

ANNEX IX

Management response by the United Nations Country Team in North Macedonia to the evaluation of the Partnership for Sustainable Development: UN Strategy 2016-2020

31 August 2020

1. Introduction

The final evaluation of the “Partnership for Sustainable Development: UN Strategy 2016-2020” (PSD) was conducted at the end of 2019,¹ with results informing the development of the 2021-2025 United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for North Macedonia (SDCF), the key UN strategic planning document in the country that will succeed PSD.

The findings of the evaluation have been shared externally. Initial results were presented to the PSD Joint Steering Committee, which includes UN and the Government of North Macedonia, in December 2019. The Committee endorsed the evaluation findings, which was followed by the finalization of the evaluation report (February 2020) and presentation of findings to donors and international partners (March 2020). Further validation of evaluation results with other external partners, scheduled for March 2020, was postponed due to COVID-19 outbreak. Nevertheless, findings and recommendations of the evaluation were shared with UN partners during the SDCF consultations, including during the meetings of three Sector Working Groups, a coordination mechanism that includes the Government, European Union (EU) and other partners, and further validated through the online *UN perception survey* (May 2020), which targeted UN partners.

The United Nations Country Team in North Macedonia (UNCT), which includes the UN System entities implementing development activities, whether physically present in the country or remotely, has welcomed the evaluation findings and has accepted its recommendations.

UNCT has committed to fully consider the five sets of evaluation recommendations during the development and the implementation of the forthcoming SDCF. The evaluation comes at a particularly opportune time with the UN Development System reforms being in full swing, globally and in North Macedonia. Its observations have given the empowered UN Resident Coordinator (RC) and UNCT in North Macedonia a baseline overview and have already guided the RC and UNCT in their operations during the 2020 transition year.

This *management response* document summarizes key evaluation observations (section 2) and lays out UNCT’s actions planned in response to the evaluation, including activities ongoing in 2020 (section 3). UNCT will review the progress of their implementation -annually. The PSD final evaluation report, which contains the full text of recommendations, is available at this [link](#).

¹ The PSD Evaluation was conducted between September and November 2019, by Elinor Bajraktari (team leader), Rajna Cemerska and Aleksandra Georgievska.

2. Summary of key PSD evaluation observations

Overall, PSD has been a relevant strategic document – aligned with the Government priorities and responsive to the country's most pressing needs. Its outstanding feature has been the focus on vulnerable and marginalized groups, dedicating proper focus to the disadvantaged sections of the society, which had made it fully aligned with the UN-promoted *no one left behind* (LNOB) priority principle. Future SDCF and UNCT programming should maintain focus on vulnerable groups.

PSD has been responsive to the changing context and the situation in the country. The political changes of 2017 have created new opportunities for the UN that UN entities have effectively pursued. The migration crisis posed a significant challenge for national institutions and UN was able to step up and provide significant support to the Government, migrants and the communities affected by the crisis. This was an area of major UN success in the country. (Pg. 105-107 of the Evaluation report)

A defining feature of UN work in the country has been its significant footprint at the local level, working with local authorities and communities across the country on a range of issues, in addition to working closely with the national Government. As confirmed by the evaluation interviews, this segment of UN work has been greatly appreciated and, in certain areas, transformative.

UN has contributed to tangible results in most areas of its engagement. One such example is the area of employment for vulnerable groups, where UN has been engaged since 2007. Multiple agencies sustained and developed partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Employment Agency at the national level and a range of partnerships at the sub-national level. Following North Macedonia's progress with the employment of persons with disabilities, its experience has now been replicated in other countries (Azerbaijan). The area of deinstitutionalization of persons with disabilities is another that has seen impact thanks to UN sustained engagement since 2000. The country has made significant progress, with transformative impact on the lives of people with disabilities.

Other areas that have recorded positive changes due to UN work – at the level of institutions, policies and people's life experiences – include management of sexual and reproductive health; climate change; disaster risk management; natural resource management, which includes land, agriculture, protected areas, river-basin management, etc.; and early childhood development. This has been confirmed by testimonies of the beneficiaries interviewed by the evaluators.

UN entities have built strong partnerships with the authorities and have supported the development of an impressive array of policies and programmes at the national level.

