

Thematic evaluation on the contribution of transitions of United Nations peace operations to sustaining peacebuilding gains

11 June 2026

IED-25-017



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:

Daouda Badio, Team Leader

Wenxin Zhang, Team Member

Christoph Stieglbauer, Consultant

Contact Information **OIOS-IED Contact Information:**

Srilata Rao, Chief of Section

Tel: +1 212-963-3550, e-mail: rao3@un.org

Demetra Arapakos, Director

Tel: +1 917-367-6033, e-mail: arapakos@un.org

Contents

Summary	3
I. Introduction and objective	4
II. Background	4
III. Scope and methodology	5
IV. Evaluation Results	7
V. Conclusion.....	20
VI. Recommendations	21
Annex I: Management Response	23

Summary

The Office of Internal Oversight Services assessed the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of contributions by transitions of United Nations peace operations to sustaining peacebuilding gains. The evaluation focused on four peace operations transitions - in Liberia, Guinea-Bissau and South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where transitions had been completed and peace operations had left, and in Somalia, where the transition was ongoing at the time of the evaluation. In all four cases, the evaluation covered pre-transition planning and active transition (both planning and implementation). In Liberia and Guinea-Bissau, it additionally covered post-transition to assess the sustainability of peacebuilding gains in those countries.

Pre-transition planning was inconsistent across missions and faced internal and external barriers to meaningful preparedness, including impractical policy guidance, political sensitivities and limited mission capacity. As a result, pre-transition planning was inadequate to ensure transition readiness in Liberia, Guinea-Bissau and Somalia.

Active transition planning, triggered by a Security Council decision, in all four missions was more consistent and included transition strategies that were well aligned with national needs, appropriate sequencing of transition activities based on country-specific conditions and the development of relevant peacebuilding priorities. Missions effectively facilitated government consensus through various approaches, while engagement with civil society and sub-national authorities varied across contexts. Furthermore, missions and United Nations Country Teams (UNCT) collaborated closely during active transitions through structured coordination mechanisms and the production of joint outputs. Despite limited dedicated funding for transitions, missions and UNCTs also effectively leveraged the Peacebuilding Fund, pooled funds, and programmatic mission resources to support transition needs.

Active transition implementation in all four missions faced several constraints, including administrative delays to collaboration between missions and UNCT, the absence of detailed implementation plans and persistent resource and capacity constraints, which limited the ability of UNCT members to support the continuation of peacebuilding priorities.

Post-transition, reconfigured United Nations presences in Liberia and Guinea-Bissau carried forward key peacebuilding priorities identified during transitions. However, reduced senior level access and diminished analytical capacity constrained the ability of the reconfigured United Nations presence to adequately influence and respond to political developments.

OIOS makes two important recommendations to:

- DPO, DPPA, and DCO to promote the monitoring and documentation of residual tasks and activities to be undertaken by the United Nations in support of priority peacebuilding areas, during and after the transition.
- DPPA to strengthen its political engagement and analysis in both post-peacekeeping and post-special political mission transition settings.

I. Introduction and objective

1. The overall objective of this Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) evaluation was to assess, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of contributions by transitions of United Nations peace operations to sustaining peacebuilding gains.
2. The evaluation was conducted in conformity with the norms and standards for evaluation in the United Nations System.¹
3. Comments from the management were sought on the draft report and considered in the preparation of the final report. The management responses from DPO, DPPA and DCO are included in Annex I.

II. Background

Transitions of Peace Operations

4. In Resolution 2594 (2021), the Security Council defines transitions of United Nations peace operations (Special Political Missions and Peacekeeping Operations) as **‘a strategic process which builds towards a reconfiguration of the strategy, footprint and capacity of the United Nations in a way that supports peacebuilding objectives and the development of a sustainable peace’**. The definition highlights that transitions should support and reinforce national ownership and be informed by the operational context and national priorities and needs.
5. United Nations transitions may result in different reconfigurations, including from a peace operation to: another peacekeeping mission (PKO); a special political mission (SPM); or a United Nations Country Team (UNCT). This evaluation focuses on transitions from a peace operation to an exclusive UNCT presence in integrated settings.
6. Transition planning and management in integrated settings fall under the broader umbrella of United Nations integrated assessment and planning processes aimed at sustaining peace. Transition Planning and management involve three different phases: *pre-transition*², *active transition*, and *post-transition*. In the pre-transition phase, all multidimensional missions, including multi-dimensional peacekeeping operations and Cluster III SPMs, are expected to initiate early planning upon completion of the start-up phase. Active transition, triggered by a Security Council decision which can either be based on the withdrawal of host government consent or other factors such as the Council’s recognition of the mission’s sufficient progress toward mandate implementation, should ideally begin at least 24 months before the anticipated withdrawal or reconfiguration. In the post-transition phase, the United Nations continues supporting peacebuilding priorities, contributing to the consolidation of peace and the achievement of long-term stability.
7. Transition planning and management are shared responsibilities of the entire United Nations leadership in-country, led by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) of the departing peace operation. In integrated mission settings, the Deputy SRSG who also serves as the

¹ [UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation in the UN System | UNEG.](#)

² Usually referred to as “early transition planning”, the term “pre-transition planning” is used here to better distinguish between the three transition phases.

United Nations Resident Coordinator as well as the Humanitarian Coordinator where designated by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (DSRSG/RC/HC), leads operational transition planning encompassing the mandate implementation activities, capacities and assets that are relevant for the continuation of peacebuilding efforts by the UNCT.

8. At the headquarters-level, the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and the Development Coordination Office (DCO) provide oversight, strategic guidance and support to field entities. The Integrated Task Force (ITF), chaired by DPO or DPPA (for PKOs and SPMs, respectively), serves as the primary forum for coordination and support on transitions.

9. In the post-transition phase, when the United Nations presence has reconfigured to an exclusive UNCT presence, the Resident Coordinator (RC) is the highest-ranking United Nations official and continues to lead the UNCT in supporting sustainable peace and development.

10. Although there are no dedicated resources earmarked for transitions, key financial mechanisms within the United Nations system that support transitions include:

- **Programmatic funding of peacekeeping operations**, where available and deemed appropriate by heads of mission to support the transition period;
- **Country pooled funds**, administered by the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office to support peacebuilding priorities; and
- **The Peacebuilding Fund (PBF)**, the Organization's financial instrument to sustain peace in countries or situations at risk or affected by violent conflict.

III. Scope and methodology

11. The evaluation examined how United Nations actors contributed to sustaining peacebuilding gains during and after the transition. It focused specifically on transitions from peace operations to UNCTs, examining the following four cases in depth:

- Somalia (United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM)/United Nations Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS));³
- Guinea-Bissau (United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS));
- Liberia (United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)); and
- The eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)), with a focus on the South Kivu transition.⁴

12. To reflect diverse transition contexts, case selection followed a purposive mixed sampling strategy. The pre-transition planning and active transition phases were covered across all four cases, while the post-transition phase was reviewed in Liberia and Guinea-Bissau only. During the period of this evaluation, the United Nations Policy on Transitions was being revised. The existing

³ Resolution 2753 (2024) decided that UNSOM would be called UNTMIS from 1 November 2024 and begin formal transition of its new mandated functions.

