

**Management Response to Evaluation of United Nations Cooperation Framework 2017-2021
by United Nations Country Team in Montenegro
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This review is undertaken in the context of the final evaluation of the UN Development Assistance Framework for Montenegro for the period 2017 – 2021, which started in April 2020. Evaluation process has been coordinated jointly by UNCT and the Government of Montenegro. At the technical level, designated representatives of the Ministry of Foreign affairs (MFA), as the key ministry representing the Government, participated in UNDAF Evaluation Management Team, while the MFA political representation has been ensured through their participation in the UNDAF evaluation Steering Board.

UNDAF evaluation was finalized in July 2020, following the presentation to the Evaluation Steering Committee and UNDAF Evaluation Management Team, and incorporating suggestions from the UN and Government partners. Although conducted under challenging circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemics, the Evaluation Team consulted 147 partners, beneficiaries and UN representatives, representing a wide range of stakeholders and thereby making it possible to strongly validate the findings and recommendations. Agency-specific programme evaluations (i.e. those of UNDP and UNICEF) have also been consulted.

The evaluation findings will inform development of the Cooperation Framework of the Government of Montenegro and UN system in Montenegro, especially in highlighting areas where progress in achieving the SDG's has been slower than anticipated in the previous cycle.

Key findings:

- Overall, the UNCT in Montenegro in implementing the UNDAF 2017-2021 addressed specific developmental needs identified by UN Agencies and the national partners.

The UNDAF implementation has, been flexible and responsive to emerging priorities and challenges of the country over the period of implementation. Also, the principle to "leave no-one behind" has been considered and the needs of the (main) vulnerable groups have been in focus during UNDAF implementation.
- UNCT has been generally effective in delivering results and contributing to progress under all UNDAF outcomes. This is confirmed by positive changes in relevant statistical indicators. The work of UN Agencies could be credibly linked to positive changes identified.

UNCT demonstrated its neutrality, impartiality, technical expertise and reputation in facilitating Montenegro's progress in critical reform areas linked to EU accession process and achievement of SDGs. Factors contributing to success include strong partnerships UN Agencies cultivated with the

national stakeholders, continuous communication (“exchange of information”) UN agencies maintained with international development actors and active dialogue with GoM and other national stakeholders. These critical factors contributed to greater effectiveness of the UNCT.

In general, the UNCT in Montenegro has been successful in designing and implementing joint initiatives and addressing complex (sectoral) challenges and problems. The collective efforts of the UN Agencies and the UN Resident Coordinator Office have been critical factors contributing to a more coordinated approach and ensuring synergies within each of the UNDAF outcomes.

Many UN system interventions were verifiable as being effective in achieving their planned outputs. UN agencies have well-developed systems to measure their progress towards agency-specific outputs. However, approaches to monitoring actual contributions to achieving UNDAF outcomes are inconsistent and underdeveloped.

The UNCT assisted in improving and strengthening policy processes in Montenegro in each strategic area and under all UNDAF outcomes. This support to policy development and strategic planning was viewed as highly valuable to the Government of Montenegro, starting from identifying priorities and defining appropriate measures. However, the evaluators found in areas of policy-making and implementation, and particularly in policy coordination there remains space for further improvements drawing on additional (external) technical assistance.

UN Agencies have steadily addressed capacity needs for delivery of quality services, particularly for socially excluded and marginalized groups. The UNCT used capacity development and transfer of knowledge (through direct interaction/ involvement of the key national stakeholders) approaches to support SDG nationalization and operationalization. In this context, the UNCT responded to the needs of the country to well through “pragmatically linking EU accession process with the SDGs and the respective targets”

- In general, the UNCT has considered the sustainability of results from the design stage of UNDAF while implementation of UNDAF ensured national ownership and involvement of national stakeholders. Still, sustainability of results depends on the operational and technical capacities of national institutions to use deliverables (from UN assistance) and benefit from knowledge gained in the regular provision of (public) services.

As a result of UN interventions, many national partners feel more confident to lead the development process. The UN system has shown the capacity to focus on complex, cross-sectoral policy advice functions and empower the state partners to deliver programmes. The development realities of Montenegro and the needs of vulnerable groups still require improved multi-sectoral partnerships, and according to the several key informants interviewed there were examples of overlaps or missing links in policy advice associated with inflexible interpretations of UN agencies’ mandates, and insufficient interactions between staff from different UN Agencies (especially programme and project staff).

