

ON THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM & RESIDENT COORDINATOR SYSTEM REFORM

May 2026

The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development is at the centre of the UN's work, with stronger leadership, more integrated responses and a sharper focus on helping countries accelerate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a global environment marked by declining development financing, rising debt pressures, impacts of regional crises and multifaceted challenges like climate change.

The UN development system better tailors support to the needs of different country contexts — from Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States to Middle-Income Countries and countries in complex settings — for UN support aligned to their national needs and priorities, through the Cooperation Framework agreed with the government.

Innovation is increasingly embedded in UNCT planning and programming. Cooperation Frameworks now incorporate future-oriented approaches, including foresight, behavioural sciences, digital tools and data-driven analysis, in line with the Pact for the Future and UN 2.0.

Catalytic funding instruments support more joint UN action. The Joint SDG Fund catalyzes policy transformations and ignites strategic investments. The Funding Compact between the UN development system and UN Member States sets a clear plan for predictable and flexible funding, operationalized in countries through funding dialogues facilitated by Resident Coordinators.

Accountability and transparency have improved. All UN country teams produce results reports; global digital dashboards offer real-time visibility on UNCT results and UN efficiencies in UN INFO; and follow-up on independent evaluations, audits and oversight recommendations has become systematic.

The UN development system has exceeded the efficiency targets it set for itself. In 2025, the system reported \$981 million in efficiency gains (up from \$596.2 million in 2024) through entities' efforts and system-wide shifts to common premises, common back offices, business operations strategies and global shared services.

ON THE RESIDENT COORDINATOR SYSTEM REFORM

Resident Coordinators lead UN efforts through dedicated, independent and impartial coordination of 132 UN country teams, covering more than 160 countries and territories, bringing together UN expertise, Governments and partners to align UN responses with national needs and priorities.

Through RC coordination and leadership, Cooperation Frameworks have become the main platform for aligning UNCT expertise, partnerships and financing behind national priorities. RCs facilitate joint planning, implementation and strategic collaboration.

Working closely with UN agencies, funds and programmes, RCs help tailor UN support to the specific needs of different country contexts, as LDCs, LLDCs, SIDS and MICs — fostering structural transformation, economic growth, global trade access, development financing, resilience building, early warning systems and innovative services.

RCs help strengthen system-wide coherence in applying UN norms and standards at country level, including for mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment, youth engagement and disability inclusion.

To protect and advance sustainable development, RCs bridge humanitarian responses, peacebuilding and long-term development interventions in complex settings, convening UN actors, Governments, international financial institutions, civil society and communities around shared strategies for resilience, prevention and long-term solutions.

RCs facilitate opportunities and access to development financing, convening stakeholders, identifying openings for public and private investments, supporting partnerships and unlocking catalytic funding through pooled funding and funding dialogues.

RC system coordination facilitates transparency for UNCT results and system-wide efficiencies, supporting data gathering and analysis, and advancing common premises and common back offices.

DCO headquarters in New York and in the regions serve as the strategic backbone of the RC system, providing tools, guidance, management and surge support, and connecting country needs with global and regional support. DCO in New York also serves as secretariat of the UN Sustainable Development Group.

Despite clear results, the RC system faces a persistent funding gap. In 2025, income reached \$236.1 million against a budget requirement of \$281.8 million — a \$45.7 million gap — while voluntary contributions declined to their lowest level since the system's establishment.

KEY FEEDBACK ON THE UN DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM FROM HOST GOVERNMENTS IN 2025

UN country team programming and policy support is increasingly recognised by host Governments as more relevant and effective, with strong alignment to national priorities, greater integration across sectors, and improved coherence in policy advice and joint programming under the Cooperation Frameworks.

93% report the Cooperation Framework is aligned with their country's development needs and priorities.	94% rate overall UN development system support as effective.	83% agree that integrated policy advice, delivered in a coordinated way, is tailored to national needs and priorities.
89% express satisfaction with UN development system support to engage in SDG partnerships — 93% in LDCs, 96% in LLDCs and 89% in SIDS.	89% report that UN development system activities are effective in strengthening resilience to shocks.	79% note that UNCT results reports are effective in demonstrating results achieved in country.

KEY FEEDBACK ON THE REINVIGORATED RC SYSTEM FROM HOST GOVERNMENTS IN 2025

Resident Coordinators continue to be recognised as more impartial and more effective leaders of the United Nations development system at country level. In 2025, host Government satisfaction reached its highest levels since the reform across several key dimensions.

93% affirm strengthened RC leadership — a gain of nearly 30 points since 2019.	92% agree that RCs display strengthened impartiality, up from 89% in 2024.	93% report strengthened RC capacity to coordinate, up from 85% in 2024.
90% say the RC serves as a strengthened entry point to the UN system, up from 84% in 2024.	90% report increased RC focus on common results, up from 89% in 2024.	88% see reduced duplication across UN entities, up from 81% in 2024.

KEY FEEDBACK ON THE REINVIGORATED RC SYSTEM FROM CONTRIBUTING GOVERNMENTS IN 2025

93% indicate that RCs have strengthened capacity to coordinate (vs. 85% in 2024).	93% say that RCs have improved management skills (vs. 89% in 2024).	90% indicate an increased focus on common results (vs. 89% in 2024, and 60% in 2019).
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KEY FEEDBACK ON THE REINVIGORATED RC SYSTEM FROM UNCT MEMBERS IN 2025

73% say the RC is effective in leading the UNCT to access expertise across the UN development system.	85% say the RC is effective in leading the UNCT in decisions on Cooperation Framework objectives.	85% say the RC fosters coherent, strategic engagement with government counterparts on the UN's normative agenda.
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UN COUNTRY TEAMS VALUE THE SUPPORT RECEIVED FROM RC OFFICES

Ratings fluctuate in 2025, but overall satisfaction remains stable, with the exception of a decline in perceived support for partnerships and resource-mobilization in the current constrained fiscal environment.

	2025	2024
Strategic planning	88%	94%
Data and results reporting	83%	88%
Economic analysis	81%	84%
Communications and advocacy	81%	88%
Partnerships	59%	74%

THE ROAD AHEAD IN KEY AREAS

UN country teams need to be fully equipped to help countries advance the SDGs. This includes stronger alignment between individual agency plans and the Cooperation Frameworks, and a UN presence that can adapt to changing national priorities, capacities and contexts. As UN country presences evolve, Resident Coordinators will be increasingly important in ensuring that governments continue to access coherent system-wide expertise, including from specialized, regional and non-resident entities.

Continued financial investment in the RC system is critical. Resources continue to fall short of what is needed, and voluntary contributions declined in 2025 to their lowest level since the system's establishment.

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

Culture change and reform incentives need to go further, including through adequate funding, to consolidate progress achieved and complete unfinished business.

The UN80 Initiative brings new momentum. Building on earlier reforms, it focuses on optimizing UNCT configuration to fully match UN offer with national demand, a regional reset for cohesive regional support across all UN pillars, timely access to the full range of knowledge, expertise and capacities across the UN development system, and a strengthened RC system. As the 2030 Agenda enters its decisive phase, the RC system remains a critical vehicle for translating the promise of UN80 into coherent country-level support.

The RC system is undergoing a recalibration effort to strengthen its support across country, regional and global levels. Recalibration alone, however, cannot offset loss of capacities or fully meet rising demands in the absence of predictable and adequate funding. Full, predictable and sustainable funding for the RC system is necessary.

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 Vice-Chair. The Development Coordination Office (DCO) acts as the Secretariat of the UNSDG.

All figures are drawn from the results of independent DESA surveys of host Governments and UNCT members, 2025.