⁴ UNMIL and UNIOGBIS had fully transitioned to the UNCT, while UNTMIS was in transition at the time of this report. In the DRC, MONUSCO underwent a partial transition to UNCT in South Kivu in 2024, while remaining operational in North Kivu and Ituri.

policy was used as the framework for the period under evaluation, while a draft of the new policy was also reviewed and considered.

13. The evaluation used a mixed methods approach, as shown in Table 1. Contribution analysis, with outcome mapping incorporated as an analytical framework, was used to infer and assess how the United Nations contributed to achieving the outcomes outlined in the Theory of Change. Artificial Intelligence (AI) assisted tools were leveraged on a limited basis to support qualitative data analysis. All AI-assisted outputs were reviewed and validated by the evaluation team in compliance with the organizational policy on the use of ICT resources and data (ST/SGB/2004/15) and the policy on information sensitivity, classification and handling (ST/SGB/2007/6).

Table 1: Mixed methods

Method	
Interviews	53 interviews with United Nations staff and stakeholders, comprising: 41 internal interviews (54 individuals, 50 per cent female) 12 external interviews (14 individuals, 36 per cent female)
Desk review	- Structured review of 354 United Nations documents, such as Security Council reports, Secretary-General's reports, transition strategies, planning documents, meeting records, end of assignment reviews, after-action reviews, audits, evaluations, UNCT documents, Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) reports, programme documents and budgetary data. - Structured review of 141 external documents in English, French, Portuguese and German (peer-reviewed and grey literature) on peace operation transitions, conducted with the assistance of AI.
Survey	An online survey of 32 mission planners and heads of RCOs in pre-transition, active and post-transition settings; 27 responded, representing an 84 per cent response rate.
Secondary data analysis	Descriptive statistics on peacebuilding related areas in post-transition cases, including data from the World Bank, the World Justice Project Index, the Institute for Economics and Peace, and the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC).

14. The evaluation faced two limitations:

- Restricted engagement with external stakeholders due to the inability to conduct data collection in field missions in certain cases and political sensitivities in other cases, resulting in limited external perspectives. Statements of Member States in the Security Council and the PBC were used as a proxy.
- Access to key country-specific documentation on post-transition cases, including planning and implementation documents, and certain system-wide data such as transition calendars, was limited, largely due to inadequate information management practices related to transitions. A systematic review of relevant and available external literature was conducted to mitigate this limitation.

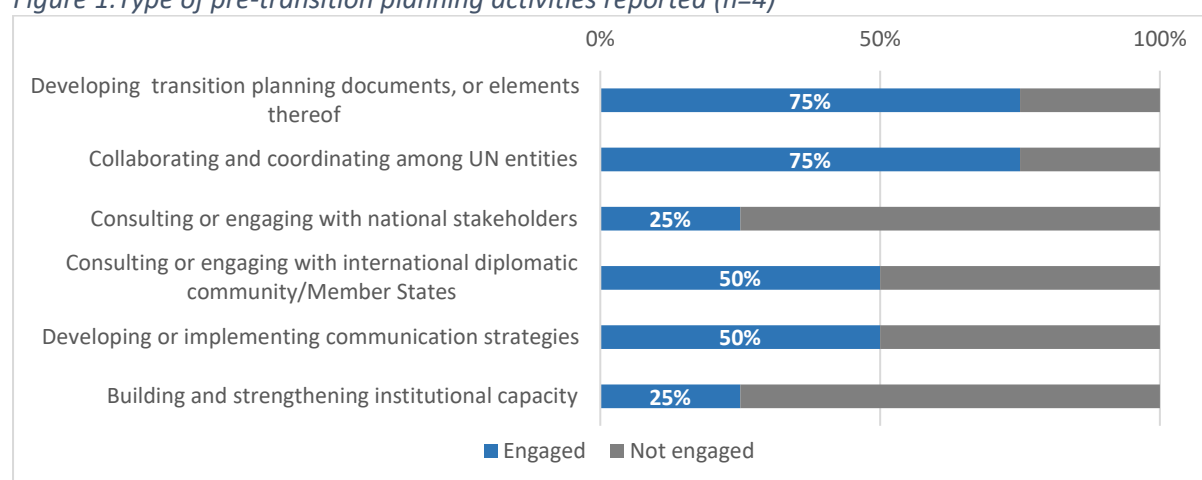
IV. Evaluation Results

- A. In the pre-transition phase, United Nations missions did not undertake sufficient and meaningful early planning, thereby limiting their preparedness for transitions

Pre-transition planning was inconsistently implemented across missions and inadequate to strengthen transition readiness in three of the four cases reviewed

15. Pre-transition planning requirements proved challenging to implement despite strong consensus among United Nations stakeholders, based on interviews and document review, that planning for transition should start early. Key measures, such as developing an integrated transition calendar upon completion of the start-up phase and articulating a detailed transition plan at least 24 months prior to the withdrawal, as requested by the 2019 Secretary-General's Planning Directive, were not implemented consistently. Interpretations of what constituted meaningful 'pre-transition planning' also varied, ranging from strengthening United Nations integration to embedding a transition mindset within existing planning processes, further contributing to inconsistent approaches. As a result, integrated transition roadmaps⁵ were seldom developed in a timely manner, and many stakeholders approached the exercise as more of a 'checkbox' activity. Among the seven active integrated settings surveyed, mission and RCO planners in three settings, including one peacekeeping mission, reported no engagement in pre-transition planning. In the four settings where pre-transition planning was reported, practices varied according to survey findings as shown in Figure 1, with emphasis on producing transition planning documents and strengthening internal collaboration among United Nations entities.

Figure 1: Type of pre-transition planning activities reported (n=4)



Source: OIOS Survey

16. In Liberia and Guinea Bissau, pre-transition planning efforts, as guided by the 2013 Policy on United Nations Transitions, did not sufficiently enhance overall preparedness. In Liberia, the mission began internal preparation for the transition as early as 2012. Prior to 2016, these efforts focused primarily on the security transition and military drawdown in line with the request of the Security Council, while also including limited planning efforts on civilian components, such as a review of civilian tasks in 2013. However, staff interviews and relevant documents reviewed indicate that insufficient early attention was devoted to civilian tasks, which could have alleviated time pressures associated with the subsequent planning for the transition of civilian components

⁵ Changed from the 'integrated transition calendar' to signal the dynamic nature of the transition timeline.

starting in 2017. Consequently, the UNMIL transition faced compressed timelines for operationalizing its transition strategy, which was finalized a month before mission closure. In Guinea-Bissau, while the mission undertook planning efforts in line with the 2019 Secretary-General's Planning Directive issued at the start of the transition process, evidence of pre-transition planning was limited. Staff interviews and documents reviewed further indicated gaps related to the timing and extent of early consultation and planning along with staff resistance to mission closure and delays in transition implementation.