During the PSD implementation period UN entities also encountered several challenges that presented themselves as opportunities for the future:

- While individual entities have established good relations and strong cooperation with their respective counterparts, the cooperation at the UNCT-Government level as a whole can be further improved. For UNCT to better resemble and represent one, unified and coherent UN, further internal cooperation is needed at all levels of programme design and implementation. Results groups could play a more active role through better attendance by all entities and attract a more active participation by the Government. There are opportunities for more joint

programming, which remained limited during PSD duration. The evaluation report pointed out some feasible opportunities for joint implementation based on collected evidence.

- A key area of work that would benefit from greater collective UNCT attention is the support to the Government on the adaptation and pursuit of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), where North Macedonia has lagged behind most countries in the region. There is an opportunity to learn from others and apply their lessons. A strong inter-agency approach coordinated by the UN RC could yield significant results.
- There are opportunities for UNCT to collectively collaborate better with the EU. Stronger UN coordination presents an advantage, not only for UN entities, but also for EU, which incurs higher transition costs when dealing with each entity separately. While bilateral interaction will remain essential, it would be useful to explore a collective format of coordination and consultation between UN and EU.
- Regarding planning, the forthcoming SDCF presents an opportunity for UN to better frame results it will pursue in North Macedonia through improved indicators and targets. Sufficient attention should be given to this so that the important work that is taking place and its results can be clearly demonstrated. UN should support the Government with collecting data and statistics necessary to measure progress. Policy making – whether by the Government directly or with UN's support – should be driven by evidence grounded in reliable data.
- It will be important for UN entities to identify sustainable sources of funding – in particular, Government cost-sharing and resources from the private sector. Resource mobilization would benefit from stronger internal coordination among, facilitated by the UN RC Office (RCO). Partnerships with private sector, potentially harnessed as an agent of change in the areas of employment social protection, for example, should be explored more systematically.
- While the support that UN entities have provided with development of policies and programmes had been impressive, greater attention should be given to addressing the challenges of implementation in the forthcoming SDCF. The scaling up of pilot initiatives should be better tracked to ensure lessons learned are recorded and can be used elsewhere.

The evaluation has identified two key PSD implementation lessons for UNCT:

- *Lesson 1:* Close cooperation between UN entities usually emerges in those areas where there is a clear reform agenda, underpinned by a clearly identified problem and a strong commitment to change by the Government. Two such examples were the areas of deinstitutionalization or employment of persons with disabilities, which has created space for different UN entities to contribute with their expertise and experience. Where the Government commitment had been weaker, there were fewer incentives for UN entities to closely cooperate. National ownership is thus an important factor that shapes the interaction of UN entities at the country level.
- *Lesson 2:* The UN System can become rapidly relevant and provide a major contribution in an area where it has had minimal engagement earlier. This was the case during the migration crisis: UN entities have worked very well not only with their respective government counterparts, but also with each other. If there is a clear need in an area of UN expertise, capacity and experience, it is possible for UN entities to come together, coordinate effectively and efficiently deliver in close collaboration with each other.

3. UNCT response to evaluation recommendations and planned action

Recommendations	Actions to be taken	Responsible	Timeframe	Resource
RECOMMENDATION 1: Strengthening inter-agency cooperation		ACCEPTED		
(pages 108 – 113 of the Evaluation Report)				
Results groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase frequency of result group meetings and strengthen the tracking of their decisions and the reporting of their results.• Agencies should commit to better attendance of results group meetings.• Identify incentives to make result group meetings more attractive to Government counterpart• Open result group meetings to civil society organizations.	1. UNCT will consider revising the structure and functioning of Results Groups within the 2021-2025 SDCF, including increasing the frequency of meetings, recording of and follow up and the actions agreed, as well as involvement of the external counterparts.	UNCT; RCO; Results groups chairperson	Jul – Dec 2020	No resources required
	2. Agencies commit to better attendance of Results Groups meetings and of their better utilization as a mechanism for joint programming.	UNCT	Jan 2021 – Dec 2025	UNCT personnel
Joint programming <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify and institutionalize incentives for agencies to engage in joint programmes (suggested measures: government co-financing conditional on joint programming, establishment of SDG pooled funds for the financing of joint activities, etc.)	3. UNCT will utilize all possible opportunities to develop joint programmes through improved internal communication of possible opportunities, development of joint concepts by utilizing issue-based programming approach. RCO will enhance its support in joint programming coordination.	UNCT; RCO	Jun 2020 – Dec 2025	UNCT members investing personnel/ expertise; RCO scale-up
Gender <ul style="list-style-type: none">• UNCT should cooperate more effectively around gender, not only with regards advocacy and awareness-raising, but also through the joint development of gender-sensitive programmes and legislation.• The UNCT could adopt a joint gender advocacy and communication strategy and work plan.• The agencies should further strengthen joint external communications on gender to ensure consistent messages and information and promote gender equality in external communications.	4. UNCT will develop a Country Gender Equality Profile as part of the SDCF preparation process and undertake strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis.	Human Rights and Gender Theme Group; UN Women	Oct 2020 – Jun 2021	UNCT personnel (internal resources mobilized)
	5. Ensure gender mainstreaming is explicitly referred to as the guiding principle in the 2021-2025 SDCF; that SDCF Results Framework is gender responsive; and the indicators available are, where relevant, sex disaggregated.	UNCT	Jun – Dec 2020	No
	6. UNCT will revitalize Human Rights and Gender Theme Group.	UNCT; OHCHR	Oct – Dec 2020	No
	7. Gender Theme group will review joint proposals before submission for funding to ensure gender is properly mainstreamed and implementation of international commitments is properly integrated.	Gender Theme Group; RCO	Jan 2021 – Dec 2025	No

