

Evaluation of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs Subprogramme 7: Public Institutions and Digital Government

6 April 2026

IED-25-015



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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Summary

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) evaluated the relevance, effectiveness, coherence and efficiency of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG)'s contributions to Member States on building effective, accountable and inclusive governance and public institutions at national and sub-national levels for sustainable development.

DPIDG responded to its programme objectives through an appropriate modality portfolio of analytical research, intergovernmental and multistakeholder fora, technical assistance, and strategic partnerships. While these modalities were mutually reinforcing, interlinkages among them were more incidental than systematic, which limited potential synergies to better respond to Member State needs.

Stakeholders across its portfolios considered DPIDG support to be of high quality. DPIDG successfully leveraged its comparative advantages of convening power and access to global perspectives to respond to Member State needs.

DPIDG contributed significantly to the shorter-term outcomes of facilitating global consensus on normative issues, raising awareness and understanding of emerging issues and common approaches and increasing stakeholders' capacities to adopt and implement normative frameworks. Progress on longer-term outcomes related to revised institutional arrangements and the adoption and implementation of national policies, plans, strategies, and laws was also made but was more limited.

Strategic partnerships and sustained engagement with other development actors were effective in influencing policy outcomes, though not consistently used. Despite strong efforts, contributions to policy making were hindered by limitations of DESA communication of policy analysis, reports and activities at the country level, while longer-term progress was hindered by persistent external contextual factors that were challenging to mitigate.

Faced with high demand for its support and diminishing resources, there were opportunities for DPIDG to improve on efficiency measures already taken to offset negative impacts on performance. These included more optimal use of strategic partnerships, better prioritization of its work, greater interbranch coherence and stronger collaboration with other DESA divisions.

OIOS makes four important recommendations for DESA-DPIDG to:

- a) Strengthen internal coherence;
- b) Improve reach of publications, guidance materials and analytical products to country and local level users;
- c) Improve usability of products for target audiences; and
- d) Strengthen and build strategic partnerships to support policy makers.

I. Introduction and objective

1. The overall objective of this Office of Internal Oversight Services, Inspection and Evaluation Division (OIOS-IED) evaluation was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, effectiveness, coherence and efficiency of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) subprogramme 7 support to Member States on building effective, accountable and inclusive governance and public institutions at national and sub-national levels for sustainable development.
2. The evaluation conforms to the United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards.¹ The DESA management response is included in Annex I.

Mandate and objectives

3. Within DESA, the Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG) implements subprogramme 7 and serves as the custodian of the United Nations Programme on Public Administration, a foundational role established and reinforced by General Assembly and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolutions. Its mission is to assist Member States to advance effective, accountable, and inclusive governance and public institutions for sustainable development, including through innovation, digital government and digital transformation. DPIDG utilizes four support modalities to implement its mandate as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: DPIDG modalities of mandate implementation



¹ https://www.unevaluation.org/uneq_publications/uneq-norms-and-standards-evaluation-un-system

Technical assistance support

- Capacity development initiatives (training events, curricula, e-learning, Regular Programme and Technical Cooperation (RPTC) interventions and field projects funded by Development Account (DA) or extrabudgetary resources (XB)), advisory support and facilitation of South-South learning and cooperation to enhance Member State critical understanding and capacities in translating intergovernmental results and recommended practices into policy instruments, institutional arrangements and policy implementation.

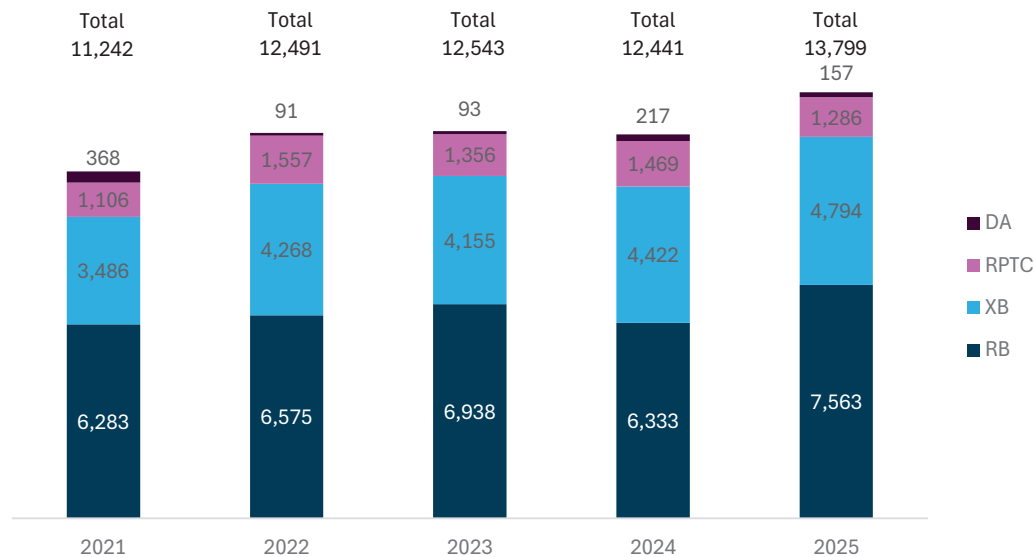
Strategic partnerships

- Cultivation of purposeful, longer-term relationships with the Resident Coordinator (RC) system, United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) and other development actors to extend reach at the national level and leverage collective knowledge, expertise, technology and resources to provide holistic and sustained support to Member States and fill policy implementation gaps. DPIDG coordinates the United Nations Public Administration Network (UNPAN) that connects international, regional and national institutions and experts worldwide devoted to public administration, in support of sustainable development.

Resources

4. The DPIDG annual average budget during 2021-2025 was USD 12.5 million, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: DPIDG budget by resource type, 2021-2025 (thousand USD)

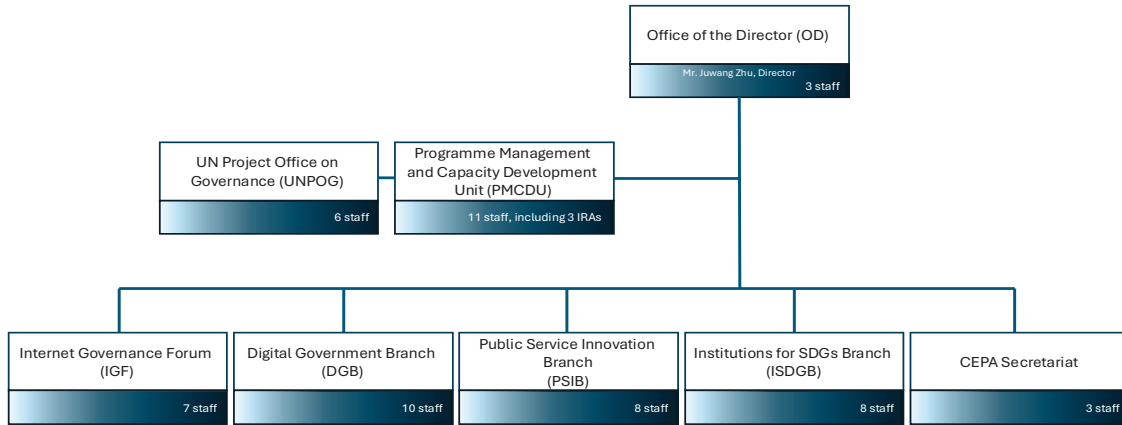


Note: Figures for 2025 denote approved and estimate (before recosting) values, respectively, for RB and XB.

Source: OIOS analysis of proposed budget programme documents 2021-2025. [A/77/6 – A/80/6 Sect.9]. RPTC and DA figures as reported by DESA on 20 January 2026.

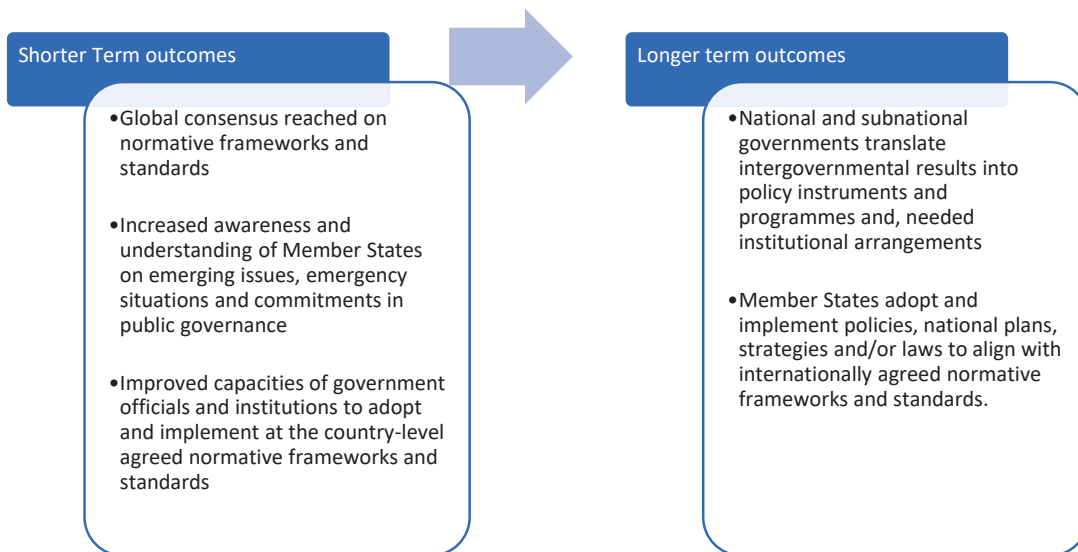
5. DPIDG is organized into five branches and units in New York, one project office on governance in Incheon and one secretariat office for the IGF in Geneva. Figure 3 illustrates the 56 posts allocated to DPIDG in 2025, 37 of which were filled as of December 2025.

