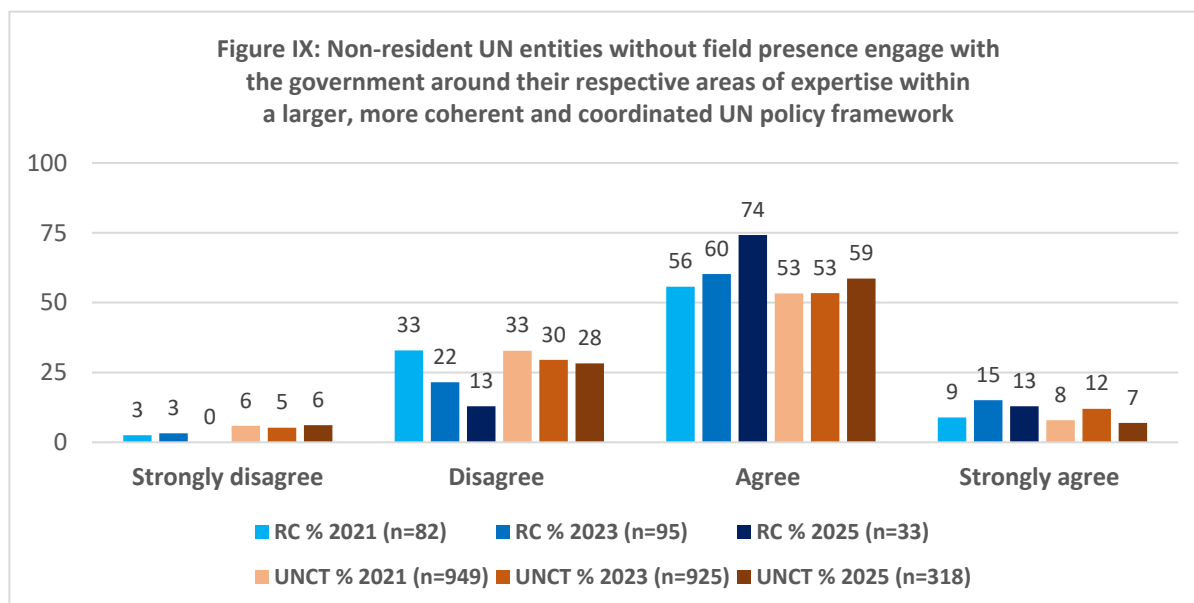
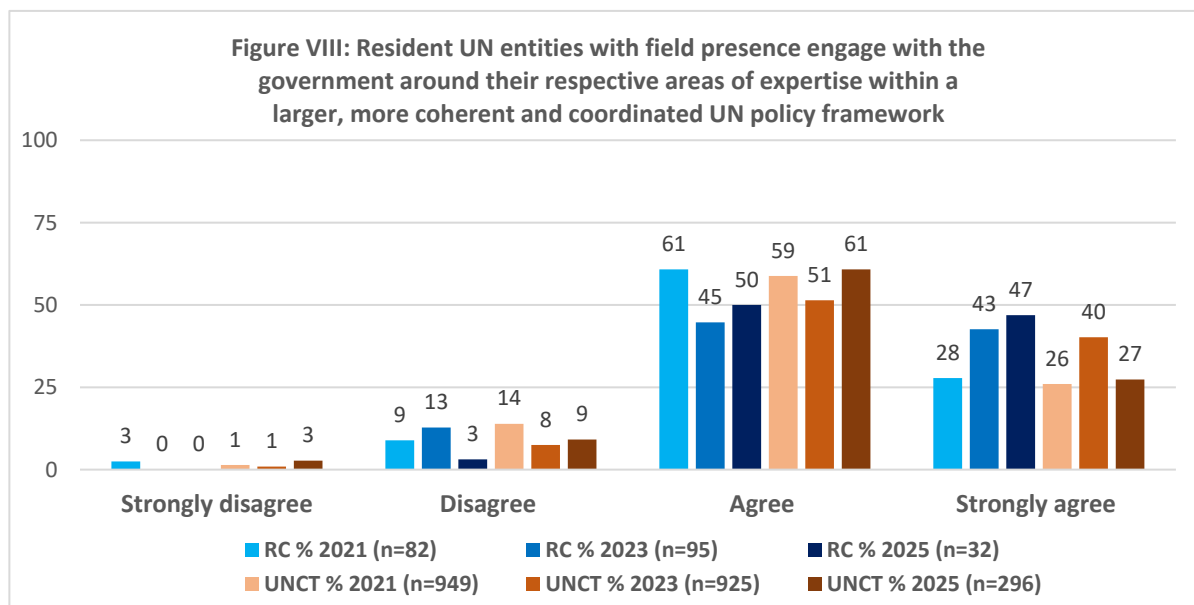
40. The multiplicity of international frameworks created a further impediment to integrating programmes of action into Cooperation Frameworks. Resident Coordinator office staff members interviewed, and government officials observed, noted the challenge of integrating the commitments and priorities of multiple programmes of action and other regional and global frameworks into strategic plans. Challenges related to: lacking clarity about the overlap, difference between and need for multiple frameworks (as shown in Box III); uncertainty about how to practically integrate all relevant programmes of action and the multiple agendas and commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals; and the general fatigue with United Nations guidance and frameworks at the country level.