17. Similarly, in Somalia, the absence of early engagement with the host government limited the response of the Mission to transition signals, representing a missed opportunity. The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) repeatedly raised the prospect of a transition of UNSOM in meetings of the Security Council from 2022 to 2024, and the Independent Strategic Review of UNSOM (S/2022/716) similarly recommended initiating pre-transition planning. Following the Review, the mission took several measures that strengthened integrated programme delivery, including the creation of a transition planning cell and the organization of an integrated mission-UNCT workshop; however, these efforts were insufficient to improve overall readiness. High-level political engagement with the FGS on the transition remained limited and was reportedly discouraged by headquarters according to mission and headquarters staff interviewed. Some headquarters staff clarified that their advice was cautionary rather than discouraging, to ensure that all engagement with the FGS was connected to a broader strategy and backstopped by the relevant department. Consequently, when the FGS formally requested the closure of UNSOM on 8 May 2024, internal stakeholders described the development as unexpected, resulting in a largely reactive process with insufficient anticipation and preparation.

Internal and external barriers hindered meaningful pre-transition planning

18. Several barriers to meaningful pre-transition planning were identified through the survey, interviews and document review, including:

- Policy guidance that was perceived by mission and headquarters stakeholders as insufficiently practical, with pre-transition planning requirements that had limited operational utility and lacked flexibility, and were insufficiently anchored in field realities making it difficult to apply in fast-paced or crisis-driven contexts;
- Political sensitivities surrounding early engagement with national authorities on transitions, possibly leading to misinterpretation that the United Nations was signaling premature withdrawal;
- Limited planning capacity, with small and overstretched planning units challenged to initiate substantive pre-transition planning and integrate transition considerations into broader planning processes;
- Limited incentives for mission staff to initiate pre-transition planning; and
- Insufficient attention and support from mission leadership.

19. The Organization's Transition Policy is currently being updated, and OIOS believes that the proposed changes and guidance relating to pre-transition planning requirements will address the main barriers to meaningful pre-transition planning identified above. The draft policy suggests flexibility in the timing of pre-transition planning, clarifies expectations of such planning as an internal United Nations exercise, and emphasizes its linkage to the integrated assessment and planning process.

B. United Nations missions facilitated government consensus during active transition planning and demonstrated responsiveness to national needs and priorities

Once actively in transition, United Nations missions effectively employed various approaches to engage national governments for consensus-building

20. While external engagement was limited during the pre-transition planning phase, the missions intensified their engagement with national governments during the active transition phase through multiple approaches to promote national ownership, including:

- Establishing formal coordination structures with national governments to enable regular dialogue and facilitate joint planning and oversight;
- Engaging national governments in the co-development of transition plans and strategies; and
- Leveraging good offices and bilateral high-level engagement.

21. These approaches were applied across multiple cases reviewed, with examples presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Approaches applied in Somalia, DRC and Liberia

Approaches	Somalia	South Kivu (DRC)	Liberia
Use of Coordination Mechanisms 	UNTMIS established a high-level Joint Technical Committee (JTC), co-chaired by the SRSG and a senior official of FGS	MONUSCO utilized the Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS) to guide and monitor South Kivu transition	UNMIL established a reference group, including the Government, to coordinate the Peacebuilding Plan
Joint Development of Plans and Strategies 	UNTMIS and the FGS jointly developed Transition Roadmaps to identify transition modalities	MONUSCO and the Government of the DRC jointly developed multiple frameworks to guide the overall provincial transition and disengagement process	UNMIL and the Government of Liberia co-drafted Peacebuilding Plan to identify peacebuilding priorities
Use of Good Offices 	UNTMIS SRSG conducted bilateral discussions with FGS counterparts	N/A ⁶	UNMIL SRSG cultivated strong relationships with the country's political leadership through close engagement

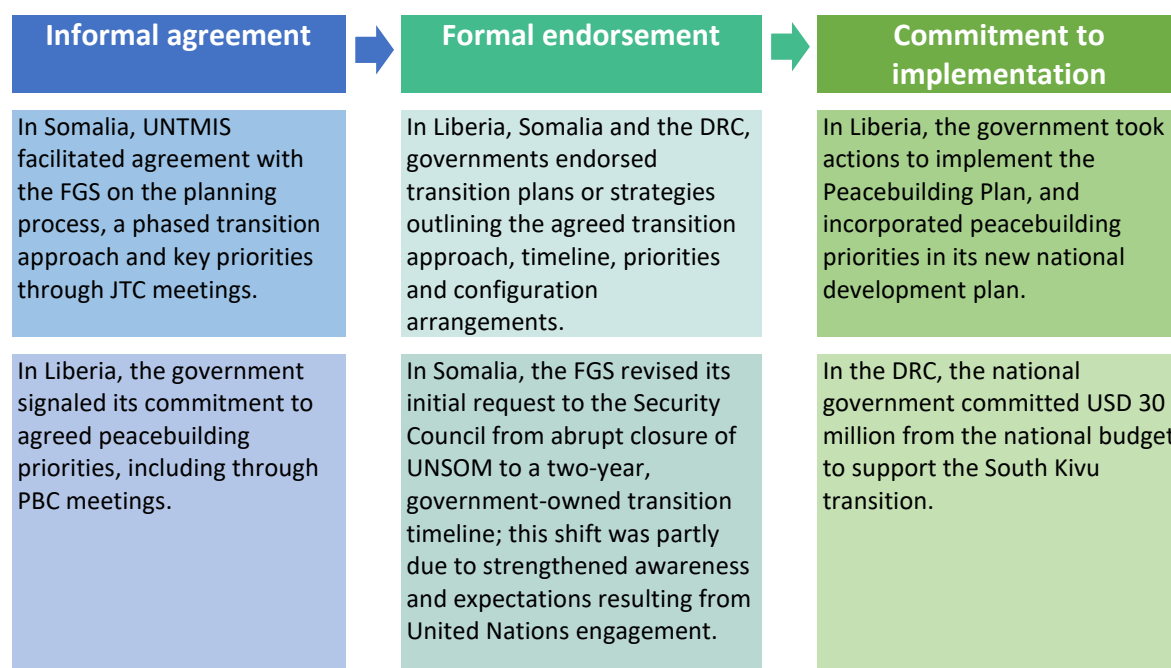
Source: OIOS analysis

22. As a result of the engagement above, consensus with national political leadership was established, as evidenced by both informal agreement and formal endorsement by national

⁶ While DPO stated there was close engagement with the government through Good Offices, no specific examples of such engagement were noted in the documents reviewed or in references by staff and stakeholders interviewed.

governments on key transition parameters, including the timeline, approach, peacebuilding priorities and reconfiguration arrangements. In several instances, this consensus was translated into subsequent government commitment to implement the transition, as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Examples of Mission-facilitated informal agreement, endorsement and government commitment to implementation



While civil society actors and sub-national governments were also engaged, the depth and breadth of such engagement varied across different cases

23. Across the reviewed cases, missions engaged civil society organizations (CSOs) and sub-national authorities in transition planning less consistently and to varying degrees. Figure 3 presents the level of engagement across four different cases in transition planning. Beyond planning, CSOs in Liberia, South Kivu, and Guinea Bissau also served as implementing partners during and after the transition, supporting peacebuilding priorities through programme delivery.

Figure 3: Engagement of sub-national governments, CSOs and other actors in active transition planning



24. Despite these engagements, interviews and documents reviewed reported limitations on CSO and sub-national engagement across the reviewed cases and wider transition experiences. They included:

- CSO consultations with limited impact on decision-making related to the transition;
- Political dynamics curtailing inclusive engagement due to national authorities restricting or discouraging CSO or sub-national participation in formal transition processes; and
- Limited engagement outside capital cities, particularly in rural areas, resulting in inadequate consideration of local needs and perspectives in transition planning.