Figure 3: DPIDG organization chart and allocated posts in 2025



II. Scope and Methodology

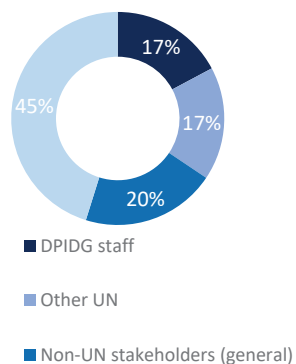
6. The evaluation covered all substantive DPIDG activities between 2021-2025 with a focus on assessing outcomes, particularly at country-level. Drawing on the theory of change for building effective, accountable and inclusive public institutions, the evaluation focused on the following shorter-term and longer-term outcomes.



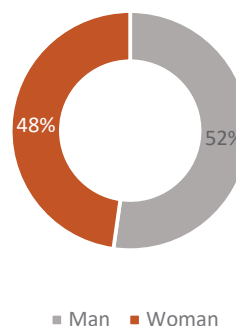
7. The methodology included the following five qualitative and quantitative methods:

a. **93 interviews** conducted in person and virtually with 111 individuals:

Respondent type (n=93)

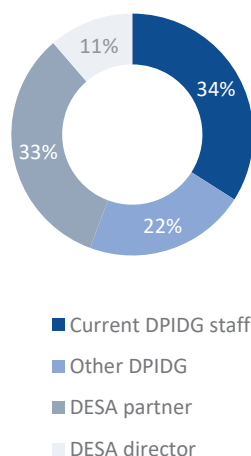


Gender (n=111)

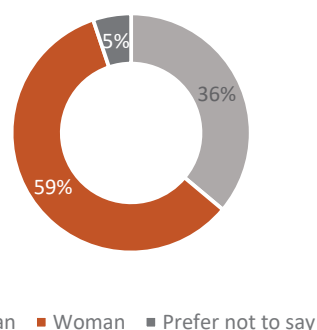


b. **DESA staff survey** administered online to 136 current and former DPIDG staff and consultants, DESA partners and DESA directors with 97 responses representing a 71 per cent response rate.

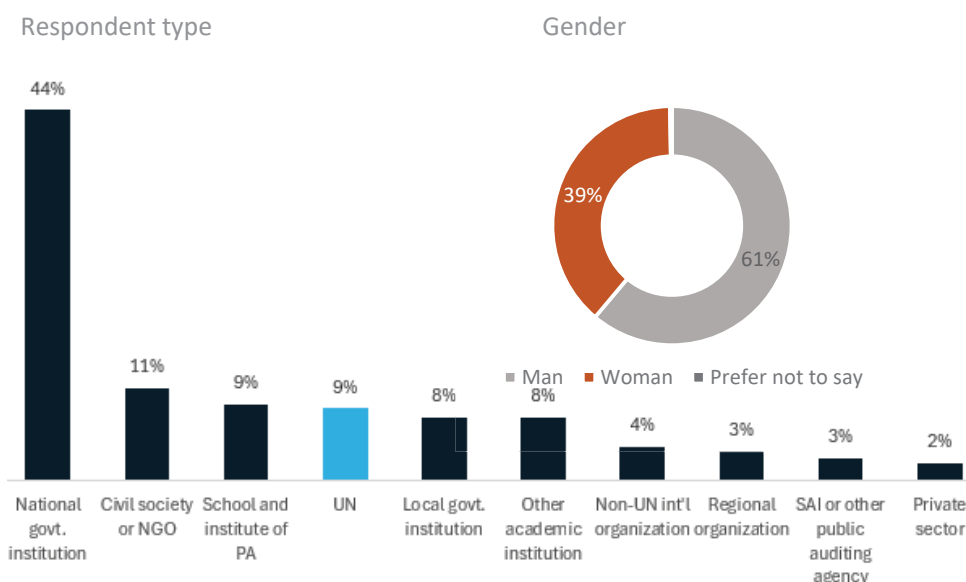
Respondent type



Gender



c. **Stakeholder survey** administered in English, French and Spanish to 1,352 participants and partners of all DPIDG activities implemented during 2021-2025 with 394 responses from individuals in 100 Member States, representing a 29 per cent response rate. To ensure survey results could be used and generalized, an analysis for non-response bias confirmed that non-respondents did not vary systematically by respondent type.



- d. **Review** of more than 100 documents including DESA budget fascicles, DESA Highlights reports, DESA plans of action, CEPA parliamentary documentation, other CEPA documents and expert papers, ECOSOC resolutions, IGF reports, SDG 16 conference reports, DPIDG capacity development reports, internal evaluation reports, field project documents as well as substantive DPIDG outputs pertaining to specific policy themes such as flagship reports and DESA policy briefs.
 - e. **Secondary data analysis** of 2021-2025 DPIDG workplans, DPIDG deliverables, DESA RPTC data and field project data.
8. The evaluation used a case study design. The case studies examined the problems intended to be addressed, the key DPIDG interventions, their contribution to observed outcomes at country level and the influences of internal and external contextual factors. The four case studies, identified in consultation with DPIDG, are presented in Table 1. They were selected to reflect the multiple modalities of DPIDG support, variation in lead DPIDG branches and maturity of interventions to focus on outcome examples at country level, particularly in countries in special circumstances.

Table 1: Four case studies constructed a detailed narrative of DPIDG influence and contribution to outcomes

#	Policy theme	Outcome example country
1	Putting into practice the CEPA principles of effective governance for sustainable development in Africa	 Sierra Leone*
2	Applying systems thinking and strategic foresight for effective governance in Small Island Developing States (SIDS)	 Seychelles
3	Advancing effective digital data governance	 Ethiopia*
4	Strengthening supreme audit institutions for SDG implementation	 Costa Rica

* in-person missions for data collection

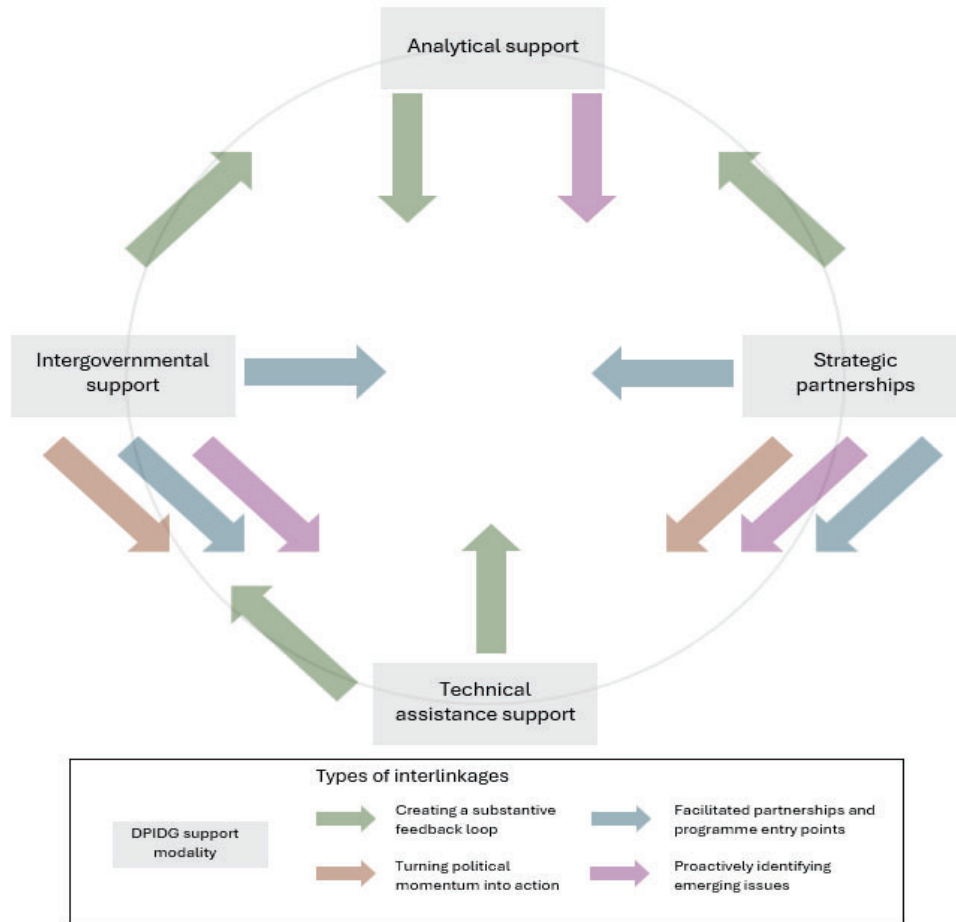
III. Evaluation Results

A. DPIDG used appropriate mutually reinforcing modalities to respond to its programme objectives, though interlinkages among them were more incidental than systematic

DPIDG used the right modalities of mandate implementation, which were mutually reinforcing

9. As described in Figure 1, DPIDG used four modalities that were relevant and mutually reinforcing in the Division’s overall mandate delivery. Nearly all stakeholders interviewed across all case studies confirmed that these four modalities constituted the appropriate approach to addressing their needs. Moreover, around half of staff interviewed confirmed the interlinkages among the modalities and perceived them as valuable. Across case studies, analytical support, intergovernmental and multistakeholder expert forum support, technical assistance support and strategic partnerships interacted in ways that enhanced relevance, visibility and quality of DPIDG work. The four case studies identified four specific types of mutually reinforcing interlinkages among DPIDG support modalities. The direction and types of interlinkages are illustrated in Figure 4 and described with examples in Figure 5.

Figure 4: Four types of interlinkages between DPIDG support modalities in case studies



Source: OIOS case study analysis

Figure 5: DPIDG modalities were interlinked to reinforce each other in four ways.