41. Additionally, some United Nations staff members interviewed suggested that any alignment between Cooperation Framework and programme of action priorities likely resulted from their shared alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals rather than a deliberate effort to incorporate programme of action priority areas.

*Although there was general agreement that engagement with the host government was strong and that the coherence of United Nations programming had improved, some structural issues remained*

42. As shown in Figures XIII and IX below, most Resident Coordinators surveyed in 2025 (97 per cent) either agreed or strongly agreed that resident United Nations entities engaged with the government within a larger, more coherent and coordinated United Nations policy framework; a similar number of Resident Coordinators (87 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed about the same regarding non-resident entities. These ratings have increased slightly over the past four years. Similarly, a majority of NFPs (63 per cent), country team member (60 per cent) and Resident Coordinator (97 per cent) survey respondents reported that coherence of United Nations programming in their country of focus had increased since the Resident Coordinator system reform in 2019.

**Figures VIII and IX: There was stronger agreement amongst Resident Coordinators surveyed in 2025 than in previous years about the extent to which resident and non-resident entities engaged with the government within a more coherent and coordinated United Nations policy framework**



43. However, according to a 2025 system-wide evaluation on progress towards a “new generation of United Nations country teams”, a lack of engagement by resident and non-resident UN entities, as well as more general challenges with coordination and consolidation, was attributed to the structure of the United Nations system.<sup>11</sup> Prior OIOS evaluations of the Resident Coordinator system also reported that separate governance boards, programming and funding arrangements directed United Nations entity and country team members to focus, first and foremost, on their own mandates, programmes and projects. Joint or joined up country team activities under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator were, therefore, seen as additional work for country team members that had not been properly resourced. In one case study country, a country team member suggested that agency representatives are

<sup>11</sup> [SWE0/2025/001](#).

simply too busy with their own programmes and projects to have time for strategic engagement on graduation.

44. There were limitations on the extent to which Resident Coordinators could coordinate United Nations approaches on graduation and to which country team members were able to engage and converge for joined up programmes and initiatives more generally. Systemic issues, including siloed approaches, also resulted in an inconsistent approach to engaging with the government on graduation. Some Resident Coordinator office staff members interviewed reported that United Nations entities based at the regional and global levels had engaged directly with the government without first consulting with the Resident Coordinator on issues related to graduation.
45. Further, there were concerns that the issue of country team configuration following graduation had not been sufficiently addressed. Two Resident Coordinator office staff members in two different case study countries commented on the lack of clarity about how country team member configuration would be affected by both graduation and the current context of the UN80 Initiative and declining ODA. In one of these case study countries, two country team members agreed that there had been a lack of follow up about how graduation affects the United Nations' work and positioning, and a lack strategic thinking about the United Nations offer to graduated countries.

