



Inception Report:

System-Wide Evaluation of the UNDS Response to COVID-19

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Executive Office of the Secretary General
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ACRONYMS

CCA	Common Country Assessment
CF	Cooperation Framework
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease-2019
DCO	Development Coordination Office
DESA	Department of Social and Economic Affairs
GDI	Gender Development Index
GE	Gender Equality
GEM	Gender Equity Marker
HDI	Human Development Index
HR	Human Rights
LI	Low Income
LMI	Low-Middle Income
LNOB	Leave no one behind
MPTF	Multi-Partner Trust Fund
MPTFO	Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office
NRA	Non-Resident UN Agency
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
QA	Quality Assurance
QCPR	Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review
RC	Resident Coordinator
RCO	Resident Coordinator Office
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEIA	Socio-Economic Impact Assessment
SERP	Socio-Economic Response Plan
SIDS	Small Island Developing State
SWE	System-Wide Evaluation
SWSD	System-Wide Strategy Document
UMI	Upper Middle Income
UNCT	UN Country Team
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDS	United Nations Development System
UNSDCF	UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UNSDG	UN Sustainable Development Group

1. Introduction

1.1. Background: COVID-19 and the Overall UN Response

On September 10, 2021, the United Nations Secretary General presented his report *Our Common Agenda* to the General Assembly detailing his vision of the way forward for the multilateral system and the world in light of COVID-19 and other major ongoing crises. He specifically emphasized the devastating effects of the pandemic (UN 2021a, p.12):

“The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has been a challenge like no other since the Second World War, revealing our shared vulnerability and interconnectedness. It has exposed human rights concerns and exacerbated deep fragilities and inequalities in our societies. It has amplified disenchantment with institutions and political leadership as the virus has lingered. We have also seen many examples of vaccine nationalism. Moreover, with less than a decade to go, the Sustainable Development Goals have been thrown even further off track.”

When the report was discussed at an informal plenary session of the General Assembly on October 25, 2021, one of the delegates pointed out “continuing with business as usual is very attractive, but it will not resolve the issues facing our people” (IISD 2021).

This call to move away from business as usual was echoed in the *Secretary General’s Report on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review 2021*, which emphasized the need to build on progress in repositioning the United Nations Development System (UNDS) through ongoing reforms as an essential component of the response to COVID-19 (UN 2021b, p.4):

“We need to move faster in effecting the transition of the mindset and skill sets in each entity of the United Nations development system, including by aligning agency specific policy making, planning and programming in support of an integrated response.”

There is a clear dual recognition of both the challenge faced by the UNDS as it responded, and continues to respond, to the socio-economic effects of the rapidly changing COVID-19 pandemic and the essential role played by the reform process in enabling and, potentially, accelerating that response.

The key objective of the immediate UNDS response to the Covid-19 pandemic has been to support countries and societies in addressing the socio-economic fallout of the crisis, especially for the most vulnerable. To that end, and in line with ongoing reform, the UNDS was to leverage the full breadth of the system’s capacities and draw on the strength of multilateral norms and values for an integrated package of support. Formulated under the global UN Framework and tailored to national priorities in the form of country-specific Socio-Economic Response Plans (SERPs), the UNDS response had a dual purpose: while focused on stemming the immediate impact of the pandemic, UNDS support also seeks to define entry points for a better recovery, oriented towards sustainable development as formulated in the 2030 Agenda. Key UN norms and values such as human rights, gender equality, inclusion [including persons with disabilities, and leaving no one behind (LNOB)] were to form an integral part of the UNDS response.

The UNDS response has been taking place in a highly dynamic and complex setting, which the evaluation also needs to recognize and account for: the uncertainty of the pandemic's course, its unprecedented economic and social disruption, and the uneven and inequitable vaccine response have all required continuous adaptation. While it was clear early on that the pandemic would set back efforts to progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the extent of these setbacks is still emerging.

At the same time, UN structures at country and regional levels were in the midst of major changes when the pandemic began. Adjusting to reform demands to meet the requirements of the 2030 Agenda, the reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system was being established, and UN country teams (UNCTs) were reorganising the way they worked together to support countries to achieve the SDGs, aiming for greater coherence and integrated approaches across sectors and organisations. This is an ambitious undertaking at a time when the UN Reform is working to bring coherence to a system that is sometimes fragmented by differing mandates, incentive structures and governance arrangements, and which furthermore depends on insecure funding.