Interlinkages between modalities were more incidental than systematic, which limited harnessing their potential synergies to better respond to Member State needs

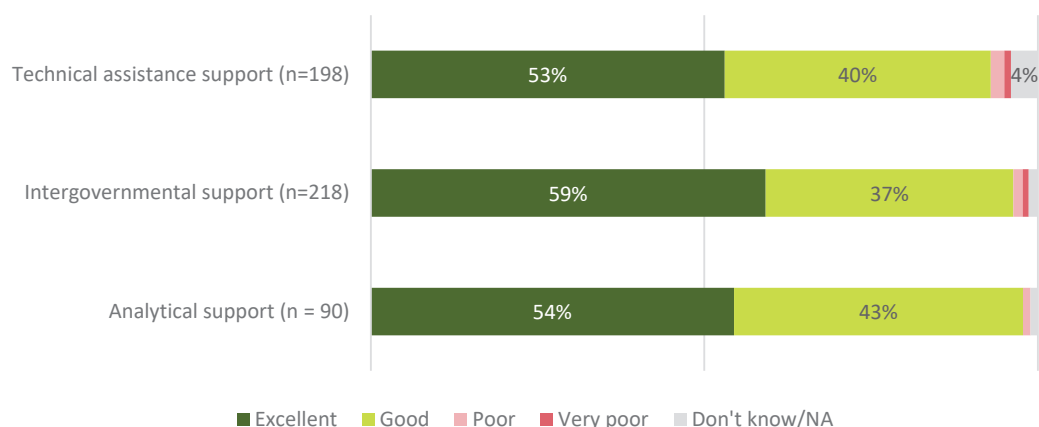
10. Despite the positive interlinkages discussed above, which were often incidental, the more formal mechanisms for reinforcing programmatic coherence were insufficient. These mechanisms included the preparation of the annual strategic framework, RPTC work planning and monthly meetings between DESA programme branch managers and the Office of the Assistant Secretary-General. However, staff interviewed from all DPIDG branches reported the absence of a division-wide strategy or mechanisms to guide the deliberate sequencing and planning of support across modalities, with just under half citing a lack of intentional connection between them; they noted that instead, the interlinkages were created through individual, ad-hoc initiatives or opportunities. Moreover, only three of the four modalities, excluding strategic partnerships, were institutionally recognized by DESA as core pillars of its work in its reports, work plans, website and programme of work. The DPIDG workplans reviewed did not specifically articulate how analytical, intergovernmental and multistakeholder expert forum, technical assistance support or strategic partnerships were expected to interact to achieve greater synergies and collectively respond to emerging stakeholder needs and identified division-wide priorities.
11. Overall, surveyed staff assessed internal collaboration positively, but more detailed qualitative interviews and reviewed documentation demonstrated gaps. The limited internal collaboration within DPIDG identified by some staff contributed to missed opportunities for linkages across its four modalities of mandate implementation. Additionally, reviewed documents, such as CEPA parliamentary documentation and flagship report, indicated that despite strong interlinkages, analytical outputs and intergovernmental documentation covering similar issues did not always cross-reference one another. Similarly, review of workshop participation lists indicated that interventions implemented by different DPIDG branches covered similar topics but did not systematically leverage each other's partners and stakeholder networks; this was also noted by stakeholders interviewed.

B. DPIDG support for strengthening public institutions and digital government was of high quality, leveraged its comparative advantages and aligned with stakeholder needs

Stakeholders considered DPIDG support to be of high quality

12. DPIDG stakeholders consistently praised the division for its high-quality support. Nearly all interviewed stakeholders, including in all four case studies, described DPIDG support as excellent and appreciated the professionalism and dedication of DPIDG staff. Similarly, most stakeholders surveyed assessed the quality as excellent or good for the specific modality through which they engaged with DPIDG, as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Stakeholders reported good to excellent quality DPIDG support across modalities



Source: OIOS stakeholder survey

13. Evidence from stakeholders and staff interviews and DPIDG capacity development documents and internal evaluation reports identified the following factors contributing to the high-quality support:

- (i) Professionalism, technical knowledge and expertise of DPIDG staff;
- (ii) Rigor and data-driven research in analytical outputs;
- (iii) Multi-stakeholder and inclusive approach;
- (iv) Facilitation of peer-learning and experience exchange;
- (v) Participation of the right people in activities, including at senior levels; and
- (vi) Participatory and dynamic workshop formats.

DPIDG successfully leveraged its comparative advantages of convening power and access to global perspectives to respond to stakeholder needs

14. The DPIDG demonstrated a unique capacity to convene stakeholders that would not normally engage with one another. According to stakeholders and staff interviewed, DPIDG consistently convened multiple actors, including national and local governments, private sector, civil society, academia and, to some extent, other development actors through its analytical, intergovernmental or technical assistance support. This convening role aligned with what stakeholders surveyed and interviewed identified as their top need for support - namely, to address institutional silos, fragmentation across Member State institutions and the low level of trust between them. Some government officials interviewed noted that DPIDG support enabled different entities to collaborate for the first time, while others emphasized that it elevated the visibility of diverse institutional actors (e.g. supreme audit institutions) and intersectional groups (e.g. indigenous women) within the policy space. International organization partners interviewed within and outside the United Nations system appreciated the Division's ability to provide access to networks in well-organized intergovernmental processes and

multistakeholder global and regional events, such as CEPA sessions, IGF, SDG 16 Conference and UNPSF.

15. The DPIDG further amplified its convening role through its multistakeholder approach and intentionally including multiple relevant public administration and governance institutions in its support. The Division undertook a whole-of-government approach to its work, demonstrated in the four case studies shown in Table 2.

Table 2: DPIDG oriented its support to include a whole-of-government approach across the four case studies

CEPA principles	Strategic foresight	Digital data governance	SDG audits
Officials from national, regional, and local governments in Sierra Leone were brought together to participate in a workshop on subsidiarity	Different ministries in Seychelles were brought together that previously operated in silos to co-design causal loop diagrams and identify policy area interlinkages	National data governance stakeholders across the government, private sector and civil society in Ethiopia were convened for the first time to clarify data governance roles and build trust	Policy coherence audit framework co-developed by DPIDG provided guidance to supreme audit institutions (SAI) on incorporating the whole-of-government approach into SDG auditing methodology

Source: OIOS case study analysis.

16. The DPIDG also provided governments with unique access to global perspectives and recommended practices. This responded well to a frequently identified stakeholder need for peer learning and peer exchanges. Stakeholders and staff interviewed reported that DPIDG was uniquely positioned to accumulate and disseminate comparative insights, pioneer innovative solutions and facilitate peer learning and exchanges among countries, with specific examples of peer exchanges shown in Table 3. The Division opened access to global perspective and practices through multiple channels, including:

- CEPA normative guidance featuring recommended global practices;
- Showcasing innovative practices through the United Nations Public Service Awards;
- Policy discussions at global fora organized by DPIDG;
- Exposure to Member State experiences through regional workshops;
- Field-level project implementation; and
- Collection and use of Member State data in DPIDG research and analysis.

Table 3: DPIDG promoted peer learning among Member States across the four case studies

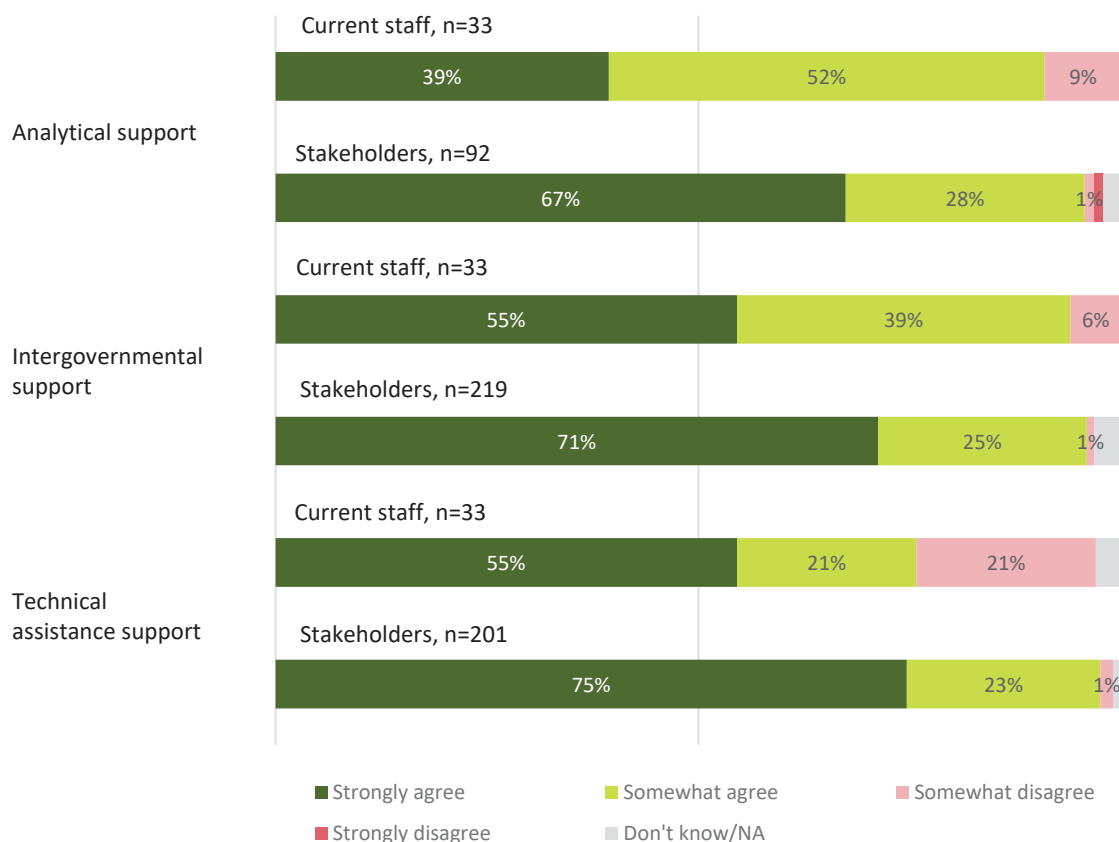
CEPA principles	Strategic foresight	Digital data governance	SDG audits
Peer learning on implementation of CEPA principles was fostered through the DESA-African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) regional workshops	Peer exchanges of experiences among SIDS took place among Seychelles, Mauritius and the Dominican Republic	Ethiopian results achieved and lessons learned were shared with other Member States in global fora and symposia	Audit practices were exchanged and further streamlined among SAIs in the Organization of Latin American and Caribbean Supreme Audit Institutions (OLACEFS) through the regional audit exercise

Source: OIOS case study analysis

DPIDG support aligned well with Member State needs

17. The DPIDG support was well aligned overall to stakeholders’ needs. Most stakeholders and staff surveyed assessed the alignment between DPIDG support and stakeholders’ needs positively, though current staff were less widely positive for technical assistance support, as shown in Figure 7. Furthermore, stakeholders interviewed in all four case studies confirmed good alignment of DPIDG support with Member State needs, priorities and SDG 16 targets. The Division’s support emphasized the “leave no one behind” principle, including gender and disability inclusion aspects in its work, as confirmed by documents, interviews, and stakeholder survey assessments. The Division’s deliverables and workplans between 2021 and 2025 aligned well with Member State needs identified in CEPA parliamentary documentation and relevant ECOSOC resolutions on the reports of the Committee. However, secondary analysis of field project data for technical assistance support showed that only half of project documents explicitly referenced the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) priorities in project countries. DPIDG reported that this lack of alignment was linked to different Department templates used based on the sources of funding for technical cooperation activities.