Approaches and strategies for United Nations transitions were aligned with national needs and peacebuilding priorities

25. Across the four cases, the missions developed transition approaches and strategies that were responsive to government requests, national needs and context-specific conditions. This included sequencing and tailoring transition activities in line with political timelines, security conditions and institutional readiness. For example:

- In Liberia, UNMIL aligned transition planning with the national electoral cycle and developed an Integrated Transition Plan that simultaneously guided both mission transition and the government administrative handover, ensuring continuity across the electoral period.
- In the DRC, MONUSCO adopted a phased provincial transition, initiating its disengagement in lower-risk areas. The mission also planned to shift towards a more localized, territory-level transition approach based on applicable protection risks.
- In Somalia, UNTMIS sequenced its transition across two phases in line with FGS priorities, with Phase I focused on functions where national institutions and the UNCT had stronger capacity, enabling a more orderly and sequenced transition.

26. In addition, the missions identified relevant peacebuilding priorities to guide their transition strategies and the planning of residual tasks for reconfigured United Nations presences. These priorities and their implementation arrangements were typically established through jointly developed transition strategies and plans, or through robust assessments and consultations with national stakeholders. The UNIOGBIS transition, as described in Box 1, illustrated this positive approach.

Box 1: Conflict Analysis in Guinea-Bissau

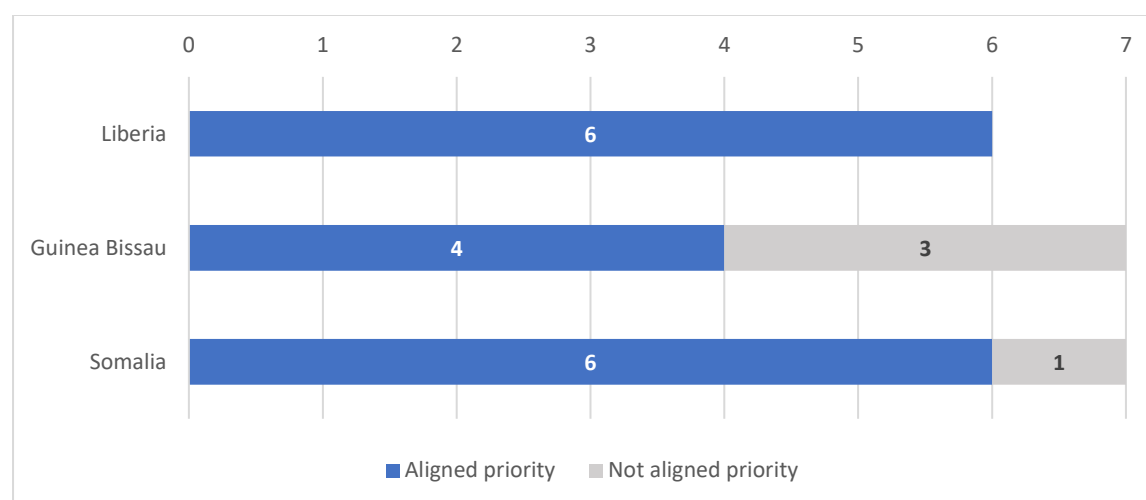
During the UNIOGBIS transition, the mission conducted a comprehensive and long-lasting conflict analysis informed by national consultations, as noted in the quote from a staff member below. It applied gender-responsive and human rights-based approaches, identifying underlying conflict drivers, peacebuilding priorities and their respective entry points for continued United Nations engagement. These priorities guided the reconfiguration of the United Nations in the country and were used throughout the post-transition phase.

‘The legacy of UNIOGBIS was the conflict analysis...that analysis still holds’ --- United Nations staff in Guinea Bissau

27. The mission approach discussed above resulted in transition plans and strategies that reflected nationally relevant peacebuilding needs and were broadly aligned with national policy frameworks, thus demonstrating their responsiveness to long-term national priorities. Figure 4 demonstrates that the majority of transition priorities were aligned with relevant national

development plans in the three cases reviewed, with full alignment in Liberia and partial alignment in Somalia and Guinea-Bissau.

Figure 4: Number of peacebuilding or transition priorities aligned with national frameworks⁷



Source: OIOS analysis

C. Peace operations and UNCTs effectively collaborated in planning and leveraging resources for joint programming during the active transition phase

Missions and UNCTs effectively collaborated in joint planning

28. United Nations Transitions were characterized by an increasingly sophisticated formal coordination architecture between missions and UNCTs. This included missions and UNCTs engaging through platforms for coordination as seen in Figure 5 between:

- The integrated United Nations presence and the host government;
- The mission and the UNCT; and
- The integrated United Nations presence and headquarters departments.

Figure 5: Cooperation Mechanisms with missions and UNCT participation

	Liberia	Guinea-Bissau	Somalia	DRC (SK)
United Nations-Government mechanisms	Reference Group	---	JTC	Integrated Provincial Transition Team and JTS
Mission-UNCT mechanisms	Transition Task Force	Integrated Transition Task Team	Integrated Transition Planning Group	---

⁷Across the three cases, aligned priorities included: peace, security and the rule of law; human rights; governance and public institutions; sustainable economic transformation; gender equality; youth empowerment; drug trafficking and organized crime; judicial capacity; climate financing; and mine action. In Guinea Bissau, non-aligned priorities included political dialogue, civil-military relations, state-building and civic engagement, and in Somalia the priority of child protection was not aligned.

Headquarters-Integrated presence mechanisms	UNHQ Inter-Agency Task Force	Transition Working Group within the Integrated Task Force
---	------------------------------	---

Source: OIOS analysis

29. In particular, the role of the triple-hatted DSRSG/RC/HC was viewed as critical to ensuring a coherent planning process. Interviewed staff, documents, and literature reviewed all highlighted the triple-hatted DSRSG/RC/HC as a critical integrator before and after mission closure, who brought stakeholders from across the United Nations together during the transition, bridging gaps between the mission and the UNCT. Interviewed staff noted the importance of ensuring that RCs have the resources and capacity to effectively lead transitions and make decisions that have long-term operational implications beyond the transition. Surveyed stakeholders involved in the UNAMI/Iraq transition echoed this finding, emphasizing the importance of empowering the Resident Coordinator system in transitional contexts to ensure coherence and sustainability of UN operations post-transition.

30. Mission-UNCT collaboration led to some joint internal outputs in the four cases, as shown in Figure 6. The most common were joint capacity mapping assessments, which identified capacity gaps to be mitigated for the reconfigured United Nations presence. Other relevant outputs produced through Mission-UNCT collaboration included transition plans and strategies for resource mobilization and communication.

Figure 6: Common joint internal outputs between missions and the UNCT

	Liberia	Guinea-Bissau	Somalia ⁸	DRC (SK)
Capacity mapping	✓	✓	✓	✓
Resource mobilization strategy	---	---	✓	✓
Communication strategy	---	---	✓	✓

Source: OIOS analysis

Missions and UNCTs leveraged financial, programmatic and human resources to reconfigure peacebuilding functions

31. Since transitions lacked dedicated funding in United Nations budgets, integrated United Nations presences made efforts to mobilize and leverage internal and external resources as part of the transition. The PBF was the key funding source across all cases reviewed, often being the largest source of transition funding dedicated to projects that facilitated the reconfiguration and adaptation of peacebuilding priorities from a mission to the UNCT.