With its unique system-wide perspective, this evaluation can serve the essential function of providing an overall assessment of the UNDS response, supported by an analysis of how the process of UNDS reform may have enabled and/or constrained that response. It will also provide an assessment of how well the UNDS response has integrated action on the core UN values of human rights, gender equality, inclusion (including persons with disabilities) and LNOB. Finally, by addressing the socio-economic response in 2020 and 2021, the evaluation can help identify barriers and recommend changes which can better position the UNDS to contribute to the goals of *Our Common Agenda*. **As such it will be of direct interest to senior managers in the UN, including heads of agencies, to all member states and to the general public. In sum, a timely and informative evaluation holds out the potential to help secure a successful and coherent UNDS socio-economic response to the pandemic moving forward which, in turn, represents an important step in securing the goals of *Our Common Agenda* (United Nations 2021a).**

1.2. Responding to the Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19

As early as March 2020, the United Nations Secretary-General wrote of the socio-economic effects of the pandemic evident in just the first 12 weeks and the potential for much deeper devastation to come (UN 2020a, p.8):

“Tragically, the COVID-19 Crisis risks reversing decades of progress in the fight against poverty and exacerbating high levels of inequality within and between countries. Unless measures are promptly put in place, the disruptions imposed by the pandemic and the measures adopted to suppress the virus will dramatically worsen the situation.”

In anticipation of the potential effect of the pandemic on people's lives and livelihoods, the Secretary General's March 2020 report (UN 2020a) established the objectives for what quickly became a three-part response to COVID-19 by the United Nations System:

- OCHA's Global Humanitarian Response Plan;
- WHO's Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan;
- The UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19.

The global guidance and coordination around the humanitarian response was led by OCHA with WHO providing the same leadership around the health response.

The UN Framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19 was prepared through an inter-agency process led jointly by the Development Coordination Office (DCO) and UNDP. This became the framing document or the country level UN socio-economic response plans which typically focused on the five pillars of the Framework.

At the country level, the Framework was to be mobilized, on the UN side, by UNCTs under the overall leadership of the Resident Coordinators with the UNDP as technical lead, always recognizing national priorities. (UN 2020b, p.2). The UNCT Socio-Economic Response Plans (SERPs) are typically organized under five areas for action (UN 2020b, p.11):

1. Health First: Protecting health services and systems during the crisis;
2. Protecting People: Social protection and basic services;
3. Economic Response and Recovery: Protecting jobs, small and medium sized enterprises, and vulnerable workers in the informal sector;
4. Macroeconomic response and multilateral collaboration;
5. Social cohesion and community resilience.¹

UNDS actions across these five pillars, as illustrated in the theory of change in section 3.2, and their effectiveness at country level as implemented by UNCTs will be a central focus of the evaluation. The five pillars were also supported by a commitment that the UNDS response to COVID-19 will emphasise “environmental sustainability and a gender imperative to build back better” (2020b, p.1).

Some key informants contacted for global level interviews during the inception phase noted that UNCT country level SERPs were not intended solely as a means of faithfully implementing the five pillars of the framework. Rather, the five pillars would serve as a framing device to guide the UN response that was: a) responsive to national priorities; and b) capable of scaling up actions already included in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) or Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (CF) to allow them to ramp up quickly and effectively and to demonstrate the UN working together in emergency mode.

The pandemic began at a time when the UNDS was in its second year of implementing a set of ambitious reforms to better position it for the demands of the 2030 Agenda. The link between the UNDS response to COVID-19 and the reform process is further elaborated in Section 2.2.

1.3. Objectives of the UNDS Response

The UN Framework sets out the typology of UNDS support for each pillar of the response and recovery (UN 2020b, p.11-31) as detailed below.

¹ These five areas of action are presented in the Theory of Change (section 3.2) in a different order and in more detail to provide a clearer illustration of the link between the UNDS response and its theoretical outcomes.

Table 1: Characteristics of UNDS Support in Each Pillar of the Framework

Framework Pillar	What the UNDS will do
1. Health First: Protecting health services and systems during the crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support countries to maintain essential health services • Provide analytic and policy support and rapid technical guidance • Support programme implementation • Support tracking and reaching vulnerable groups.
2. Protecting People: Social protection and basic services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support scaling up and expansion of resilient and pro-poor social protection systems • Maintain essential food and nutrition services • Ensure continuity and quality of water and sanitation services • Support the continuity of social services and access to shelters • Support victims of Gender-Based Violence
3. Economic Response and Recovery: Protecting jobs, small and medium sized enterprises, and vulnerable workers in the informal sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide integrated, country-specific policy advice and programme support • Support the scaling-up of employment intensive programming • Support young people and social partners in entrepreneurship and social innovation • Support strategies for green fiscal stimulation packages • Support rapid and gender-responsive socio-economic assessment and labor market and business environment diagnostics • Support nature-based solutions for development • Support investments to improve productivity in micro and small farms • Provide technical support to women micro and small entrepreneurs • Digital payment support • Provide assistance to address trade challenges • Support e-commerce and digital solutions
4. Macroeconomic response and multilateral collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide analytic and technical assistance on the fiscal response and policies for a sustainable recovery • Support evidence-based policy making • Provide advice on social expenditure monitoring and mapping budgets for social development priorities • Conduct comprehensive impact assessments
5. Social cohesion and community resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support inclusive social dialogue, advocacy and political engagement • Empower community resilience, participation and equitable service delivery • Support fundamental freedoms, governance and the rule of law