Figure 7: Stakeholders and current staff perceived DPIDG support to be well aligned with stakeholders' needs



Source: OIOS stakeholder and staff surveys

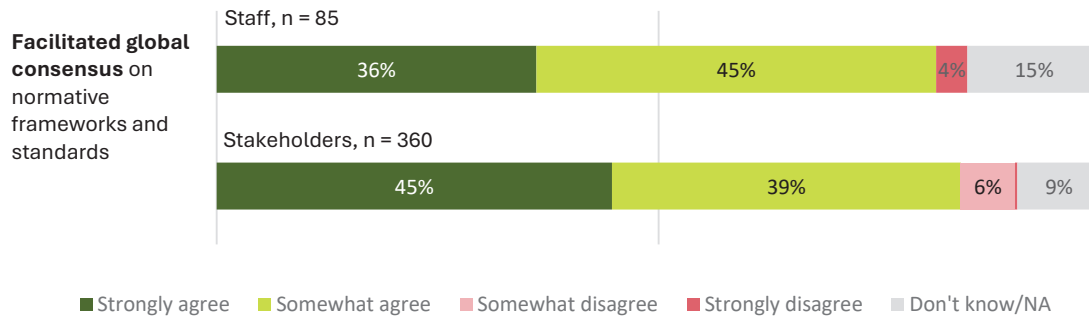
C. DPIDG contributed significantly to the shorter-term outcomes of facilitating global consensus on normative issues, raising awareness and understanding of emerging issues and common approaches and increasing stakeholders' capacities to implement normative frameworks

DPIDG effectively contributed to reaching global consensus on normative frameworks and standards

18. Stakeholders and staff assessed positively the Division's contribution to reaching global consensus on normative frameworks. As shown in Figure 8, most stakeholders and staff surveyed agreed that DPIDG had facilitated consensus, and stakeholders that participated in multistakeholder fora such as CEPA sessions, IGF, SDG 16 Conference and UNPSF, further explained when interviewed that being participants and members in these fora led to transfer and refinement of ideas and concepts. For example, CEPA members reported DPIDG supported setting the agenda for the 11 principles of good governance and facilitated uptake and subsequent resolutions by ECOSOC. In another example, UNPSF participants in workshops facilitated by the Division reported discussing and then adopting a one-stop-shop approach for

citizen services based on the experience of another country that they would not have learned about if not for the event.

Figure 8: Most stakeholders and staff surveyed agreed DPIDG contributed to facilitated global consensus

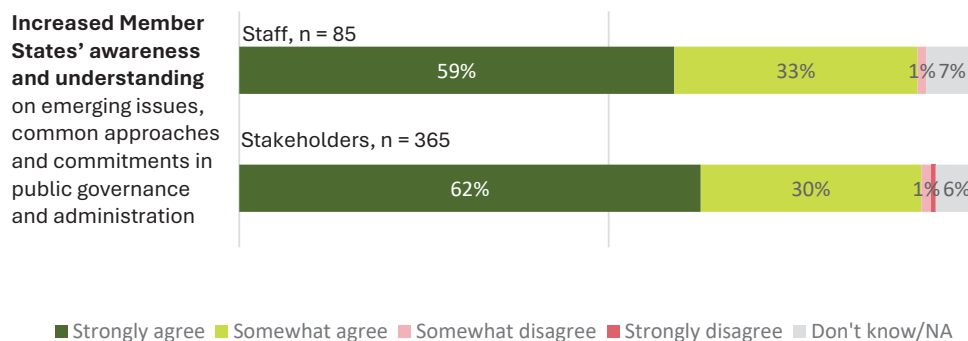


Source: OIOS stakeholder and staff surveys

DPIDG contributed significantly to increased awareness and understanding of emerging issues, common approaches and commitments in public governance and administration issues

19. The Division also effectively contributed to increased awareness and understanding among Member States of issues in public governance. As shown in Figure 9, the majority of stakeholder and staff survey respondents agreed that DPIDG had contributed to increased awareness and understanding. Similarly, most stakeholders interviewed were able to provide specific examples of how DPIDG work effectively contributed to raising their awareness and understanding; these included Member States using the e-Government survey as a reference point and CEPA guidance notes that provided Member States with good practices such as implementing the concept of subsidiarity in policy making.

Figure 9: Most stakeholders and staff surveyed agreed DPIDG contributed to increased awareness and understanding



Source: OIOS stakeholder and staff surveys

20. Positive outcomes related to increased awareness and understanding among government officials and other stakeholders were observed in all four country-level case studies, shown in Table 4. Reviewed DPIDG capacity development reports also showed that outcomes related to

greater awareness and understanding of concepts and issues in public administration were the most common impacts of DPIDG work. In all four case studies, stakeholders strongly attributed their increased awareness and understanding specifically to the support from DPIDG.

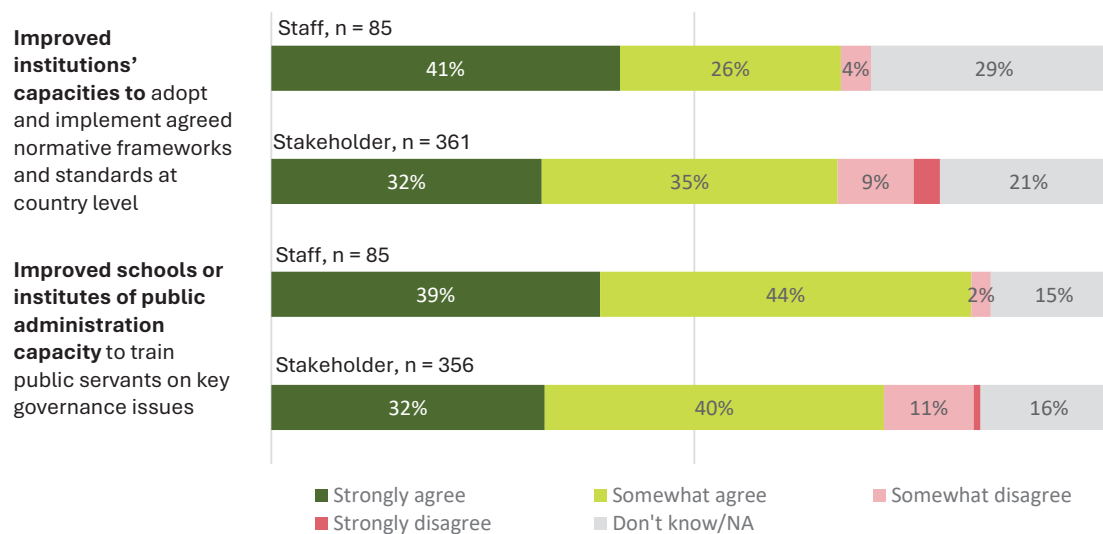
Table 4: Contributions to increased awareness and understanding outcomes in all four case studies

DPIDG contribution	Outcome
CEPA principles	
<p>The government of Sierra Leone’s participation in CEPA for the last eight years. Regional and country level workshops were held by DPIDG and APRM from 2019 until 2025.</p>	<p>Participation in CEPA contributed to ownership of principles of good governance in Sierra Leone.</p> <p>Government officials in Sierra Leone were aware of the principles of good governance and were using them as a framework for public sector reforms.</p> <p>DPIDG-APRM workshops generated broader awareness among APRM member countries of both the principles of good governance and good practices for implementing them.</p>
Strategic foresight	
<p>DPIDG-UNITAR workshops held with officials of the government of Seychelles on integrated planning and strategic foresight were informed by the principles of good governance and CEPA guidance notes. The workshops deepened participants’ understanding, and gave them practical tools that they could use, and the activities forced them to think critically about how to apply the content.</p>	<p>Government officials in Seychelles reported that their awareness of integrated planning needs, and techniques for applying strategic foresight and systems thinking had increased.</p>
Digital data governance	
<p>Ethiopia hosted the IGF in 2022. Subsequently, the e-government survey, and digital data governance baseline study and validation workshops increased awareness among high-level officials on the importance of having a data governance framework at the national level, data governance needs, roles, gaps and other Member State recommended practices.</p>	<p>Government officials and civil society stakeholders reported increased interest among government officials in advancing digital data governance.</p>
SDG audits	
<p>DPIDG provided mentorship and guidance on SDG auditing (ISAM v1 and v2), policy briefs, policy coherence audit framework, through partnership with INTOSAI Secretariat and IDI and promoting SAI work on SDG audits in the HLPF side-events. The World Public Sector Report 2025 was also used to promote visibility of SAIs in SDG implementation.</p>	<p>Interviewed stakeholders confirmed DPIDG contribution to increased awareness of SAI role in SDG implementation at both regional and national level in Costa Rica.</p>

DPIDG effectively contributed to enhancing the capacities of government officials to adopt and implement normative frameworks

21. The Division contributed substantially to improving the capacities of government officials through policy guidance, technical cooperation support and facilitating peer to peer exchanges. Most stakeholders and staff surveyed agreed that DPIDG contributed to improved capacities of institutions to adopt and implement policies and normative frameworks, as shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Most stakeholders and staff surveyed agreed that DPIDG contributed to improved government capacities



Source: OIOS stakeholder and staff surveys

22. Similarly, DPIDG contributed to strengthened institutional capacities of host governments. Examples of this strengthening were identified by stakeholders and staff interviewed and highlighted within the Division’s capacity development reports and internal assessments, the latter identifying 81 specific examples of improved capacities from 2021 to 2024. Examples included improved capacity of host governments to:

- a. Conduct Voluntary National Reviews in Botswana;
- b. Apply the methodology for Local Online Service Index (LOSI) in Uzbekistan;
- c. Implement action plans on gender equality in Bhutan; and
- d. Write Terms of Reference for digital innovation projects on Artificial Intelligence in Thailand.

