

HIGHLIGHTS

ON THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM REFORM

May 2025

Sustainable development is now at the centre of the UN's work, with stronger leadership, and more integrated efforts. At the country level, the 2030 Agenda guides UN support through joint planning, strategic collaboration, and innovative action.

Resident Coordinators lead UN efforts to bring partners together, align actions, and mobilize support for the SDGs. They draw on the full range of UN expertise and partnerships. Their leadership, recognized by governments and partners, is now a key factor in achieving results together through more strategic partnerships.

The Development Coordination Office (DCO) continues to support the work of Resident Coordinators in countries, providing essential coordination and guidance. It also plays a key role in advancing UN development reform efforts and acts as the secretariat for the UN Sustainable Development Group.¹

Stronger coordination across the UN system has ensured immediate responses to unprecedented development challenges, from the COVID-19 pandemic to climate change and the global impacts of regional crises, to accelerate the Sustainable Development Goals.

With the UN Resident Coordinators' leadership, 132 UN country teams covering 160+ countries and territories now provide more coordinated and effective support, with a strong focus on strategic policy advice, financing solutions, and integrated programming across sectors.

Cooperation Frameworks – which are signed between the UN and host governments - have become the central instrument for UN action in countries, helping to break down silos in planning and delivery, and driving system-wide change aligned with national priorities.

The UN is increasingly adapting its support to the specific needs of different country contexts from Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, Middle-Income Countries, and Small Island Developing States.

Regional Collaborative Platforms, bringing together the expertise of UN development entities at regional level, are providing more coherent and targeted support to Resident Coordinators and UN country teams to advance on country priorities.

Catalytic funding instruments, such as the Joint SDG Fund, pooled funds at country level, and funding dialogues between host governments, the UN and development partners, are helping to drive more joint UN action.

Complementarities between humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts in complex settings are stronger, thanks to stronger coordination, ensuring effective UN responses focused to set countries on a path towards sustainable development.

Accountability and transparency have improved, with better UN Results Reports shared with Governments, stronger use of system-wide data and knowledge platforms like UN INFO, and more coordinated joint advocacy.

UN development system entities reported \$596.2 million in efficiency gains in 2024. These savings reflect ongoing efforts to use resources more effectively and deliver greater impact.

KEY FEEDBACK ON THE UN DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM FROM HOST GOVERNMENTS IN 2024

UN country team programming and policy support is increasingly recognized by host governments as more relevant and impactful, with strengthened alignment to national development goals, greater integration across sectors, and improved coherence in policy advice and joint programming under the Cooperation Frameworks.

- 98%** report that UN activities - as articulated in the **Cooperation Framework** - are closely aligned with their priorities (up from 94% in 2023)
- 94%** agree that the UN was efficient in **providing support to countries** (up from 93% in 2023)
- 92%** agree that the UN helped build the country's capacity to engage in **partnerships** (compared to 91% in 2023)
- 89%** agree that the UN provided **integrated policy advice** (up from 88% in 2023)
- 87%** indicate that UN system entities **work more collaboratively together** (compared to 83% in 2023)
- 81%** (compared to 84% in 2023) see **reduced duplication** across UN entities - up from 56% in 2019, a 25% increase

KEY FEEDBACK ON THE REINVIGORATED RC SYSTEM FROM HOST GOVERNMENTS IN 2024

Resident Coordinators (RCs) convene and mobilize broad-based support for the SDGs, leveraging their strengthened leadership role, increased alignment with national priorities, and expanded access to UN and external expertise. With tailored profiles and greater recognition from host governments and partners, RCs now drive more integrated policy, financing, and partnership solutions to accelerate progress on the 2030 Agenda.