The rights and needs of the marginalized and people in vulnerable situations have been considered, in general and incorporated during design of UNDAF. However, the UNDAF has omitted to include and address the needs of some less visible vulnerable groups, such as unemployed poor people or children of parents who are abusing alcohol or drugs. These people are in danger of “falling between mandates of individual agencies”. In general, human rights mainstreaming and no-one left behind principles have been followed during the entire period of UNDAF implementation. However, there remains need to enhance the reach beyond the most commonly recognized vulnerable groups (the “usual suspects”) and address needs of those furthest left behind.

The UNCT in Montenegro has been addressing gender equality and empowerment of women with varying level of attention under UNDAF outcomes. Although important results have been

achieved in mainstreaming gender (especially considering prevailing traditional norms in the country), there are important areas for further work and efforts. It remains highly important to ensure that gender is addressed under all UNDAF outcomes with efforts and involvement of all members of the UNCT in Montenegro.

UNCT has used the principles of environmental sustainability effectively, contributing to achieving national development targets and international commitments of the country. This support has been evident as the results have been adopted by the Government of Montenegro.

- In general, UNDAF Montenegro 2017-2021 has been implemented efficiently, following globally adopted procedures and adjusted to the specific context of the country. Still, better strategic and operational structures would improve involvement in the plan as well as, capacities for planning, coordination, cooperation and reporting under UNDAF.

The financial resources planned for implementation of full UNDAF period were almost fully mobilized during the first three years and delivered to a large extent.

Responses to recommendations

<p>Recommendation 1</p> <p>Focus new UNDAF on the most critical issues for the achievement of SDGs and EU accession priorities for Montenegro.</p> <p>Ensure strong focus on the inclusion of vulnerable groups and full implementation of “leave no one behind” principle (also addressing the needs of those left furthest behind).</p>	<p>Accepted</p>
<p>Explanation</p> <p>Montenegro has recorded some progress in achieving SDG targets, however, still significant challenges remain for ensuring gender equality, climate action, peace, justice, and strong institutions¹. The institutional capacity of Montenegro to coordinate and monitor implementation of sustainable development goals (SDG) was sub-optimal. Even though SDG agenda provides wider framework for overall socio-economic development, the focus have been almost completely on achieving EU acquis goals. The complementarity between the SDGs and the EU accession process is apparent. Namely, a recent analysis² revealed links between SDG targets with the chapters of the Acquis. Sixty-five percent, nearly two-thirds of the SDG targets (109 of 169 targets) have a strong link with the chapters of the acquis – in meeting the requirements of the acquis, Montenegro will be closer to achieving the SDG. The crucial chapters, those that have the greatest impact on achievement of the 2030 Agenda in Montenegro are chapter 27 on the environment, chapter 23 on justice and fundamental rights and chapter 19 on social policy and employment. While complementarity is evident in the above areas, it remained more limited for reduced inequalities (32%), education (38%), hunger and poverty (52%), and gender equality (54%). At the same time, these are some of the core areas of UNCT work.</p> <p>The development context of Montenegro has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government of Montenegro took swift and decisive actions to prevent the spread of the virus; however, strong containment measures put the brakes on an economy that was growing steadily in the preceding months. With tourism accounting for nearly twenty per cent of its economy, it is expected that the country will face substantial economic contraction (according to the recent IMF estimation, nearly 9 per cent drop in 2020³). It is expected that these changes and challenges will impede the country in its efforts to meet the targets under SDGs.</p> <p>Thus, UNCT in Montenegro has acknowledged the adverse effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, also recognizing some of the emerging needs such as the inclusion of vulnerable groups and full implementation of "leave no one behind" principle (also addressing the needs of those left furthest behind). Also, the Roadmap for preparation of the 2021-2025 Cooperation Framework (adopted in July 2020) recommended considering (nationalized) SDGs for the next programming cycle. UNCT identified "accelerator" platforms that contain directions to remove bottlenecks to development results across multiple SDGs. It should be complemented by the analysis of Groups Left Behind in Montenegro and the Common Country Assessment (CCA). The CCA will take place during the second half of 2020 and together with other documents will form the updated analytical basis upon which the discussion and consultations surrounding the next Cooperation Framework will take place. The</p>	

¹ The country scored 70.2 on the Sustainable Development Goal Index (slightly under the Western Balkans regional average of 70.9), reaching 72 position on the global level (out of 166 countries).