23. Stakeholders working in or with schools of public administration reported that DPIDG had increased their capacities to train public servants on governance issues. Notable examples include:

- a. In the Philippines, the handbook on integrated budget auditing for SDGs was integrated into their capacity training programmes.
- b. Schools of public administration in Saint Lucia, Guatemala, Pakistan, and Nepal adopted and used online training tools and guidance from DPIDG in their training on issues such as strategic foresight, financial management, and development planning.
- c. In Lebanon, engagement in UNPAN contributed to strengthened financial management capacity, with young policy makers that attended annual DPIDG roundtables for public service day building on the experience gained in these fora to become senior policy makers in their respective countries.

24. Detailed analysis of the four case studies illustrated strong connections between DPIDG guidance and training activities and enhanced government capacities that resulted in stakeholders applying new skills and knowledge. Box 1 provides examples of each.

Box 1: Case study examples of DPIDG contributions to increased government capacities

Contribution from training:



In the strategic foresight case study, government officials in Seychelles confirmed applying concepts from the DPIDG-UNITAR training on strategic foresight. These officials found the content and practical activities on scenarios visioning, back casting and multistakeholder engagement particularly helpful. For example, several ministries now follow the five-step strategic planning process laid out by DPIDG. The Ministry of Finance has begun adjusting its budget guidance to reflect strategic foresight and risk, and several other ministries had deliberately collaborated with each other on their project initiation documents following principles from the workshops.

Contribution from guidance:



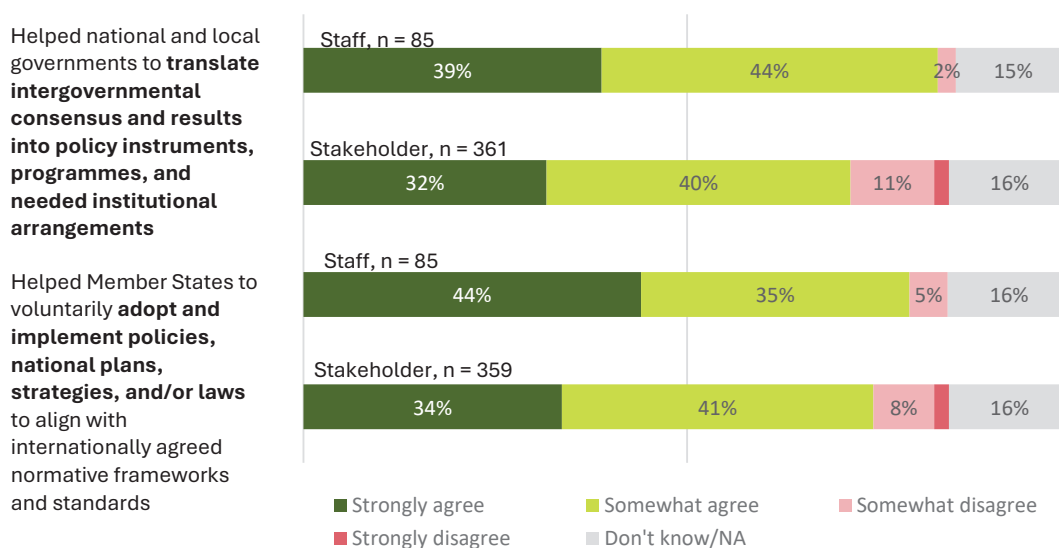
In the SDG audits case study, interviewed stakeholders confirmed DESA contributed to improved guidance on the audit framework on policy coherence and the whole-of-government approach. Auditors from Costa Rica confirmed that this guidance, delivered together with the INTOSAI Development Initiative (IDI), helped them to work with a whole-of-government and multi-stakeholder approach to SDG auditing. The 2024 DESA survey of SAIs reported increased capacities to apply this whole-of-government approach. Additionally, through membership and regional audits in the Organization of Latin American and Caribbean Supreme Audit Institutions (OLACEFS), Costa Rica auditors mentored and supported other SAIs on this approach.

D. More limited progress was made on the longer-term outcomes of policy adoption and implementation, due to several internal and external constraints

The Division contributed to some revised institutional arrangements and the adoption and implementation of national policies, plans, strategies, and laws

25. Both stakeholders and staff reported some DPIDG contributions to longer-term outcomes, including policy changes and revised institutional arrangements. They agreed that DPIDG assisted Member States in the voluntary adoption of policies, national plans, strategies and laws, shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Most stakeholders and staff surveyed agreed that DPIDG contributed to longer term outcomes



Source: OIOS stakeholder and staff surveys

26. Stakeholders interviewed provided several examples of institutional arrangements and policy outcomes influenced by all areas of DPIDG work. These included:

- Integrated LOSI base standards into municipal digital service standards in Uzbekistan,
- Strengthened digital data governance and interoperability standards in Tanzania;
- Created office of the Ombudsman on public sector governance in Malawi;
- Added innovation unit to the Urban Renewal Authority in the Bahamas;
- Drafted public sector modernization plan;
- Set up interministerial committees on public administration; and
- Changed strategic planning processes to align with SDGs in Indonesia.

27. The Division’s contribution to longer term policy implementation at country level was observed in all four case studies. Government officials interviewed in each case study provided concrete examples of policy and institutional changes that had been influenced by the intergovernmental/multistakeholder fora, research and analysis, and technical cooperation work of DPIDG. These are summarized in Table 5.
28. While these contributions to policy change outcomes were identified, the greater level of detailed data collected in the case studies also highlighted sustainability challenges. These challenges, also shown in Table 5, mainly clustered around the highly project-based format of interventions, the need for additional technical assistance support and the follow-up support on policy implementation, such as post workshop follow-up and additional guidance.

Table 5: Case studies revealed influence on policy and institutional arrangements, though with sustainability challenges

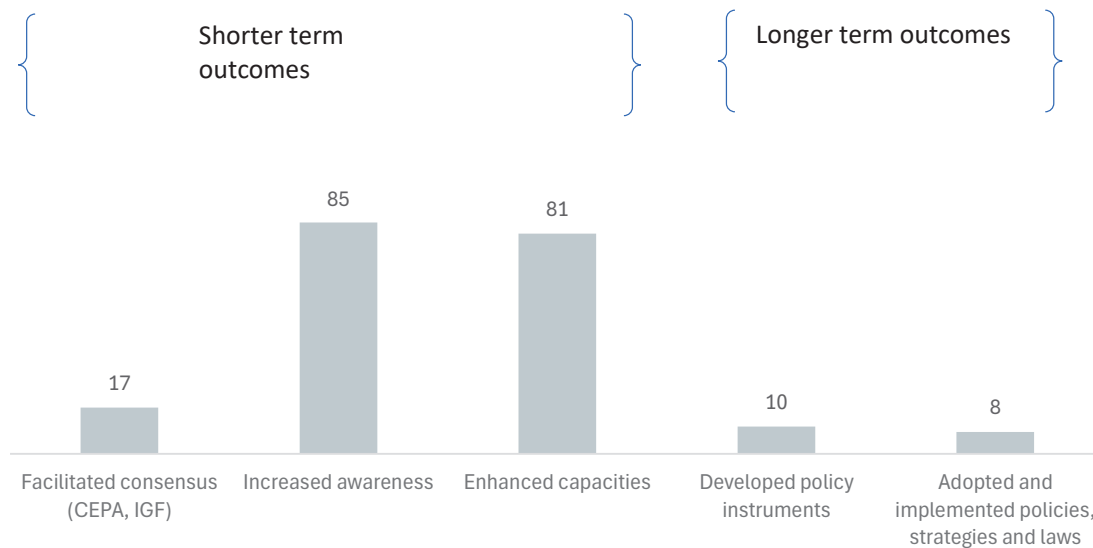
Longer-term outcomes on policy adoption and institutional arrangements	Sustainability challenges
CEPA principles	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Government officials involved in civil service reforms in Sierra Leone confirmed that CEPA principles, and the DESA-APRM workshops were key influences on the government’s eight Pillar strategy of public sector reform, the revisions to the civil service code of conduct (supported by EU project), and the revisions to the Public Service Act approved in October 2025. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Reportedly under-resourced area of reforms. ❖ Low awareness of CEPA, SDGs, Agenda 2063 frameworks among parliamentarians affects political support and government oversight of reform progress.
Strategic foresight	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Some ministries made policy changes to the project initiation documents, and the Ministry of Finance made changes to its budget guidance to include foresight and risk because of the workshops, while another ministry reorganized their risk section following guidance from the workshops. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Change management needed to sustain momentum from whole of government was missing. <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">(note: DA project funding concluded in December 2026).</p>
Digital data governance	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Creation of the data governance desk in the Ministry of Innovation and Technology (MINT), and the development of the national data sharing directive were directly influenced by DPIDG. Furthermore, the Ethiopia digital data strategy for 2030 included reflections from DESA support and analysis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ MINT not having jurisdiction over other ministries’ data policy, coupled with the under resourcing to MINT’s data governance service desk impeded sustained progress and policy coherence. ❖ The national data sharing directive was not finalized. ❖ The Digital Data Strategy 2030 itself is not resourced.