**E. The extent and effectiveness of Resident Coordinator system support to countries on LDC graduation was further challenged by limited Resident Coordinator office and government capacity, as well as more general concerns about graduation readiness and sustainability**

*Resident Coordinator office capacity for support on graduation was not always adequate*

46. Given the support needs of LDC governments, some stakeholders interviewed and surveyed noted inadequate Resident Coordinator office, and at times wider United Nations, capacity to fully meet those needs. A few noted that the Resident Coordinator office capacity to convene and coordinate was hampered by a lack of non-post financial resources; they suggested that additional financial resources were needed for the office to more effectively coordinate with and engage external stakeholders, including even a minimal discretionary budget for events and meetings, and to support costly communications work, including for graduation. In addition, several stakeholders interviewed and country team members surveyed commented on the general lack of staff capacity to manage the additional workload demands created with LDC graduation support. One United Nations staff member interviewed noted that reporting on programmes of action is heavy considering the limited capacity of the Resident Coordinator office.
47. With regard to skills, the Resident Coordinator office, and at times the wider country team, also lacked access to expertise on economics, finance and trade and related areas critical to advancing progress towards LDC graduation. This placed pressure on Resident Coordinators and Economists to respond to government demands and needs with limited capacity, whilst also rendering the United Nations as a lesser partner of choice for the government regarding development advice in this area as they moved towards and beyond graduation. In this context, the Resident Coordinator office Economist post and strong networks of economists were perceived as critical to enable expert-led, joined up analysis and briefs for the country team and government.
48. Given the Resident Coordinator's role to support the country team and government to identify development priorities to accelerate progression towards LDC graduation, Resident

Coordinator office staff and country team members considered skills in strategic planning and knowledge of strategic foresight and scenario planning tools as critical and in need of strengthening. Other relevant skills gaps highlighted included competencies related to UN 2.0 and new technologies, including for data collection, and strategic partnerships.

*Engagement on, and progress towards, graduation was also hampered by a lack of government capacity and focus on graduation, including bureaucratic inefficiencies*

49. Resident Coordinator staff, country team members and donors interviewed, as well as 29 percent of Resident Coordinator survey respondents, noted that progression towards graduation, and on development more generally, was additionally hampered by government capacity constraints. This resulted in slower progress through graduation milestones, bureaucratic inefficiencies and regression on relation-building with governments.
50. In particular, the following issues were perceived by Resident Coordinator office staff, country team members, donors and some government counterparts interviewed as negatively impacting graduation progress:
- (i) Bureaucratic inefficiencies slowing government processes and impacting scheduling, with even high-level meetings and conferences being confirmed, delayed or postponed with little notice;
  - (ii) A lack of national skills and expertise to ensure sustainable graduation, including a lack of expertise to conduct international trade and finance negotiations to support the country's transition from LDC status;
  - (iii) Insufficient numbers of government staff, and staff with the appropriate skills and expertise, to manage the multiple development agendas, priorities and actors;
  - (iv) Continued reliance on development partners and slow progress in terms of the mindset and behaviour change needed from being an LDC to a more independent, graduated country; and
  - (v) Low awareness about graduation in line ministries, and amongst development partners beyond the government.

*Stakeholders also expressed concerns about readiness for, and the sustainability of, graduation*

51. Several government and development partners interviewed expressed concerns about LDC readiness for, and the likely sustainability of, graduation. These concerns centred on:

- (i) Losses and adjustments associated with graduation, including: potential adjustments to tariffs; increases in interest rates on loans and the gradual shift from grants to loans; declining ODA; reductions in trade-related capacity-building and technical assistance; and diminishing donor presence in country;
- (ii) Economic vulnerability due to the lack of diversification in the economy, as expressed by one government official interviewed in the adjacent quote;

“Most of our economies in LDCs are commodity-driven, so when the price of [our primary commodity] is doing well, our GDP growth shoots up. Everything goes in the right direction, but then we don't have the capacity to handle the shocks because our economies are not that diversified. Graduation is exciting, but it is difficult”.  
Government official

- (iii) Heightened vulnerability, and less capacity to respond, to repeated shocks that could acutely impact development progress post-graduation; and
  - (iv) Acute disparity between development progress and poverty levels in capital cities and regions/provinces.
52. Given these concerns, some stakeholders interviewed in all three case study countries and supplementary interviews questioned the validity and applicability of graduation criteria. These interviewees agreed that the criteria may not accurately reflect a country’s economic and development status, including real per capita GDP growth minus donor contributions and net ODA inflows, as well as actual poverty and inequality levels and employment rates beyond the capital city, as expressed by one civil society representative interviewed in the adjacent quote. These stakeholders further noted that the criteria do not adequately consider a country’s ability to sustain graduation. They questioned whether the criteria and methodology to determine LDC classification and graduation should be maintained, particularly considering the continued vulnerability of some graduated countries.