<i>Recommendations</i>	<i>Actions to be taken</i>	<i>Responsible</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>	<i>Resource</i>
	Gender Marker and Gender Scorecard are implemented throughout the programme cycle.			
	8. UNCT will ensure that joint gender advocacy is integrated in the SDCF communications strategy	UN Communications Group (UN CG)	Oct – Dec 2020	UNCT personnel
Cross-sectoral analytical products, strategies and assessments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNCT also strengthen cooperation around the production of analytical products. 	9. UNCT will develop, through Joint Workplans (JWPs), and agree on the required and planned assessments, analysis and support to development of national strategies and strive for joint efforts, whenever viable	UNCT; Programme Management Team (PMT); Results Groups	Jan 2021 – Dec 2025	UNCT personnel
Advocacy, awareness-raising and communications with a focus on behavioural change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agencies should find ways of cooperating more actively in the conduct of joint advocacy activities. To the extent possible, the agencies should explore ways of delivering to external audiences stronger one-voice messages on such key issues. 	10. Develop SDCF Joint Communications and Advocacy Strategy	UNCT; UN CG	Oct – Dec 2020	UNCT resources; RCO budget
	11. Conduct behavioural study to understand young people's perceptions on the development challenges and their active role in identifying solutions and leading change	UNCT; UN CG	Jun – Dec 2020	UNCT resources; RCO budget
	12. UNCT will continue developing annual communications action plans for observance of international days and joint advocacy messages and campaigns on themes of importance for the UN	UNCT; UN CG	Feb 2020 – Dec 2025	UNCT resources; RCO budget
	13. UNCT will proactively promote and contribute to the joint advocacy and joint communications products	UNCT; RCO; UN CG	Jun 2020 – Dec 20205	UNCT resources; RCO budget
Trainings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agencies should seek to identify jointly training needs and design and deliver training programmes jointly. RCO should play a more active role in coordinating and organizing some of these joint trainings for agency staff; and share with agency staff good examples from other countries where inter-agency cooperation has been more intensive and has produced good results. 	14. When preparing the Joint annual workplans, mapping of planned trainings for the beneficiaries (within the programmes) will be undertaken. RCO will establish a monitoring system and support in coordination as needed.	PMT; RCO	Jan 2021 – Dec 2025	No additional budget required
	15. Annual UN staff training workplan we be incorporated in the UNCT coordination workplan, with RCO providing enhanced support with coordination of trainings and team building events (virtual and physical, as per the agreed schedule)	UNCT; RCO	Jan 2021 – Dec 2025	UNCT resources; RCO budget