SDG audits

- ✓ IDI initiative contributed to incorporating SDG audits into government SAI mandates and workplans and increased adoption of SAI roles in SDG implementation. In Costa Rica, a procurement law was influenced by the SDG audits.
- ❖ Competing priorities of some governments deemphasized SDG audits.

29. Despite these positive assessments, fewer concrete examples of longer-term outcomes compared to shorter term outcomes were identified by stakeholders and staff and in DPIDG reports. Just under one in five interviewed stakeholders provided examples of policies, strategies or laws, compared to nearly all that referenced increased awareness. Similarly, as presented in Figure 12, reviewed DPIDG reporting on capacity development activities identified fewer examples of longer-term outcomes.

Figure 12: DPIDG internal assessments more likely to report short rather than longer term outcomes



Source: OIOS document review

Strategic partnerships and sustained engagement with other development actors were important for influencing policy outcomes, though not consistently across cases

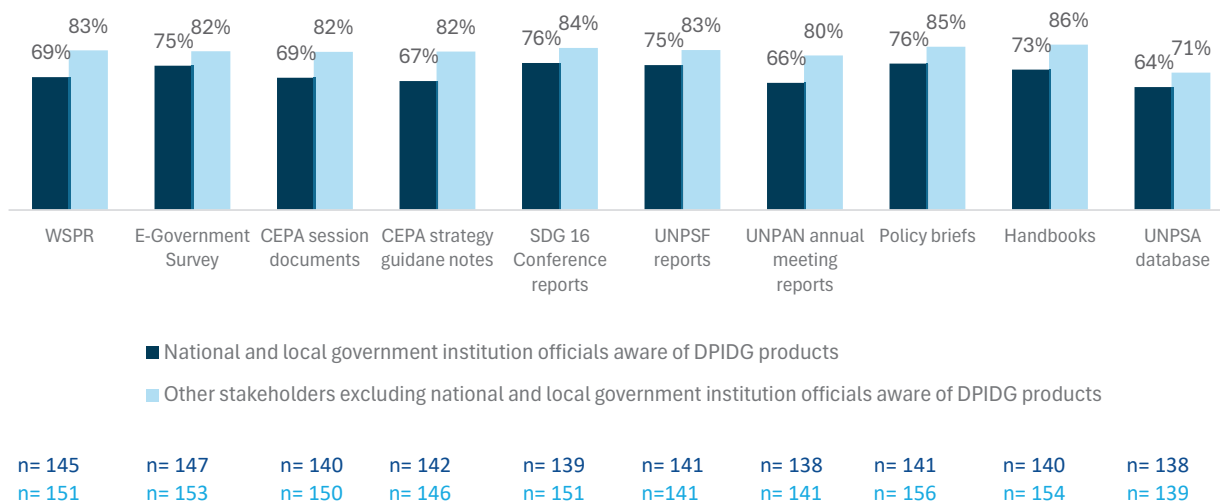
30. Global, regional and national strategic partnerships significantly expanded DPIDG reach to country level, as demonstrated in three of the four case studies. These partnerships were developed and intentionally maintained over time through continuous engagement between the Division and different partner entities. Examples of effective partnerships included the following:

- a. In the CEPA principles of good governance case study, DPIDG partnered with APRM to deliver peer exchange workshops on good governance and promoted the principles to their 44 member countries, including Sierra Leone;
 - b. The support to SDG audits case study demonstrated the value of partnerships at both global (IDI), regional (OLACEFS) and national level (SAI Costa Rica) through the IDI initiative when reaching national level technical staff. This partnership enabled DESA to reach national-level technical staff and to mentor SAIs through targeted technical guidance on auditing for SDGs;
 - c. In the strategic foresight training case study, DPIDG had a strong partnership with UNITAR and the RCO to deliver training, in line with the strategic planning needs of the government and the UNSDCF.
31. United Nations partners and stakeholders interviewed in all four case studies provided mixed responses on the adequacy of the Division’s partnership approach in terms of supporting longer term outcomes. They specifically referenced numerous development partners working in similar spaces but with whom DPIDG had minimal or no contact with that could continue or reinforce the work of DPIDG after the Division was no longer directly involved. This included, for example, UNCT members, Resident Coordinators offices and the World Bank. United Nations partners also expressed concerns over missing links between the Division and their respective entities’ ongoing work at country level. DPIDG staff noted that even when aware of the other UN and non-UN actors, there were challenges with engaging these potential partners due to timing, actor willingness or ability to respond, or other logistical issues.

Contributions to policy making were hindered by limitations of DESA communication of policy analysis, reports and activities at the country level

32. Despite not having a dedicated communication function, the Division has made a strong effort to communicate its work. This included the administration of UNPAN and its website and the use of social media and mailing lists to disseminate policy guidance and reports. According to data collected by DESA, visits to DPIDG websites saw a growth of 66 per cent between 2024 and 2025, with two of its flagship publications – the e-Government Survey and World Public Sector Report - among the most downloaded of all DESA reports.
33. Strong dissemination efforts yielded increased visibility of knowledge products. However, intended users at country level were less likely than other stakeholders to be aware of the resources produced by the Division, as shown in Figure 13.

Figure 13: Government officials at country and local levels were less likely to be aware of all DPIDG products they were asked about in comparison to other types of stakeholders



Source: OIOS stakeholder survey

34. Moreover, interviewed stakeholders and staff identified gaps in communication and dissemination of DPIDG materials. These included:

- a) **Target audiences at country level were not always aware of DPIDG guidance products and analyses.** Stakeholders asked for more deliberate communication to put relevant DPIDG research and analysis into the hands of government officials and RCO and UNCT members at country level. One government official expressed a common view in this regard when explaining, *“I haven’t heard of the website content on CEPA principles, UNPAN or other materials [you mentioned]. If that is there, it would be good to be notified by DESA.”*
- b) **Target audiences sought more digestible or modern formats.** Stakeholders reported that for both DPIDG policy guidance documents and major publications such as the WSPR and E-Government Survey, it would be helpful to facilitate their use by developing summaries, YouTube videos, and options in local languages. One partner explained this view as follows, *“use a lighter touch. Break big knowledge into what each stakeholder really needs. The heavy packages can be hard to use.”*

Achievement of long-term policy outcomes for governments was hindered by additional persistent external contextual factors, some of which – such as lack of political will – were particularly challenging to mitigate

35. Additional external contextual factors hindered the Division’s achievement and sustainability of longer-term outcomes. Three or more of the following factors were present in each of four case studies:

a) **Low political will, commitment and prioritization within government.** This included low awareness among parliamentarians of agreed multilateral frameworks and practices, entrenched power structures within government, and lack of authority to implement, as referenced in the adjacent quote.

“We don’t discuss them... When parliament sits it’s not reflective of these conventions we have agreed to.”
- Government official

“We are early on implementation... There are few people. If they switch roles or leave, we go back to square one.”
- Government official

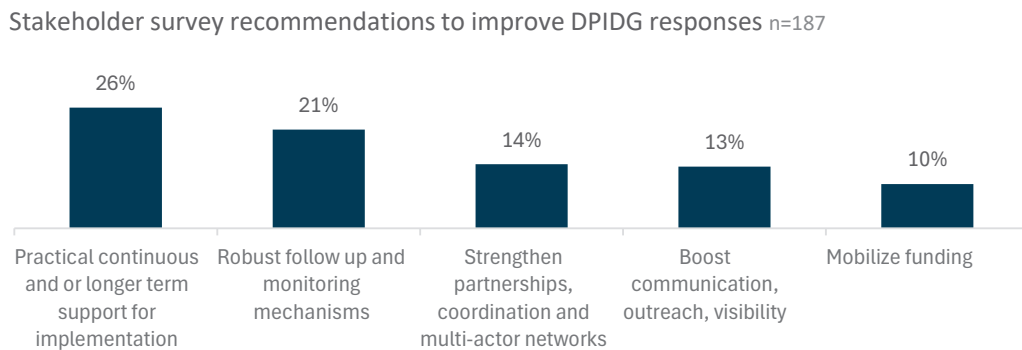
b) **Limited stakeholders and government capacity.** The small size of civil services, especially in SIDS, and high turnover of officials impeded progress, with new capacities being lost due to attrition or unable to be used given other priorities of the officials trained, as explained in the adjacent quote.

c) **Scarce physical and monetary resources:** Even with training and policy advice, governments required additional resources to implement changes. Examples of this included funding to facilitate organizational restructuring and reforms, transportation for multi-stakeholder approaches, and technical infrastructure for data management, as noted in the adjacent quote.

“When you eventually digitize and centralize, security risk is high. So, we need to have good digital infrastructure to do this first.”
- Government official

36. While DPIDG was aware of these external factors, their planned mitigation measures were not sufficiently effective. A review of ten Division technical assistance project documents showed that DPIDG assessed these risks as either likely or very likely to affect project implementation. However, the mitigation measures presented were often generic (e.g., liaise closely with government, or actively work with RC and UNCT, develop clear terms of reference) and interviewed stakeholders and staff reported that these measures did not fully respond to the risks. Moreover, surveyed stakeholders’ top suggestions to improve DPIDG programming (presented in Figure 14) were to mitigate against these same factors.