32. Missions and UNCTs also leveraged pooled funds to support transitions. Some of these funds, such as the Somalia Joint Fund, existed previously, whereas others such as the Liberia Multi-Partner Trust Fund (LMPTF) were created specifically as part of the transition process. These funds

⁸ The evaluation focused on the first phase of the UNTMIS transition and while documentation envisioned the development of a resource mobilization and communication strategy, there was no evidence of their existence.

benefited from leveraging synergies with the PBF, including through their governance structure, which required them to be managed by the RC. They were often co-located or co-managed by the PBF Secretariat in the respective countries.

33. Additionally, in peacekeeping settings, integrated United Nations presences were also able to leverage assessed contributions using programmatic mission funds. This practice was first piloted in Timor-Leste and has since been replicated in other settings, including in Liberia and in South Kivu, where \$10 million of MONUSCO programmatic funds were mobilized in 2024 for transition support. Mobilized funding was often channeled through joint programmes that brought together different United Nations entities around a common framework, thereby facilitating a collaborative approach, and preparing actors to support priority peacebuilding areas going forward.

34. The United Nations mitigated anticipated human resource gaps from the transition by institutionalizing capacity. Capacity was strengthened in all four settings through the deployment of transition advisors and specialists embedded in the offices of the SRSR or the triple hatted DSRSG, partly funded by the Transitions Project, which provided direct technical assistance to country-level transitions, institutional capacity building, guidance and learning. In Liberia and Guinea-Bissau, institutional knowledge and capacity were preserved through the DSRSG/RC/HC continuing their term as solely in the RC role following the drawdown of the mission. MONUSCO provided a further example of a good practice through the approval of a residual team in South Kivu to stay in situ for a year following the withdrawal of the mission to support transferred responsibilities.

- D. In the active transition phase, the reconfiguration of peacebuilding functions was limited by institutional barriers to collaboration, lack of a detailed implementation plan, and resource and capacity constraints

Transition implementation was constrained by collaboration barriers between United Nations partners and a lack of specific details on how continued support in priority areas would be ensured

35. Despite efforts to foster collaboration, United Nations staff interviewed identified barriers between the mission and the UNCT that hindered implementation of good transition practices. In Liberia and South Kivu, slow negotiations and incompatible administrative policies and processes between missions and UNCTs prevented UNCT members from using the mission's programmatic funding and the leveraging of mission staff from the South Kivu residual team respectively. In Somalia and Guinea-Bissau, some UNCT members interviewed reported limited involvement in transition planning, highlighting a lack of outreach by the mission, and silos and integration challenges between the mission and the UNCT. In Iraq, surveyed stakeholders reported delays in the designation of a lead agency on the UNCT, which negatively impacted joint planning, budgeting and sequencing of the transition.

36. Transitions also suffered from the lack of an explicit implementation plan and limited monitoring of measures undertaken to enable the UNCT to ensure adequate support to priority areas following the withdrawal of the mission. While in all cases reviewed, missions and UNCTs had broadly identified which UNCT members might contribute to specific peacebuilding priority areas following the exit of the mission, there was little available evidence on the specifics of what and how the UNCT would ensure continued support in priority areas previously covered by the mission during and after the transition, and which resources would be leveraged in that regard. As a result, in the absence of that information, United Nations leadership in one of the two post-

transition settings pointed to a lack of available documentation and gaps in institutional knowledge related to the transition as a challenge for them when they took up their post, qualifying the transition as a “black hole”. OIOS notes that proposed updated guidance on identification and retention of key transition-related documents prior to mission withdrawal as part of the revision process of the Transitions Policy would strengthen the preservation of institutional knowledge on specific transitions.

37. Stakeholders interviewed and surveyed indicated that headquarters’ requirements and processes could hinder efficient transitions. In Somalia, approval delays of the Secretary-General’s Planning Directive after the initial transition trigger negatively impacted an already time-constrained process. Some mission staff in Somalia also saw implementation of the Directive as primarily a “checklist exercise”. Survey responses from Iraq indicated that heavy reporting demands from headquarters reduced time for operational work related to and slowed decision-making during the transition according to some stakeholders.

With some exceptions, transitions faced persistent resource and capacity gaps, which limited the ability of the reconfigured United Nations presence to support peacebuilding priorities once missions closed

38. The UNCT was best able to continue supporting peacebuilding priorities effectively in areas where existing programme capacities previously existed. Resources, capacities, and processes were already in place within certain UNCT member entities such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which facilitated the continuation of activities and tasks. The area of Rule of Law was a good example where structures and programming were already in place, including joint programmes in all four case study countries; this facilitated the continuation of activities during and after the withdrawal of the mission. The specific case of the Rule of law in Liberia is described in Box 2 below.

Box 2: Rule of Law Joint Programme in Liberia

UNDP-UNMIL Rule of Law, Justice and Security Joint Programme

Before UNMIL’s withdrawal in March 2018, the mission had significant security sector capacity, with 239 positions compared to a capacity of 27 equivalent positions in the UNCT according to the UNCT capacity mapping. To bridge this gap, the UNDP-UNMIL Rule of Law, Justice and Security Joint Programme, with \$16.8 million over three years, sought to strengthen the capacity of institutional actors in the Justice and Security Sector and enhance civil society contributions to Rule of Law, and improve gender responsiveness. The programme also facilitated coordination between UNMIL and UNDP and promoted collaboration during the transition.

39. In all four cases, resource constraints were a major obstacle to UNCT members’ ability to continue support to peacebuilding priorities. In Liberia, the operationalization of the LMPTF was delayed, and the fund was only partially funded, missing the critical transition period. In Guinea-Bissau, a transition resource mobilization strategy for financing the country’s United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) after the exit of the mission was planned for completion by July 2020 but not finalized until 2021. In South Kivu, a detailed resource mobilization strategy was developed, but government funding commitments did not materialize, compounded by the delayed disbursement of United Nations funding which impeded effective transition.

40. The reconfiguration of peacebuilding functions was limited by capacity and footprint constraints of UNCT partners. The closure of missions resulted in the loss of field offices, reducing

logistics, implementation, and monitoring capacities. Mission withdrawals also resulted in significant loss of staff and expertise which the UNCT could not always offset with available resources.

- E. Despite facing political challenges, reconfigured United Nations presences in Liberia and Guinea-Bissau in the post-transition phase built on some of the achievements of the outgoing missions

Peacebuilding priorities identified during the transition continued through subsequent UNSDCF development and implementation once the missions closed

41. Transition plans and strategies informed the development of subsequent UNSDCFs in both Liberia and Guinea-Bissau. In each of the post-transition settings analyzed, the UNSDCF adequately continued the implementation of previous peacebuilding priorities.

42. In Liberia, relevant peacebuilding priority areas identified through the 2017 *Peacebuilding Plan for Liberia*⁹ were continued through the 2020-2024 UNSDCF.¹⁰ Over the period of the UNSDCF, there were multiple contributions to sustaining peacebuilding gains following the UNMIL transition, some of which are highlighted below in Table 3.