- 90%** report that the RC contributed to **leveraging partnerships** in support of national efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda and achieve the SDGs (vs. 87% in 2023)
- 89%** point out that RCs have increased focus on **common results** - an increase of 29% since the reforms
- 89%** agree that RCs displayed strengthened/increased **impartiality** vis-a-vis UN entities than before the reforms - an increase of 30% since 2019
- 88%** note that RCs provide strengthened **leadership** compared to before the reforms - a 23% jump since 2019
- 87%** agree that RCs contributed to **stronger synergies across development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding interventions** (up from 79% and 82% respectively in 2023)
- 84%** say the RC serves as a strengthened **entry point to the UN offer** - a 22% increase from perceptions pre-reforms
- 79%** agree in 2023 and 2024 that RCs helped to **minimize duplication of efforts** among UN agencies, ensuring efficient use of resources
- 76%** agree that RCs helped convene stakeholders on **sustainable development financing** (up from 68% in 2023) to support national Governments in their efforts to advance the SDGs

KEY FEEDBACK ON THE REINVIGORATED RC SYSTEM FROM CONTRIBUTING GOVERNMENTS IN 2024

90% report that the RC contributed to **leveraging partnerships** in support of national efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda and achieve the SDGs (vs. 87% in 2023)

88% note that RCs provide strengthened **leadership** compared to before the reforms – a 23% jump since 2019

89% of contributing governments point out that RCs have increased focus on **common results** – an increase of 29% since the reforms

79% agree in 2023 and 2024 that RCs helped to **minimize duplication of efforts** among UN agencies, ensuring efficient use of resources

KEY FEEDBACK ON THE REINVIGORATED RC SYSTEM FROM UNCT MEMBERS IN 2024

88% agree that RCs had successfully led the UNCT in providing support for changes in **national policies and regulatory frameworks** (up from 84% in 2023)

75% agree that RCs helped convene stakeholders on **sustainable development financing to support national Governments** in their efforts to advance the SDGs (68% in 2023)

73% agree that the RC facilitated UNCT's **focus on national opportunities for public and private investment at scale** (60% in 2023)

UN COUNTRY TEAMS VALUE THE SUPPORT RECEIVED FROM RCOs, rating their satisfaction at:

- Strategic planning: **94%** vs. 90% in 2023 – a 4% increase
- Economic analysis: **84%** vs. 79% in 2023 – a 5% increase
- Partnerships: **74%** vs 71% in 2023 – a 3% increase
- Data and results reporting: **88%** vs. 84% in 2023 – a 4% increase
- Communications and advocacy: **88%** vs. 89% in 2023 – stable, with a minor 1% decrease

THE ROAD AHEAD IN KEY AREAS

UN country teams need to be fully equipped to help countries advance the SDGs. This includes better alignment between individual agency plans and the Cooperation Frameworks, as well as a UN presence that can adapt to changing national priorities, capacities, and contexts.

The accountability relationship between Resident Coordinators and UN country teams, as agreed in the Management and Accountability Framework, requires continued attention and action by UNSDG Principals and governing bodies for full implementation.

Continued financial investment in the Resident Coordinator system is critical. While additional funding from the regular budget has been secured, overall resources still fall short of what is needed.

Delivering on the Funding Compact commitments, agreed between UN Member States and the UN development system to foster predictable and flexible funding, remains essential. The Funding Compact helps to make strategic use of limited aid resources and supports a more flexible, coherent, and effective UN development system.

Culture change and reform incentives need to go further, especially at the regional level, to ensure faster deployment of technical expertise, stronger support for Resident Coordinators and UN country teams, and more efficient and high-quality business operations.

The UN80 Initiative brings new momentum to advance the UN reforms. It builds on earlier reforms, simplifies procedures, streamlines operations, and helps deliver the SDGs and implement the Pact for the Future.

¹ The United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) is the high-level inter-agency global forum for programme and operational guidance and informed decision-making across the UN development system. It provides strategic direction and oversight to ensure UN development system entities deliver coherent, effective, and efficient support to countries seeking to attain sustainable development. The UNSDG is chaired by the UN Deputy Secretary-General. The UNDP Administrator serves as UNSDG Vice-Chair. The Development Coordination Office (DCO) acts as the Secretariat of the UNSDG.