Figure 14: Stakeholder recommendations focused on addressing external factors



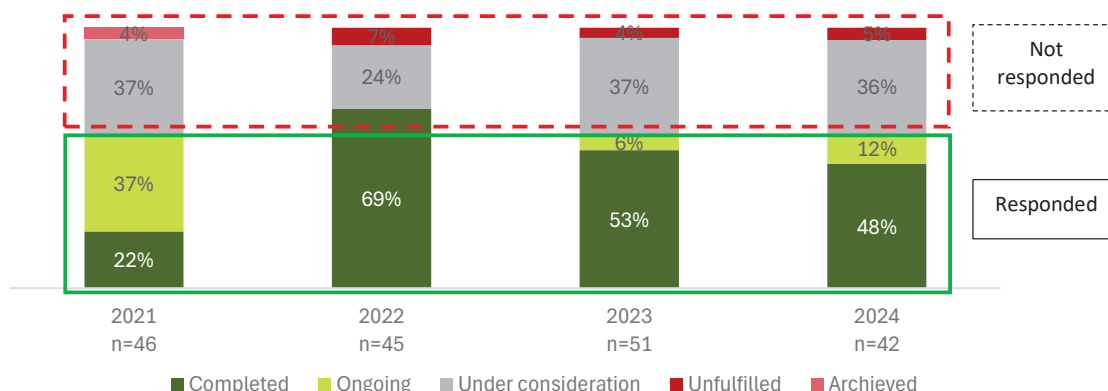
Source: OIOS stakeholder survey

E. Faced with high demand and diminishing resources, DPIDG has not fully optimized its efficiency through adequate use of strategic partnerships, prioritization of its work, greater interbranch coherence and stronger collaboration with other DESA divisions

Demand for DPIDG support on public institutions and digital government exceeded capacity to respond

37. The demand for DPIDG support on issues of public institutions and digital government exceeded DPIDG capacity. Analysis of the DESA RPTC database showed that DPIDG was the top DESA division assigned technical cooperation requests in 2021-2025, by a large margin; a review of DPIDG capacity development reports showed that DPIDG was unable to respond to between 31 and 41 per cent of all requests for capacity development within the year received, shown in Figure 15. According to the United Nations Development Coordination Office (DCO), SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, and SDG 17 on partnerships, which are the focus of the DPIDG mandate, were present in 37 UNSDCF and were underfunded by 28 and 31 per cent in 2024. Furthermore, almost two thirds of stakeholders interviewed said they needed more support from DPIDG.

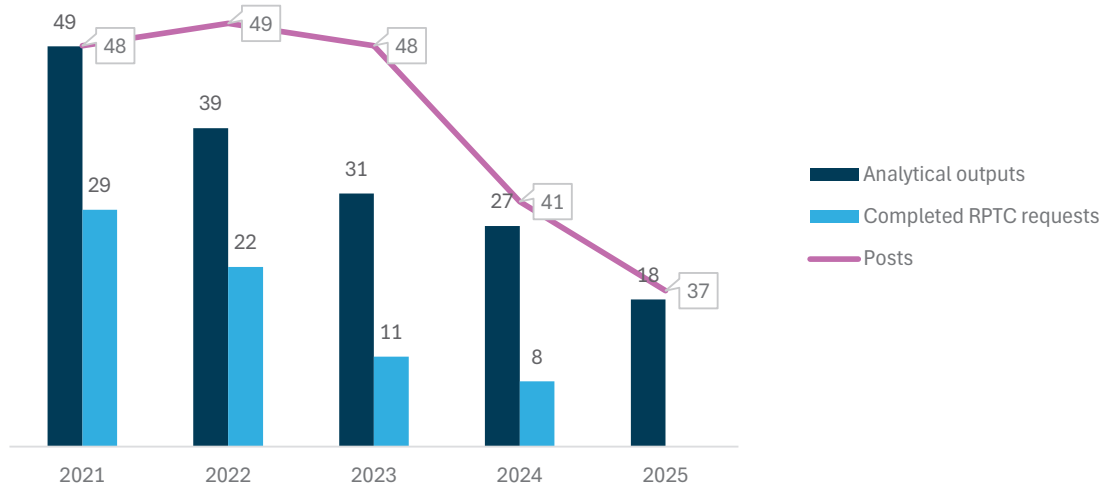
Figure 15: Requests for capacity development support from Member States far exceeded DPIDG capacity to respond within the same year



Note: 2021-2022 and 2023-2024 figures correspond to the proportion of addressed and completed Member State requests, respectively. DPIDG reported that any requests not addressed in the year received were carried forward to the following year/years. The only exception were requests with no continued interest from the Member State
 Source: OIOS secondary analysis of DPIDG capacity development reports, 2021-2024.

38. At the same time, DPIDG has been delivering its mandate with consistently decreasing post resources; as of the end of 2025, the Division was operating with a 29 per cent vacancy rate. As shown in Figure 16, a review of submitted DPIDG programme data illustrates the impact these decreasing post resources have had on delivering analytical outputs and technical cooperation support.

Figure 16: DPIDG analytical deliverables and technical cooperation support has decreased along with fewer posts from 2021 to 2025

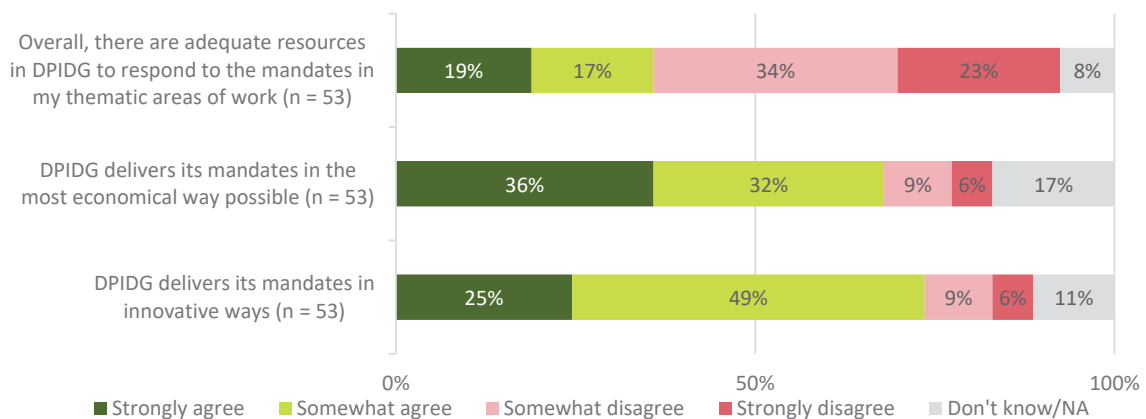


Note: Data for 2025 is for 6 months. Analytical outputs include flagship reports, policy briefs, handbooks, parliamentary documentation, compendia, guidance notes and training toolkits from all funding sources. Posts and analytical products include all funding sources.

Source: OIOS secondary analysis of submitted DPIDG programme data.

39. Most staff surveyed, shown in Figure 17, and nearly all interviewed staff believed that the resources they had were inadequate to respond to their mandates. While most staff surveyed believed that DPIDG delivered in the most economical and innovative ways, nearly all staff interviewed noted that the decreasing post resources have impacted their ability to deliver on mandates, even after accounting for internal initiatives to be more efficient. Examples included limited ability to communicate and promote their work, limitations on supporting the CEPA bureau, reduced analytical capacity for workshops, and less capacity to respond to and follow up on technical support requests.

Figure 17: Majority of DPIDG staff surveyed assessed resources to be inadequate despite economic and innovative programme delivery

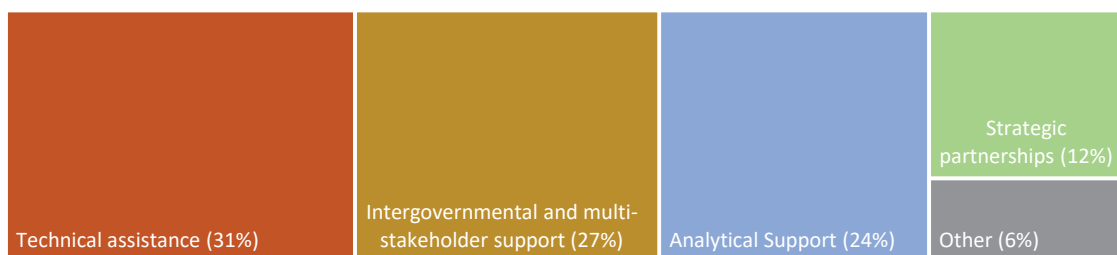


Source: Staff survey

In this context of reduced resources and demand that exceeded capacity, there were opportunities to improve on efficiency measures used to offset the negative impact on performance

40. Stakeholders and staff identified opportunities to optimize DPIDG efficiency in the context of reduced staff. These included greater use of strategic partnerships, more focus on internal strategic priority setting, inter-branch coherence and collaboration within DESA. These four efficiency measures are discussed in greater detail below.
- a) **Limited focus on partnerships compared to more technical work.** The technical support of guidance and training that DPIDG provides to Member States required follow-up to sustain momentum for outcomes (discussed in para 28-29), for which DPIDG does not have the resources. Stakeholders interviewed across the four case studies suggested that fostering partnerships and coalitions for following up after DPIDG technical support has been provided would improve sustainability of the Division’s work. The stakeholder survey showed that where DPIDG had leveraged partnerships and helped to build coalitions, there was a decreased perceived stakeholder need for additional Division support, thus resulting in efficiency gains. Furthermore, staff interviewed reported that where they have good partnerships, it has taken significant effort to build relationships and being available to collaborate. However, there appeared to be limited institutional focus and time committed to developing partnerships. Reviewed DPIDG workplans did not adequately consider strategic partnerships in overall programme planning, and staff surveyed reported that 12 per cent of their time was allocated to fostering strategic partnerships, compared to other modalities of support (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Staff surveyed reported allocating the least amount of their time to partnerships development over the past 12 months



Source: Staff survey

- b) **Strategic priority setting:** DESA-DPIDG used the Proposed Programme Budget Process and its divisional workplan for setting priorities. However, half of interviewed DPIDG staff identified challenges with setting priorities at the division level. Staff described themselves as often working in silos, and that there was not enough collaboration between their branches on common priorities.
- c) **Inter-branch coherence:** Inter-branch work was an important, and sometimes missing, approach to resourcing priority areas. The majority of surveyed staff gave a positive assessment of internal collaboration within DPIDG. Interviewed staff also provided examples where DPIDG staff worked together across branches to support key deliverables including the annual CEPA session, and United Nations Public service week. However, as noted in result A (discussed in para 10-11) mechanisms for reinforcing

programmatic coherence did not sufficiently interlink support modalities and work between DPIDG branches.