Table 3: Examples of UNCT contributions to sustaining UNMIL gains in peacebuilding priorities

UNMIL Peacebuilding Priorities	UNCT Contribution	Source of Funding
Peace, security and rule of law	Creation and support of 15 District and County Security Councils for gender-responsive community policing	LMPTF-funded project "Inclusive Security: Nothing for Us without Us" (\$2 million, 2018-2019)
Human rights	Significant improvement in visibility and operational capacity of the Independent National Commission on Human Rights, particularly in rural areas.	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights project "Strengthening the Capacity of the Independent National Commission on Human Rights in Liberia" (\$5 million, 2018–2021)
Governance and Public Institutions	Establishment of multi-stakeholder platforms as recognized mechanisms for concession-related conflict resolution	PBF-funded project "Strengthening Conflict Prevention through Establishment of Multi-Stakeholder Platforms and Improved Alternative Livelihoods for Concession-Affected Communities" (\$2.7 million, 2018-2019)
Gender Equality	Support to government's Women Peace and Security commitments, gender equality in the security sector, and women's involvement in peacebuilding	PBF-funded project "Inclusive Security: Nothing for Us without Us" (\$2 million, 2018-2019)
Youth Empowerment	Strengthened peacebuilding structures and value chains to create decent jobs for vulnerable youth	PBF-funded project on sustaining peace through rural employment for youth in conflict-prone areas (\$1.5M 2019-2020)

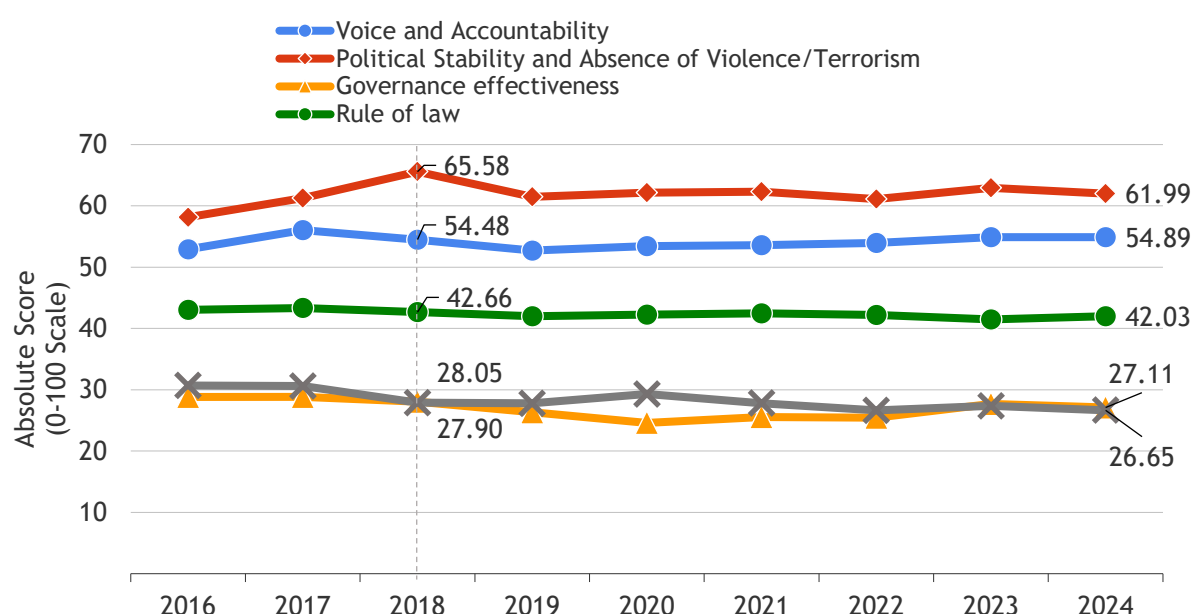
Source: OIOS analysis

⁹ Sustaining Peace and Securing Development Liberia Peacebuilding Plan. United Nations, 2017

¹⁰ United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework Liberia (2020-2024)

43. Furthermore, Liberia maintained political stability overall following the withdrawal of UNMIL in 2018. The period was marked by peaceful elections in 2023, and the absence of a relapse into large-scale conflict. The World Bank's governance indicators showed an initial drop in the first year after the UNMIL withdrawal but have since stabilized, as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Trends in Liberia's governance indicators



Source: World Bank

44. In Guinea-Bissau, relevant peacebuilding priority areas identified through the 2020 *Integrated Transition Calendar*¹¹ were continued through the 2022-2026 UNSDCF.¹² Over the period of the UNSDCF, there were multiple contributions to peacebuilding gains following the UNIOGBIS transition, some of which are highlighted below in Table 4.

Table 4: Examples of UNCT contributions to sustaining UNIOGBIS gains in peacebuilding priorities

UNIOGBIS Peacebuilding Priorities	UNCT Contribution	Source of Funding
Inclusive political dialogue and reform of political system	Support to inclusive political reform processes, civic participation and electoral preparations	PBF-funded project "Political Stabilization and Reform through Confidence Building and Inclusive Dialogue" (\$4.51 million, 2020-2025)
State-building and strengthening institutions	Development and approval of Guinea-Bissau's first National Anti-Corruption Strategy and	UNDP programming
Combating drug trafficking and organized crime	Capacity-building of the judiciary police, tailored training for judges and prosecutors, and support to operational coordination mechanisms	PBF-funded project on Combatting Drug Trafficking and Organized Crimes (\$4.3 million, 2019-2025)
Strengthening of judicial capacity and human rights	Development and adoption of Guinea-Bissau's first National Human Rights Action Plan in 2022, and the National Human Rights	PBF-funded project Enhancing the Human Rights Protection System in Guinea-Bissau (\$3.34 million; 2021–2025)

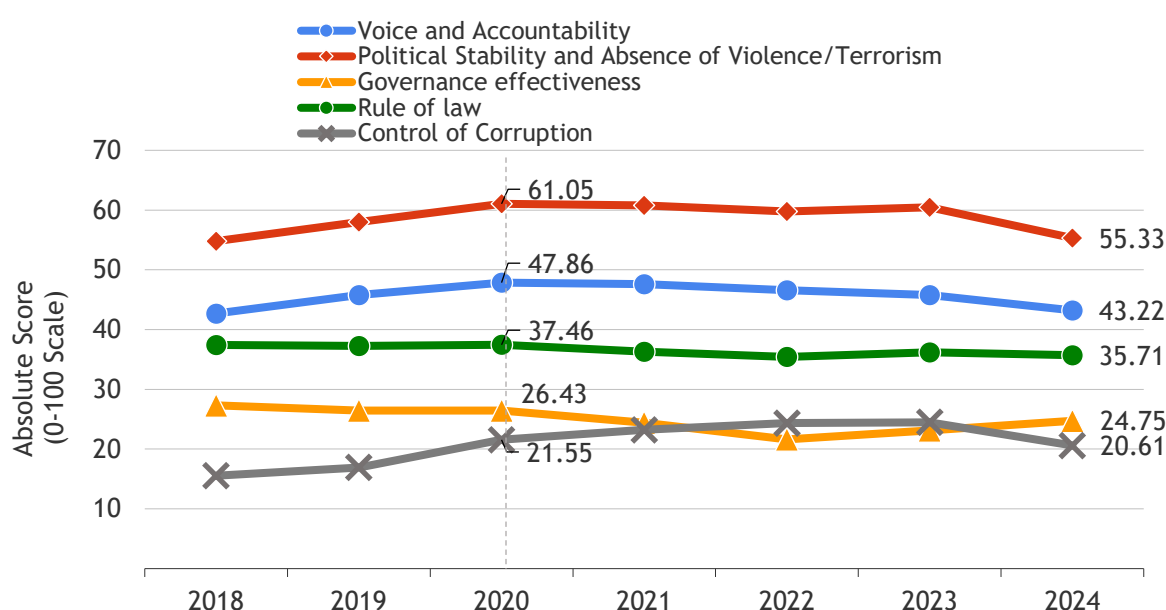
¹¹ Integrated Transition Calendar for UN Presence in Guinea-Bissau. United Nations, 2020.