<i>Recommendations</i>	<i>Actions to be taken</i>	<i>Responsible</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>	<i>Resource</i>
Resource mobilization and partnerships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agencies should more closely coordinate fundraising activities and partnerships. In particular, agencies should explore ways to approach the Government regarding cost-sharing in a more coordinated fashion. RCO should play a greater role in coordinating resource mobilization activities. In particular, a joint resource mobilization strategy at the UNCT level is recommended by the evaluation. 	16. Develop UN Joint Resource Mobilization Strategy	UNCT; RCO	Jan – Mar 2021	No
	17. Improve inter-agency communication and cooperation through scaled up coordination (regular UNCT, other meetings), increased joint programming, regular joint meetings with Government counterparts, regular meetings with donors	RC; RCO; UNCT	Feb 2020 – Dec 2025	No
Other cooperation opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNCT should explore ways for further integrating activities under outcome areas one and three (employment and social inclusion). 	18. Results groups for outcomes 1 and 3 will jointly work to address the overlaps or the gaps in implementing the activities on employment and provision of services to the vulnerable groups of the population. In future, UNCT will review the division of outcomes and improve the forthcoming SDCF results framework.	Results groups; UNCT	Feb – Dec 2020	No
Sustainable Development Goals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNCT should strengthen cooperation around the SDGs. Under RCO's coordination, the agencies should agree on a clearer division of labour in the area of support for the promotion and implementation of SDGs. Given their cross-sectoral nature, UNCT should explore ways of turning the SDGs into a mechanism that facilitates closer cooperation among the agencies. 	19. UNCT will include a section on SDGs support into JWPs to improve the internal division of labour in the area of support for SDGs promotion and implementation.	PMT; RCO	Jan 2021 – Dec 2025	No
	20. UN will support the Government in preparing the first Voluntary National Review (VNR) and support the post VNR processes, i.e. development of national vision or strategy or development plan; support in determining SDG accelerators; improvement of SDGs monitoring system; advocacy and partnerships, etc.	UNCT; RCO	Jan 2020 – Dec 2025	UNCT funding; RCO budget; third-party funding.
	21. SDGs monitoring gaps assessment will be undertaken to support the State Statistical Office (SSO), along with capacity building activities and support in establishment of the monitoring system.	RCO; PMT	Sep 2020 – Jun 2021	UNCT funding; RCO budget; third-party funding.
EU integration process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNCT should explore opportunities for greater engagement with the EU at the level of the UN. 	22. UNCT will strengthen its collective partnership with EU, both at strategic (policy) and implementation level in thematic areas of joint interest. 23. UN will work towards the integration and alignment of its work under the SDCF and the Government's efforts towards EU accession.	RC; UNCT	Feb 2020 – Dec 2025	No

<i>Recommendations</i>	<i>Actions to be taken</i>	<i>Responsible</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>	<i>Resource</i>
RECOMMENDATION 2: Data and programme design & monitoring		<u>ACCEPTED</u>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If there is progress with the adoption of a national SDG framework, UNCT should ground the upcoming programme results framework in the national SDG framework. 	24. UNCT will advocate for the adoption of a national sustainable development strategy / vision and the accompanying national SDG framework.	RC; UNCT	Jul 2020 – Jun 2021	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To make the SDCF results framework more practical and user-friendly, the number of indicators should be reduced and focus on those that are most meaningful and more directly related to the work of the UNCT. SDCF document would benefit from the articulation of a solid theory of change that connects different pieces of work that UN entities carry out into a unified/coherent framework. 	25. New UNSDCF results framework will be designed with all recommendations fully taken into consideration, including less but carefully selected specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) indicators based on the SDGs framework; and outcomes designed based on a sound and solid theory of change.	UNCT; RCO	Mar – Dec 2020	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNCT should establish a more comprehensive monitoring system, under the coordination of the RCO. The system should encompass not only results, but also performance indicators such as the ones discussed in this report. UN entities should provide the necessary information and assisting with the analysis. 	26. Migrate SDCF planning and reporting to UN INFO;	RCO; PMT; Results Groups	Sep 2020 – Dec 2020	UNCT personnel
	27. Establish mechanisms and platforms for improved monitoring and reporting of results, and joint initiatives, for example SDGs action, pilots and innovations, assessments and strategies support, trainings, and others as necessary.	RCO; PMT; Results Groups	Sep 2020 – Dec 2020	UNCT personnel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNCT should <i>evaluate the results and impact of its work more frequently</i> and in a more cohesive way 	28. Prepare and carry out a SDCF Monitoring, Learning and Evaluation (MEL) plan	UNCT; PMT (M&E Group) RCO	Oct – Dec 2020	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UN should strengthen its work in support of data collection, analysis and use by partners at the national and sub-national levels. and fostering a culture of evidence use in policymaking. 	29. Develop UN Country Data Strategy, based on Global UN Data Strategy that will focus on developing UN data capacities and operationalize SDCF commitments to support the Government in improving data generation, analysis and evidence-based policy making.	UNCT; PMT (M&E Group); RCO	Oct 2020 – Mar 2021	UNCT resources; RCO budget