- d) **Collaboration between DESA divisions:** Where DPIDG was able to collaborate with other DESA divisions, they leveraged expertise and access to government officials for both divisions. Case studies demonstrated the importance of collaborations between DESA divisions, including, for example, collaboration with the Financing for Sustainable Development division (FFSD) and the Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG) on strategic foresight work in Seychelles. Some staff surveyed and interviewed indicated that such connections could be strengthened for greater mutual advantage. For example, analysis of DPIDG programme data showed a minority of technical assistance support (RPTC seven per cent; field projects 24 per cent) was provided in collaboration with other DESA divisions, suggesting potential opportunities to work more with other DESA divisions.

IV. Conclusion

41. In the 2025 Sustainable Development Goals Report, the Secretary-General warned that the world is facing “a global development emergency.” Within this larger context, DPIDG contributes, along with Member States and other development entities, to key development aspects of both SDG 16 -strong institutions- and SDG 17 -partnerships for the goals. Despite significant progress in both areas, critical gaps remain: none of the global targets for SDG 16, and just 20 per cent of targets for SDG 17, are on track.² Strengthening effective, accountable and inclusive governance and public institutions at all levels remains foundational to accelerating progress across not just SDGs 16 and 17 but all SDGs and delivering on the Pact for the Future.
42. DPIDG has been a reliable partner to Member State governments, providing high quality support and achieving concrete and positive outcomes with its four support modalities. However, as a small global subprogramme operating amid high Member State demand and diminishing resources, DPIDG must continue to find ways to more effectively and efficiently leverage its comparative advantages and expertise where it can generate the greatest impact. This will enhance its valuable contribution to accelerating progress in meeting the ambitious goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

² The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025, pages 41, 45

V. Recommendations

43. OIOS makes the following four important recommendations to DPIDG, which it has accepted, to improve its support to Member States on governance and public institutions at national and sub-national levels for sustainable development.

Recommendation 1: Strengthen internal coherence (results A and E)

Recommendation	To strengthen existing formal coordination and prioritization mechanisms with more integrated and deliberate whole-of-division approaches to mandate delivery, DPIDG should establish a schedule for regular division and inter-branch unit chief meetings with core agenda items to identify opportunities for synergies across branches and modalities and to periodically review implementation.
Indicators of implementation	Schedule, agenda and meeting minutes identifying synergies between at least two related DPIDG activities, outputs or projects in quarterly meetings with Branch/Unit Chiefs and biannual divisional meetings.
Expected change	More integrated and deliberate whole-of-division approach to mandate delivery and performance.

Recommendation 2: Improve reach of products to country and local-level users (result D)

Recommendation	To improve the reach of its publications, guidance materials and analytical products to country- and local-level policy makers, DESA and DPIDG should implement a concrete division wide plan for reaching out to UN and non-UN networks to disseminate its outputs.
Indicators of implementation	Implement a plan for outreach (e.g., emails or other contact with UN partners with country level networks in public administration) to disseminate DPIDG products, publications, guidance and materials.
Expected change	Greater awareness of DPIDG publications, guidance materials, and analytical products by policy makers at country-level enhances potential to inform policy and decision making.

Recommendation 3: Improve usability of products for target audiences (result D)

Recommendation	To improve the usability of its publications, guidance materials and analytical products for policy makers and other target audiences, DPIDG should pilot at least one new user-friendly format , building on behavioural insights where applicable, for its products.
Indicators of implementation	Pilot at least one new user-friendly formats for two publications, guidance and/or other materials for target audiences.
Expected change	Greater awareness of DPIDG publications, guidance materials, and analytical products by policy makers at country-level enhances potential to inform policy and decision making.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen and build supporting strategic partnerships (results D and E)

Recommendation	To more deliberately support policy makers in achieving sustained outcomes after DPIDG interventions are complete, DPIDG should, building on good partnership practices within the division, revise its project inception documents to include identifying strategic partnerships with UN and non-UN development actors to follow-up and support policy makers in achieving sustained outcomes at country-level, each acting within their own authority and mandates, as feasible.
Indicators of implementation	Revised project inception documents to include a specific section on anticipated partnerships and identify viable UN (including RCs and UNCT members) and non-UN development actors to follow up and support policy makers following DPIDG interventions.
Expected change	DPIDG maintains and continues to build new strategic partnerships to support follow-up actions to DPIDG's interventions for sustained impact.

Annex 1: Response received from DESA



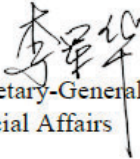
TO: Ms. Demetra Arapakos, Director
A: Inspection and Evaluation Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services

DATE: 30 March 2026
REFERENCE: DESA-26/00546
CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

THROUGH:

S/C DE:

FROM: LI Junhua, Under-Secretary-General
DE: for Economic and Social Affairs



SUBJECT: **Response to the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the**
OBJET: **Evaluation of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA);**
Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG)

1. I write with reference to your memo of 17 March 2026, conveying the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the Evaluation of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA); Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG). UN DESA recognizes the importance of this evaluation and extends its appreciation to OIOS for its detailed findings and recommendations.
2. UN DESA welcomes the report's recognition of some of the Department's key strengths, highlighting its comparative advantages in supporting Member States capacity development, and maximising contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other existing mandates. As such, it must be underscored that the Department's programme of work continues to be guided by the priorities of Member States, including mandates arising from the outcome of intergovernmental processes and the related thematic and policy reviews of global development issues.
3. The evaluation identified that among its key strengths, UN DESA/DPIDG (a) used appropriate mutually reinforcing modalities to respond to its programme objectives; (b) demonstrated that its support for strengthening public institutions and digital governance was delivered with high-quality, emphasizing professional and technical knowledge and expertise, and data-driven research and analysis; (c) effectively leveraged its comparative advantages to deliver support, particularly its multistakeholder convening power and access to global perspectives and practices and facilitation of peer exchanges, with notable recognition by both staff and stakeholders; (d) exhibited that its support is aligned well with Member States needs across all pillars of its work; (e) used the right pillars of work to respond to its programme objectives, demonstrating strong synergies between the pillars of work in its support; (f) effectively contributed to reaching global consensus on normative frameworks and

standards, (g) contributed significantly to raising awareness and understanding of emerging issues, common approaches and commitments in public governance and administration and contributed substantially to increased capacities of government officials to adopt and implement , normative frameworks through policy guidance, technical cooperation support and facilitating peer to peer exchanges, (h) contributed to some institutional arrangements and the adoption and implementation of national policies, plans, strategies, and laws, and (i) demonstrated strong dissemination efforts which yielded increased visibility of knowledge products.

4. UN DESA also notes the challenges identified in the evaluation report, which are opportunities to further strengthen the delivery of the Department's mandated programme of work.
5. UN DESA has reviewed the evaluation report carefully and following discussions and exchanges with the OIOS evaluation team, including on the recommendations, welcomes the findings and insights of the evaluation. As such, UN DESA is preparing for submission to OIOS a detailed action plan, building on work already underway in response to the recommendations outlined in the evaluation report.
6. UN DESA accepts the recommendations in this evaluation report, and would like to add the following observations:

Recommendation 1: UN DESA will strengthen existing formal coordination and prioritization mechanisms with more integrated and deliberate whole-of-division approaches to mandate delivery by setting up regular divisional and cross-branch leadership meetings to identify synergies and track implementation. These proposed actions will remain closely aligned with UN DESA mandates, including the needs and priorities of intergovernmental processes, the Secretariat-wide regulations and rules governing programme planning, the programme aspects of the budget, the monitoring of implementation and the methods of evaluation, and established channels of communication.

Recommendation 2: UN DESA's strong communication included the administration of UNPAN and its website, and the use of social media and mailing lists to disseminate policy guidance and reports. According to data collected by UN DESA, visits to DPIDG websites saw a growth of 66 per cent between 2024 and 2025, with two of its flagship publications – the e-Government Survey and World Public Sector Report - among the most downloaded of all UN DESA reports. However, target audiences at the country and local levels were not always aware of DPIDG's guidance, products and analysis, which hindered contributions to policymaking. Therefore, UN DESA will further improve the reach of its publications, guidance materials and analytical products to country- and local-level policymakers, including by better leveraging the Resident Coordinator Network and implementing a concrete division-wide plan to strengthen outreach to UN and non-UN networks to disseminate outputs.

Recommendation 3: Since target audiences sought more digestible and modern formats for UN DESA’s analytical products, the Department will further improve the usability of its publications, guidance materials and analytical products for policy makers and other target audiences by piloting new user-friendly formats such as infographics, AI chatbots and developing summaries and videos for publications, handbooks, guidance material and policy briefs.

Recommendation 4: Building on good partnership practices, UN DESA will more deliberately support policymakers in achieving sustained outcomes after its interventions are complete. In order to maintain and continue to build new strategic partnerships, UN DESA will revise its project inception documents to include strategic partnerships with UN and non-UN development actors to follow-up and support policy makers in achieving sustained outcomes at country-level, each acting within their own authority and mandates, as feasible.

7. To conclude, I wish to acknowledge Mr. Juan Carlos Pena, Mr. Nicholas Kowbel and the rest of the OIOS-IED team. We appreciate their professionalism, excellent collaboration, and valuable time in guiding us throughout this process. With the findings of this evaluation, UN DESA will continue to strengthen its unique role in the development arena, including in intergovernmental support, thought leadership on key global policy issues, and capacity development support to Member States.

cc: Mr. Navid Hanif, UN DESA
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Ms. Adriana Alberti, UN DESA
Ms. Anni Haataja-Beerli, UN DESA
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