¹² United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Guinea-Bissau (2022-2026)

Source: OIOS analysis

45. After the exit of UNIOGBIS in 2020, Guinea-Bissau faced chronic political instability as dialogue and reform processes stalled amid a polarized political climate. Reported coup attempts in 2022, 2023 and a military takeover in 2025, along with the dissolution of the National Assembly in 2022 and 2023, illustrated this issue. The World Bank governance indicators showed a decline between 2020 and 2024, as shown in Figure 8. Despite high electoral participation and civil society engagement in the 2023 election, the civic space shrunk due to governance crises and institutional instability. Drug trafficking and organized crime continued to threaten Guinea-Bissau’s stability and governance after 2020.

Figure 8: Trends in Guinea-Bissau’s governance indicators



Source: World Bank

The United Nations peacebuilding architecture was leveraged to mobilize post-transition funding and maintain international attention after mission exits in Liberia and Guinea-Bissau

46. The Peacebuilding Commission was a key platform following the withdrawal of UNMIL and UNIOGBIS for the two countries to seek support for their peacebuilding priorities and ensure visibility with the international community to sustain peacebuilding gains. Representatives of Guinea-Bissau and Liberia in the PBC expressed appreciation for its continued support to ensure sustained, coordinated and focused international support to address their country’s respective peacebuilding challenges. Both countries engaged with the PBC under a bespoke configuration, allowing for tailored approaches to their specific contexts and needs.¹³

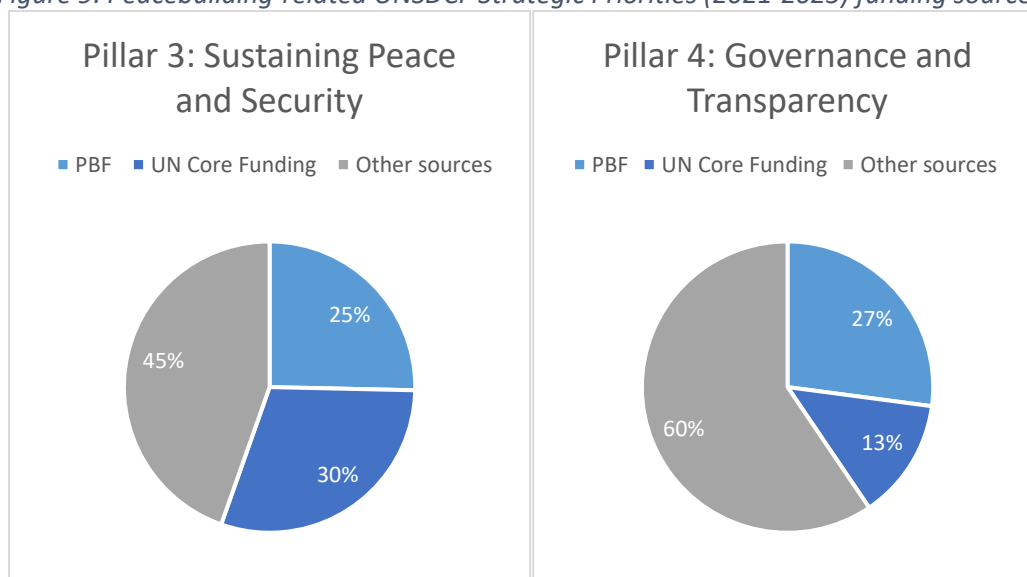
47. The PBC engagement spanned the active transition and post-transition phases and included:

¹³ PBC Working Methods Part I (2013); Security Council Report: Special Research Report No.2 The peacebuilding Commission (2009)

- Meetings and briefings with high-level national officials, senior leadership of international financial institutions, and civil society;
- Field visits enabling close consultations with stakeholders on the ground;
- Letters and briefings to the Security Council, providing advice during mandate discussions or drawing attention to key peacebuilding issues; and
- Public statements and press releases following PBC meetings or field visits.

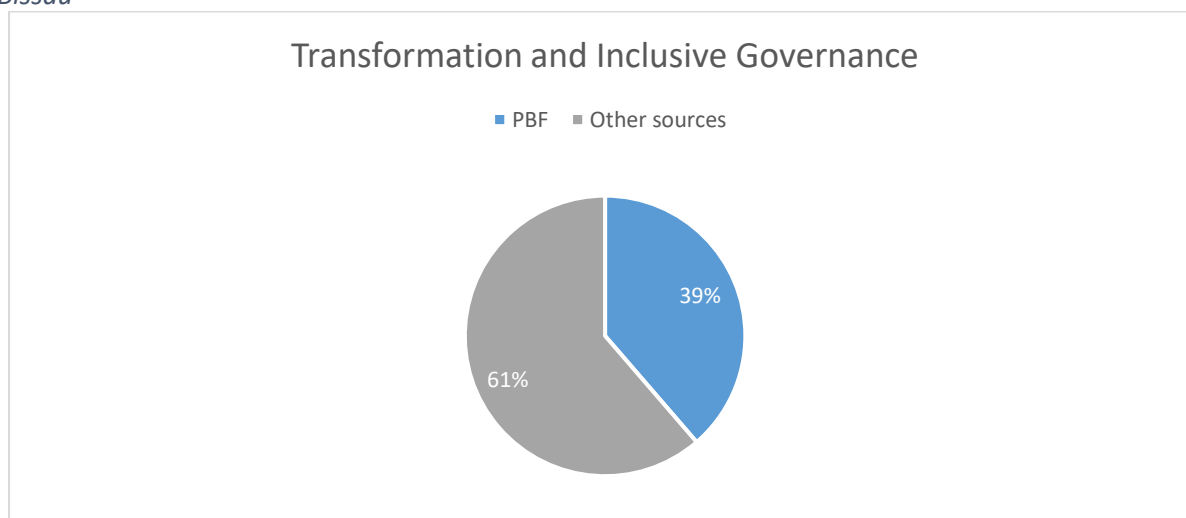
48. Additionally, the Peacebuilding Fund remained one of the top sources of funding following the exit of a mission. Across its different funding streams, the PBF continued to fund and support peacebuilding activities and priorities in both countries. An analysis of UNSDCF funding in the post-transition phase indicates that the PBF contributed \$28.2 million of funding towards the UNSDCF in Liberia (2021-2025), and \$18 million towards the UNSDCF in Guinea-Bissau (2022-2025). The high proportion of PBF contribution to the budget of peacebuilding-related priorities in the two countries is shown in Figure 9 and Figure 10.