² “Unravelling Connections: EU accession and the 2030 Agenda – case of Montenegro”- <http://www.un.org.me/Library/DaO-UNDAF/Unraveling%20Connections%20-%20EU%20Accession%20and%20the%202030%20Agenda,%202018.pdf>

³ https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDP_RPCH@WEO/OEMDC/MNE

<p>visualization/prioritization exercise will be facilitated and supported through an external expert and include the Theory of Change as the basis of the Framework's preparation. The Roadmap foresees two validation exercises with direct beneficiaries, the national and international stakeholders in Montenegro, ensuring full alignment with the actual needs and priorities under the SDGs.</p>			
Actions to be taken	Responsible	Timeframe	Resource
Carry out the analysis of the SDG “accelerator” platforms/areas, and other diagnostic documents (e.g. Unravelling Connections, report on groups left behind; assessments of gender mainstreaming and other sectorial reviews documents)	RC Office/ UNCT	December 2020 (as a part of the CCA)	
Prepare the Common Country Assessment for Montenegro, focused on the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly on the achievement of SDGs, assessing gender mainstreaming needs and following the principle of “leave no one behind”	RC Office/ UNCT	December 2020	
Once the strategic priorities for the next UNSDCF have been defined, set targets and produce a Theory of Change outlining how the desired change is expected to happen in the context of Montenegro	RC Office/ UNCT/ Government of Montenegro and other stakeholders	May 2021	
<p>Recommendation 2</p> <p>It is recommended that UNCT remain flexible and responsive to the needs and priorities of the citizens and authorities in Montenegro and also consider actions in areas where UNCT has been less present);</p> <p>It is recommended UNCT in Montenegro explore supporting the digital transformation agenda of the GoM in various sectors;</p> <p>It is recommended for UNCT to support green recovery of the country, especially in the key economic sectors;</p> <p>It is recommended to work on a systematic and integrated approach to youth programming;</p> <p>Considering already existing, significant regional development differences, with even more negative perspectives, UN Agencies together with the Government of Montenegro and other stakeholders, should explore options for SDG-focused and area-based development programming within these areas to achieve local tangible results and combat the existing challenges;</p> <p>It is recommended to explore entry points for a holistic and coordinated approach to address demographic challenges</p>	<p>These recommendations are noted.</p> <p>The UNCT will consider the priority areas for future work alongside the priorities that emerge from the Common Country Assessment.</p>		

<p>and migration (including sustainable return and reintegration when appropriate);</p> <p>It is also recommended to strengthen policy capacities in all stages of the policy cycle, linking it with the EU accession priorities and SDGs. Part of these efforts should be to strengthen systems and capacities for monitoring, reporting, and evaluation of public policies. UNCT should work to ensure that policy implementation is based on sound gender sensitive costing, with predictable financing sources. In connection to this, the mechanism for policy coordination should be strengthened.</p> <p>Also, it is recommended to explore support to the Parliament of Montenegro to implement core functions (including the law-making, analytical and oversight capacities).</p> <p>It is recommended to support the development of a systemic and holistic system for continued development of capacities of the authorities (all branches of power) to exercise their functions</p> <p>It is recommended to explore approaches for strengthening the role of non-government actors and civil society, following a two-fold approach by providing technical assistance to CSOs and continuing partnerships</p>	
<p>Explanation</p> <p>Montenegro is facing significant regional development differences, as the northern region has been facing a plethora of problems in different governance, socio-economic and demographic spheres, remaining behind to the rest of the country. UNCT has recognized that a joint and SDG-based, comprehensive area-based development initiative could be a way forward to address these challenges.</p> <p>In the recent year, Montenegro has invested efforts to define specific procedures for policy planning at the national and sub-national levels. Still, in spite of the efforts, policy making and implementation capacities remain weak; as well as coordination of policies across the Government. The extensive experience of the UNCT in different policy areas could be beneficial for the Government of Montenegro, especially when it comes to implementation of the new methodology of evidence-based policymaking which was produced by the Government with the assistance of UN. The new methodology is ambitious and ensures that the policy planning is conducted in uniform manner, based on high quality context and baseline analysis and including measurable goals and indicators of progress. However, public administration, both on the national and especially local level would benefit from support in terms of strengthening capacities, especially for monitoring, reporting and evaluation of public policies.</p> <p>While, the Government had committed to ensuring gender equality and to gender mainstream policies, the results are still lacking. One of the preconditions in increasing practical consequences of this commitment would be quantifying the lack of gender equality and women's and estimating the sum of financial or non-financial resources needed for implementation of the national commitments with regards to gender equality.</p>	

Also, part of the broader public administration reform could include strengthening of the policy coordination (across the Government and in the specific areas of implementation), and systemic development of capacities by supporting the continuous human resources development in all branches of the Government.

The population in Montenegro is ageing, while out-migration especially of young people, remained a notable contributing factor. This is affecting all spheres of society, from the provision of public services such as health care and social welfare and decline in economic activities. UNCT recognizes the need to address drivers of emigration, with a particular focus on young people. UNCT will also work on the implementation of family and youth policies, striving to enhance the human capital in Montenegro, in line with country SDG Framework.