Recommendations	Actions to be taken	Responsible	Timeframe	Resource
RECOMMENDATION 3: Sustainability of UNCT interventions		ACCEPTED		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNCT should focus its support not only on the development of policies, strategies, draft laws, etc., but also on <i>how to get these instruments implemented</i> by the respective government entities. Agencies need to focus on linking policy making a lot more closely to the Government's public financial management (PFM) system, by strengthening their capacity and engagement with the Ministry of Finance. The agencies should also strengthen the <i>systems that track broader results</i>, rather than inputs/outputs and assess more rigorously the sustainability of achievements. 	30. SDCF will give more attention to policy implementation, in addition to policy development support.	UNCT; RCO	Mar – Oct 2020	No
	31. UN will enhance collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, to improve the programme budgeting for policies development and to enhance SDGs financing. (applies as well for a section of the first point of this recommendation related to improved results monitoring).	UNCT; RC	Sep 2020 – Dec 2021	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNCT should design pilot initiatives more carefully to ensure that they become systemic, scaled up or replicated and that effects do not remain limited in scale and scope. The agencies should also establish an effective system for the tracking the performance of pilot initiatives over time. The UN should also focus more on documenting results, lessons, experiences, and good practices so that they are shared more widely, replicated, and scaled up. The UNRC Office should coordinate more closely the approaches taken by the agencies on piloting. 	32. Pilot initiatives and innovations will be tracked, lessons learned exchanged and potentials for scaling up regularly discussed at PMT and Results Groups meetings	PMT; Results groups	Jan 2021 – Dec 2025	No
	33. Analyse, discuss with the national partners and adopt approaches to ensure sustainability of results as integral part SDCF	UNCT; PMT	Oct 2020 – Dec 2025	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNCT should design information-sharing and awareness-raising activities by identifying in clear terms the types of behaviours that are targeted and the channels through which behaviour changes are expected to occur. The agencies should take social norms seriously into account and understand the social norms prevailing in their areas of work and in the specific community targeted by their interventions. 	34. CCA and its updates will focus on analysis of social norms. Results of behavioural study focusing on youth (11, above) to inform UN future programming.	UNCT; RCO	Feb – Dec 2024	RCO budget

<i>Recommendations</i>	<i>Actions to be taken</i>	<i>Responsible</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>	<i>Resource</i>
<u>RECOMMENDATION 4: Sustainability of financing</u>		<u>ACCEPTED</u>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To respond adequately to the needs and priorities of the country, UNCT should collectively explore options for increasing its financial capacity through sustainable financing sources that are better suited to medium income country context. These sources include cost-sharing with the Government, financing from the private sector and partnerships with International Financing Institutions that have financing portfolios for the country. Further, in this financially constrained operational environment, it will be important to avoid competition for funding by coordinating interaction with the Government and donors. To achieve this, a UNCT Resource Mobilization Strategy, coordinated by the RC, should be developed. 	35. See actions 3, 16 and 17. In addition, ensure (during the preparation and implementation of the UN Resource Mobilization Strategy) that the new financing architecture allows for the greater alignment of UN, government and donor funds	RC; UNCT	Oct 2020 – Dec 2025	No
<u>RECOMMENDATION 5: Strengthening UNCT role in coordination of development partners</u>		<u>ACCEPTED</u>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNCT should strengthen the <i>support for government entities in improving their coordination capabilities</i>. In their respective sectors, the agencies can play a greater role in this area. Without side lining the Government, the UNCT can also play a greater coordinating role in the thematic areas where the agencies have the greatest involvement. This is the case particularly at the sub-national level where the UN has a strong presence, history and relationships with government and non-governmental actors. 	36. Assess the needs of the Secretariat for European Affairs and design a support package for enhanced coordination	RCO	Jan – Jun 2021	To be determined
	37. Continue with the development of institutional and policy capacities, focusing the interventions on the achievements of SDGs	UNCT	Feb 2021 – Dec 2025	UNCT programme funding
	38. Consider opportunities to define and put in place a system to measure impact of capacity development initiatives, delivered within the scope of SDCF	UNCT; RCO	Jan – Jun 2021	To be determined
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are opportunities for <i>stronger coordination with the EU</i>, North Macedonia's main development partner that drives the reform agenda in many areas. There is an opportunity for linking the EU accession agenda and the SDGs, which will ensure greater alignment of UN System. The two organizations could also work more closely together in areas where both have substantial engagement – i.e. decentralization, regional development, management of natural resources, climate change, agriculture adaptation and productivity, flood risk management, etc. 	39. See actions 22 and 23.			