By undertaking an integrated programme of support as detailed in Table 1, UNCTs were given a framework for contributing to the overall objective of the response (UN 2020b, p.1):

“People everywhere must have access to social services and social protection. Jobs, businesses and livelihoods must be protected; and a safe and equitable recovery of societies and economies must be set in motion as soon as possible, with the long-term goal of directing economies along a sustainable, gender equal and carbon-neutral trajectory.”

The objective was to be accomplished through “an integrated support package offered by the UNDS to protect the needs and rights of people living under the duress of the pandemic, with particular focus on the most vulnerable countries, groups and people who risk being left behind” (UN 2020b, p.1).

The UN Framework stated plainly, “The UNDS is switching to emergency mode, helping countries within the coming 12-18 months to shore up health systems, prevent a breakdown of food systems, restore

and build back better their basic social services and other measures to minimize the impact of the Pandemic on the most vulnerable populations” (UN 2020b, p.10). Initial interviews during the inception phase of the evaluation have pointed out that UNDS reform was a necessary pre-condition for this pivot into emergency mode.

Section 3.2 presents an overall, high-level theory of change (ToC) for the UNDS response to socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 with linkages from the five pillars to key results.

1.4. Objectives of the Evaluation

The Early Lessons and Evaluability Assessment of the COVID-19 MPTF (UN 2021c) noted the important role of the SERPs in influencing and shaping the short and medium term UNDS response at country level and, with the CFs, as a critical element in restoring and re-energizing progress toward the SDGs.

As specified in the evaluation terms of reference (UN 2021d, p.4), the over-arching objective of the evaluation is to assess progress and provide accountability of the UN Development System’s contribution to the socio-economic response to COVID-19 at the country level and to learn lessons to accelerate progress towards recovering better and greener and achieving the SDGs in the context of UNDS reform. Specific objectives include (UN 2021d, p.4):

1. Provide an assessment of progress and results in the implementation of the UN Framework on the socio-economic response to COVID-19 as well as medium and longer-term approaches as operationalized through the SERPs and evolving Cooperation Frameworks.
2. Provide an assessment of the contribution of pooled funds to collaborative, coherent programming by the UNDS and identify operational and funding constraints which may limit their contribution.
3. Present an assessment of the strategic coherence and collective value of UNCTs (including non-resident agencies) in supporting the socio-economic response to COVID-19.
4. Learn lessons on how the new generation of UNCTs can build on the experience of the SERPs and CFs to better work with national governments and partners to progress towards recovering better and greener in line with core values of furthering human rights, gender equality and inclusion during the decade of action to deliver on the SDGs.
5. Learn lessons on how the UNCTs can build on the inter-agency and cross sectoral collaboration to overcome constraints and identify incentive structures for better collaborative results from the SERP/CF implementation in line with the UN Development System Reform objectives.

The evaluation will provide an important opportunity to assess the contribution of the UNDS reform process as a factor facilitating a coherent UNDS response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19.

1.5. Purpose and Structure of the Report

Purpose

The purpose of this Inception Report is to present the results of the initial desk review of documents and inception phase interviews in order to outline the scope of the exercise, provide an overview of

analytical methods to be applied and develop and present the work plan for completing all required tasks and achieving the study objectives. Given the nature of the response to this unprecedented crisis, some aspects of the scope and methods in the Inception Report will be adapted to the changing situation on the ground as the evaluation moves forward. This is required for a timely evaluation report that is useful for decision making based on emerging and final evaluation findings.

Structure

This report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 1 presents this introduction.
- Chapter 2 provides an overview of the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 in relation to the SDGs and how the response is linked to reforms of the UNDS system.
- Chapter 3 describes the scope of the evaluation and presents the theory of change for the UNDS response as well as key assumptions and evaluation questions and sub-questions.
- Chapter 4 covers the evaluation approach, methodology, and quality assurance arrangements.
- Chapter 5 presents the overall schedule and workplan.

1.6. Interim and Final Reports

As a System-Wide Evaluation (SWE), it is important that the results of the evaluation are available at key points in the decision making and accountability cycle of the UN. This was achieved during the Early Lessons and Evaluability Study of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund by ensuring that the final report was available for consideration in the Secretary General's Report on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) in March 2021 and to support the Secretary General's Report on the Review of the functioning of the Resident Coordinator System in June 2021. This evaluation will serve as an input to Member State decision making in the ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment by issuing an Interim Report in March 2022. This will be followed by a final evaluation report in September of the same year.