“I just still can’t understand how we can graduate in this situation. How can people work if their stomachs are empty? We have to graduate everywhere, not just in the capital city.”  
Civil society representative

## V. Conclusion

53. The Resident Coordinator system in countries either on the path to or having recently graduated from LDC status has played a pivotal role in supporting host governments with this transition. Resident Coordinator offices have brought timely guidance, technical resources and substantive expertise from the United Nations system at key milestones along the process towards graduation. Nevertheless, this support has been provided in the context of capacity constraints, structural challenges and varied engagement with critical external stakeholders.
54. This is a fluid and dynamic time for DCO and Resident Coordinator offices, with several initiatives, including UN80, taking a critical look at both the Office and the larger United Nations system in order to create a more nimble, responsive and effective development system at all levels. OIOS encourages the continued focus on the steps already being discussed to effect this change, including the possible reconceptualization of Cooperation Frameworks and redefinition of the Organization’s regional and country-level architecture and functions. Within this context, DCO and the Resident Coordinator system should continue to invest in those areas with the potential for greatest impact in its critical role in contributing to the achievement of the 2030 development agenda – for LDCs on the path to graduation and the remaining host governments that it supports.

## VI. Management Response



TO: Ms. Demetra Arapakos, Director  
A: Inspection and Evaluation Division  
Office of Internal Oversight Services  
THROUGH:  
S/C DE:  
FROM: Oscar Fernández-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General  
DE: for Development Coordination  
DATE: 16 February 2026  
CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

**SUBJECT: Draft Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Evaluation of the Resident Coordinator system in Least Developed Countries**  
**OBJET: Coordinateur système dans les pays à faible revenu**

1. I am pleased to acknowledge receipt of the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the evaluation of the Resident Coordinator System in Least Developed Countries (LDCs).
2. I welcome the report's findings that the Resident Coordinator (RC) system support to LDCs on graduation was relevant and aligned to the needs of graduating countries, and that this support ensured governments were better prepared to graduate. I also appreciate the finding that United Nations (UN) expertise was effectively leveraged by the Resident Coordinator system for integrated, high-quality support. In particular, the report recognized that RC system support related to international dialogue on graduation resulted in enhanced government capacity to localize international commitments and financial preparedness for graduation.
3. I take note that the RC system also led collaborative and joined-up strategic planning and implementation approaches that were aligned with national graduation priorities. It is encouraging to note that engagement by the RC system with the host governments in LDCs was strong and the coherence of UN programming has increased since 2019. This is a clear testament to the fact that the repositioning of the United Nations development system and the reinvigorated RC system are enabling us to serve better the needs of the LDCs.
4. I also take note of areas for improvement highlighted in the report. Especially, I take note of the findings that the Doha programme of action priorities were integrated into United Nations strategic planning, programming and dialogue to varying degrees across countries and that the capacity of the Resident Coordinator Offices to support graduation was not always adequate.
5. After careful consideration, while mindful of the ongoing processes such as the UN80, I propose to take the following actions in response to the findings of the report:

- i. DCO will encourage the RCOs in LDCs, especially those entering design phase of UN Cooperation Frameworks, to ensure stronger integration of the Doha Programme of Action and LDC graduation issues explicitly into the UN Cooperation Frameworks, clearly underscoring the areas of the UN system support, in line with national strategies and priorities in close consultation with their national governments.
  - ii. DCO will consult with other relevant UN system entities, especially the Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS), on how RCOs can more effectively serve as the entry point for the coherent provision of UN technical expertise and support for LDC graduation in the cooperation framework implementation phase, noting that it would be difficult to strengthen capacities within RCOs in these specific areas.
  - iii. DCO will take into account the findings of the report, along with the findings of the System Wide Evaluation Office's evaluation on progress towards a new generation of United Nations country teams (July 2025), into the ongoing process of recalibrating the RC system capacities at the global, regional and national level tailored to country typologies.
6. I express deep appreciation to you and your office for undertaking this important evaluation through a very consultative process and a strong collaborative approach. I believe the report will help us to further strengthen our efforts to enhance the United Nations development system's support for the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, as called for by the General Assembly resolution 79/226.