Concerning young people, UNCT will remain active to enhance the participation of young people in local decisions and social changes. Past and ongoing UNCT initiatives relating to youth will be fine-tuned to better respond to youth needs. UNCT in Montenegro will develop a long-term, comprehensive, joint vision and programming relating to youth.

Establishment of democratic, open and inclusive society in Montenegro would require active involvement of civil society organizations and non-governmental actors. Although CSOs have been involved in the implementation of UNDAF 2017-2021, this involvement was limited and in some specific areas. UNCT will explore opportunities to work on strengthening capacities of the CSOs in the core areas of their functioning (corresponding to the UNDAF priorities), while also involving them more enthusiastically in the implementation of activities.

Actions to be taken	Responsible	Timeframe	Resource
Prepare a comprehensive Common Country Assessment for Montenegro, focused on groups left behind, also considering recommended areas for programming and exploring new and emerging areas issues.	UN Agencies	December 2020	
Carry out in-depth analysis of root causes and problems in the identified priority areas for programming and develop a brief strategic approach for UNCT entry points and engagement in these areas	UN Agencies	January 2021	CCA task team with the support of external consultant for the CF
Consider and design project fiches for possible joint initiatives in the (new and emerging) priority areas of interventions	UN Agencies/ RC Office	Continuously	
<p>Recommendation 3</p> <p>It is recommended that UNCT continue to strengthen its normative work, assisting the key governance actors in Montenegro to understand, and implement norms and standards deriving from international charters and agreements. The focus should be to integrate norms and standards in public policies, laws, strategies and development plans but also remain active in the implementation.</p> <p>It is recommended to strengthen gender mainstreaming and empowerment of women under all UNSDCF outcomes, following gender transformative approach.</p>	Accepted		

Explanation UN Agencies with normative mandate have been integrating international norms and standards into Montenegro’s legislation, policies and development plans, being responsive, flexible, and adaptive, capable to communicating initiatives and responses and establishing partnerships. To ensure that no-one is left behind, it is planned to continue and expand normative work focusing on the priority areas of UNDAF (UNSDCF). Also, UNCT will work to expand gender mainstreaming programming and enhance equality-related policies and practices under all UNSDCF outcomes. UNCT will also explore opportunities to follow twin-track approach under the next UNSDCF, with a specific gender outcome and mainstreaming gender under all outcomes.			
Actions to be taken [Actions to be taken in response, broken down as appropriate]	Responsible entities	Timeframe	Resource implication [if any]
Support establishment of mechanisms and platforms for monitoring, reporting and the implementation of the commitments of Montenegro, under the international conventions and treaties it signed and ratified.	UN Agencies/ Government of Montenegro	End of 2021 (HR data base already established, needs to be operationalized)	
Develop UNCT Country Gender Equality Profile as part of the preparation process of UNSDCF 2022- 2026	UN RC Office/ UN Women/ UN Agencies	June 2021	
Analyse Gender Equality SWAP recommendations and prepare actions to address shortcomings in the next UNSDCF	UN RC Office/ UN Women/ UN Agencies	June 2021	
Implement gender mainstreaming activities under all UNDAF-UNSDCF outcomes, as not all of them have been properly mainstreamed.	UN RC Office/ UN Women/ UN Agencies	Continuously	
Recommendation 4 It is recommended to strengthen membership of the UNSDCF Steering Committee to ensure its strategic involvement and guidance for UNDAF implementation. It is recommended to expand the number of participants in the UNDAF Results Groups, bringing other partners in to improve planning, implementation and coordination of activities within UNDAF implementation. Intensive joint planning should be strengthened through preparation of Annual Work Plans (WPs), setting the basis for holistic and integrated planning and programming.	Accepted		
Explanation UNDAF Steering Committee has been the essential mechanism to involve high-level national partners, provide strategic guidance and coordinate development interventions during the entire period of UNDAF implementation. The SC remained an active forum for greater involvement of the high-level			