Figure 9: Peacebuilding-related UNSDCF Strategic Priorities (2021-2025) funding sources in Liberia



Source: UNSDG Data Portal

Figure 10: Peacebuilding-related UNSDCF Strategic Priorities (2021-2025) funding sources in Guinea-Bissau



Source: UNSDG Data Portal

Reconfigured United Nations presences were constrained by a lack of sustained senior level political engagement at the country level following mission drawdown

49. United Nations staff emphasized the criticality of continued political engagement following the withdrawal of peace operations in order to sustain peacebuilding gains. With a vacuum in political engagement following the exit of the mission, staff interviewed as well as literature and documents reviewed noted that transitions were often accompanied by a decline in political leverage for the UNCT. Staff interviewed also underlined the importance of maintaining RCO and UNCT political analytical and advisory capacities post-mission.

50. In Liberia, the strengthened RCO model ensured adequate political representation after the exit of the mission. Options for a post-UNMIL presence included an expanded and strengthened RCO, establishing a UNOWAS satellite office, or establishing a follow-on SPM presence. The option to strengthen and expand the RCO was selected and envisioned for a transitional period. The strengthened RCO included an additional 19-staff Political and Peace Development Unit (PPDU) with field liaison officers to provide political analysis and fill the gap left by UNMIL's political affairs capacity.¹⁴ Mission and RCO stakeholders agreed that this arrangement under the continued leadership of the previous DSRSG/RC/HC in the RC role provided the United Nations with a robust capacity to facilitate political engagement following mission drawdown. The strengthened RCO engaged regional actors including the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to mediate political dynamics and avert crises. After external funding ended, the PPDU was dismantled, leaving a small residual team. As a result, political access and information gathering capacities of the RCO diminished, leading to a more Monrovia-centric engagement, and curtailing UNCT ability to link political analysis with programme design and delivery.

51. In Guinea-Bissau, political representation arrangements following mission withdrawal were perceived as insufficient by staff and stakeholders interviewed. During the transition, UNOWAS and UNIOGBIS undertook combined good offices and collaborated on a tripartite coordination mechanism with ECOWAS to guide the UNIOGBIS transition. The mandate of UNOWAS was expanded, along with a \$1.7 million budget increase, to enable it to assume UNIOGBIS' good offices functions after the exit of the mission. Interviews with United Nations staff and stakeholders revealed limitations of this approach. While UNOWAS representatives emphasized that dedicated posts, missions to Guinea-Bissau and an integrated regional approach provided adequate political coverage, other stakeholders disagreed, describing the arrangements as inadequate for the needs and risks identified. The infrequent presence of UNOWAS in Guinea Bissau, given its scope of coverage of 14 countries and modest budget increase, limited its ability to respond in real-time to Guinea-Bissau's fast-moving political developments. Former mission leadership and staff argued that the mission's closure severely curtailed the capacity of remaining United Nations actors to carry out political representation, which was compounded by reduced coordination with other diplomatic actors.¹⁵

V. Conclusion

52. United Nations peace operation transitions rarely occur under ideal conditions in which political, security and institutional benchmarks are fully achieved. In the dynamic and volatile

¹⁴ Strengthened Resident Coordinator's Office for Sustained Peace in Liberia – Project Proposal. 2017

¹⁵ P5/Group of Five coordination platform (the Economic Community of West African States, the African Union, the United Nations, the Community of Portuguese Language Countries, the European Union)

environment within which transitions take place, missions are required to proactively anticipate and mitigate potential residual risks while adapting continuously throughout the pre-transition and active transition phases. At the same time, the Organization must embrace a mindset that views transition as a strategic evolution of United Nations engagement, rather than purely as an act of departure or withdrawal. Cultivating this mindset across the system is essential to ensure that the planning towards transition is integrated into mission mandate implementation from the outset, rather than approached as a discrete, end-of-mandate exercise.

53. Sustainable transitions depend not only on how missions withdraw, but also on how effectively other parts of the United Nations system are positioned to lead thereafter. This requires shifting away from a mission-centric model and empowering national authorities, the UNCT and other relevant regional and international partners as joint owners of the post-mission architecture in a country. In the current context of the Organization's financial constraints and shrinking development assistance more broadly, this necessitates early and realistic planning and budgeting, strengthened alignment of efforts to build common understanding and consensus, and more deliberate leveraging of diverse funding channels to support coherent and durable transition outcomes.

54. In the context of the ongoing process to update the Transition Policy described above, OIOS is of the view that the timely completion of the revision process for the Transition Policy is critical and advises EOSG to take the necessary steps to ensure the finalization and promulgation of the updated Transition Policy.

VI. Recommendations

55. OIOS makes the following two important recommendations:

Recommendation 1 (Result D)

56. **DPO, DPPA, and DCO should, within their respective mandates and in line with key transition planning documents and existing authorities and responsibilities, promote the monitoring and documentation of residual tasks and activities to be undertaken by United Nations missions and United Nations Country Teams in support of priority peacebuilding areas, during and after the transition.** This should be undertaken based on existing transition plans, UNSDCF/Integrated Strategic Framework results frameworks, and other agreed instruments, to avoid parallel reporting requirements.

Indicators of implementation: Evidence of measures undertaken, where resources and capacities allow, for monitoring of key residual tasks and activities to be undertaken by the United Nations in support of peacebuilding priority areas, during transition and post-transition

Expected change: Institutional knowledge and enhanced visibility for United Nations presence support to key peacebuilding priority areas during and after the transition.

Recommendation 2 (Result E)

57. **DPPA should strengthen its political engagement and analysis in both post-PKO and post-SPM transition settings.** This should reflect prevailing conditions, identify risks, and strengthen partnerships with regional organizations and other relevant actors at the time of withdrawal, and may include:

- Focused engagement and the good offices of its HQ leadership or regional Special Political Missions (i.e. regional offices and regional envoys), where these exist;
- Enhanced political analysis of DPPA's regional divisions or regional Special Political Missions;
- Deployment of Peace and Development Advisors to transition and post-transition contexts where resources are available

Indicators of implementation: Evidence of assessments undertaken to analyze remaining political risks in a given country and consider possible mitigation measures by UN and partners to help manage these. Internal consultations held and decisions made on DPPA efforts to reconfigure its support to post-transition settings.

Expected change: Strengthened United Nations attention to, and effort in engaging on, political issues following the withdrawal of a peace operation.

Annex I: Management Response

Comments received from DPO, DPPA and DCO

“DPO, DPPA and DCO have appreciated the collaborative engagement with OIOS on this thematic evaluation of transitions. The recommendations were accepted and will be implemented as described in the Action Plan submitted to OIOS: DPO, DPPA and DCO accept recommendation 1, and DPPA accepts recommendation 2.

DPO, DPPA and DCO, within their respective mandates, will continue to engage with their field operations/offices on key transition priority tasks during a mission’s active transition phase through the relevant country-focused Integrated Task Force, and after the mission’s departure. As made clear during the evaluation, missions and country teams undertake such tasks to the extent that resources and capacities allow, while noting that mission transitions are generally challenged by decreasing resources and capacity.”