national partners to genuinely drive development efforts, ensuring at the same time strong national leadership, promoting partnership and boosting ownership. The Results Groups have been preparing plans and reporting on progress timely, with the involvement of the GoM and UN Agencies. For the next cycle, it will be considered to expand its membership. Also, UNCT will work to ensure the active involvement of the members in the planning and implementation of interventions. UNCT will work to put in place integrated and joint planning starting with the preparation of annual Work Plans (WPs), to joint projects and programmes.			
Actions to be taken [Actions to be taken in response, broken down as appropriate]	Responsible entities	Timeframe	Resource implication [if any]
Analyze possible modalities and options for the membership and functioning of the SC during the next programming cycle and implement those deemed to be effective.	UN RC Office/ UNCT	December 2021	
Explore possibilities to extend the role of the SC as the coordination mechanism for SDGs in Montenegro	UN RC Office/ UNCT/ GoM/ national stakeholders	December 2021	
Discuss opportunities and expand the members and enhance the planning and implementation functions of the Results Groups (e.g. involving representatives of the CSOs, think-tanks and academia if appropriate)	UN RC Office/ UNCT/ national stakeholders	December 2021	
Recommendation 5 In the next programming cycle UNCT in Montenegro should invest more efforts to define appropriate qualitative and quantitative indicators to adequately measure progress under outcomes and capture UNCT contribution to this progress. In parallel, it is recommended to strengthen monitoring processes, and further build on the established results-oriented reporting practice. It is also important that UN Agencies allocate financial resources to support collection of data under specific indicators, as needed. Also, it is recommended to plan a mid-term review of new UNSDCF (that should complement regular monitoring)	Accepted		
Explanation UNCT agrees with the recommendation to strengthen results framework and introduce well-balanced combination of qualitative and quantitative indicators to capture progress under outcomes and UNCT contribution to this progress. UNCT will start this process with the preparation of a sound intervention logic and well-elaborated results chain within the Results Framework. Preparation of the Theory of change (mentioned in the previous paragraphs) should also serve to define results framework.			

Also, UNCT agrees with the need to strengthen monitoring practice and define monitoring protocols and tools. The improved reporting practice and focus on results-reporting as with the 2019 UNDAF Annual Report will continue.

Mid-term UNDAF review will be considered as possible option, serving to fine tune the intervention logic and adjust implementation process.

Actions to be taken [Actions to be taken in response, broken down as appropriate]	Responsible entities	Timeframe	Resource implication [if any]
For the new UNSDCF prepare the results framework with a sound intervention logic including chain of results that adequately capture UN work (outcomes and outputs)	UNCT	June 2021	
Define qualitative and quantitative indicators under each element of the results chain, capturing UNCT results and contribution to the progress, as well as sources of information and means of verification	UNCT/ RCO/ M&E Group	June 2021	
Prepare and carry out a mid-term UNSDCF evaluation and follow up on recommendations	UNCT/ RCO/ M&E Group	December 2024	
Recommendation 6 It is recommended to define practical sustainability strategy under all outcomes within new UNSDCF. It is also recommended to perform regular analysis of factors external to interventions (risks and assumptions) that could affect sustainability and propose measures to mitigate their adverse effects. It is recommended that UN develop a sound, hands-on approach to measure capacity development across all priority areas, linking them with changes and reform needs. (Linked with Recommendation 5) Part of the monitoring system should include efforts to measure progress and monitor the extent to which newly gained capacities are being utilized (particularly analysis benefits for the poor).	Accepted		
Explanation UNCT recognize the need to focus more on sustainability, also regularly analysing assumptions and risks regarding sustainability. Capacity development and transfer of knowledge remain essential tools for the achievement of development gains under UNDAF. UNCT is dedicated to follow a longer-term and needs-based capacity development approach; institutional capacity development and policy support will continue to be at the front and centre of the UN work, with ever-strong focus on critical capacities for achieving the SDGs and characterized by effective engagement of socio-economic stakeholders.			

At the same time, UNCT agrees that is critically important to define “capacity for what, capacity for whom and capacity for why” and adopt indicators that will adequately capture the effects and changes deriving from capacity development assistance.

Actions to be taken	Responsible	Timeframe	Resource
Analyze, discuss with the national partners and adopt approaches to ensure sustainability of results- this should be integral part of the new Cooperation Framework 2022-2026	UN RC Office/ UNCT	Throughout new CF implementation period	
Carry out capacity development needs assessments in different areas under next UNSDCF outcomes and deliver needs-based technical support	UNCT	Throughout new CF implementation period	
Continue with development of institutional and policy capacities, focusing the interventions on the achievements of SDGs	UNCT	Throughout new CF implementation period	
Consider opportunities to define and put in place a system to measure impact of capacity development initiatives (delivered within the scope of the new UNSDCF) and put in place a comprehensive system	UNCT/ UN RCO	Throughout new CF implementation period	
Provide capacity development support to the CSOs in Montenegro with the objective to enhance their organizational and technical capacities and ensure sound delivery of services (e.g. to facilitate productive dialogue between citizens and governments, as well as to play a watchdog role in policy design and delivery, including for the SDGs.)	UNCT	Throughout new CF implementation period	