The Interim Report will reflect progress in data collection and analysis in the first four months of the study and will be based on:

- An interim synthesis of lessons learned on the UNDS socio-economic response to COVID-19 as reported in completed evaluation reports;
- Global level document reviews and interviews at global, regional and in a sub-set of case study countries; and
- The results of the pilot country case study mission to be conducted in late January 2022.

The Final Report in September 2022 will incorporate the evaluation evidence gathered through all data collection methods described in Chapter 4.

2. COVID-19, the SDGs and the UNDS Socio-economic Response

Document reviews and interviews during the inception phase of the evaluation have illustrated clearly that the UNDS response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 is at the core of efforts to restore

progress toward the achievement of the SDGs and Agenda 2030. As one key informant queried, “did the UNDS response help to build a safety net under the SDGs and Agenda 2030 and will it help to regain the lost years?”. The documents and interviews also highlighted the clear link between the ongoing process of UNDS reform and the effectiveness of the UNDS response.

2.1. COVID-19 as a Set-back for the SDGs

In March 2020, the Secretary General noted that the pandemic was negatively impacting progress toward all 17 SDGs. As well as highlighting its impact on global poverty, he pointed to the way that COVID-19 could reverse or limit progress to reaching SDGs essential to reducing inequality (UN 2020a, p.12). The Secretary General’s concerns have been confirmed as more data on the social and economic impacts of COVID-19, and the subsequent damage to progress toward the SDGs, has become available by late 2021.

Table 2: Effect of COVID-19 on Selected SDGs

Sustainable Development Goal	Negative Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on SDG 10: Reduced Inequality
1. No Poverty	Loss of income leading vulnerable segments of society and families to fall below poverty line.
4. Quality Education	Schools for many closed; remote learning less effective and not accessible for some.
5. Gender Equality	Women’s economic gains at risk and increased levels of violence against women. Women account for the majority of health and social care workers who are more exposed to COVID-19
8. Decent Work and Economic Conditions	Economic activities suspended; lower income, less working time, unemployment for certain occupations.
11. Sustainable Cities and Communities	Populations living in slums face higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 due to high population density and poor sanitation conditions.

In the intervening 20 months, most of the fears of setbacks in progress toward the SDGs have been confirmed or even increased. Faced with an uneven and inequitable vaccine response and the emergence of more infectious variants, the world has struggled to bring an end to the pandemic and to even begin the process of recovery.²

While the Sustainable Development Goals Report (2021) notes that some SDGs were off track even before COVID-19 emerged, it also emphasizes the significant progress made (up to 2019) in poverty reduction, maternal and child health, access to electricity, and gender equality, amongst other goals (UN 2021e, p.2). The current crisis has gravely threatened these development gains; halting or reversing some of the progress made towards achieving the SDGs over the last six years.

² Much of the material for this section is drawn from the Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2021 which draws on material reported by a wide cross-section of UN entities. Entities also produce their own, thematic reporting on the impacts of COVID-19 on specific SDGs. Some of that material is included here, and the evaluation will continue to monitor ongoing publication of data and analysis of the impact of the pandemic.

The full toll of the COVID-19 pandemic on health is not yet known. As of 30 November 2021, the total number of reported deaths from COVID-19 had surpassed 5.2 million globally (WHO 2021). The pandemic has brought disruptions in health services, including in detecting and treating communicable diseases as well as reproductive health services, which negatively impacts women most significantly (Goal 3).

Alarmingly, for the first time in over 20 years the global extreme poverty rate rose in 2020, as an additional 119-124 million people were pushed back into extreme poverty due in part to weak social protection systems in the face of the pandemic (UN 2021e, p.27). This increase completely wiped away the progress made since 2016 towards eradicating poverty (Goal 1). New estimates project the poverty rate to be 7% (around 600 million people) in 2030, fully missing the goal of eradicating poverty by 2030 (UN 2021e, p.27). Increases in rates of extreme poverty will be disproportionately shouldered by women and children based on global patterns (Azcona and Bhatt N.D.)³.

For many countries, economic growth will remain below pre-pandemic trends for a prolonged period, as they continue to face insufficient vaccine coverage and a lack of fiscal and monetary support (UN 2021e, p.42). Although real GDP in least developed countries is expected to increase in 2021 (4.0%) and 2022 (5.0%), it is expected to remain below the 7% target envisioned for the 2030 Agenda (Goal 8) (UN 2021e, p.42).

The COVID-19 crisis demonstrated more than ever the importance of social protection measures to protect people's income, jobs, and health. While more than 1,600 social protection measures were implemented across 209 countries during 2020 in response to the crisis, almost all were short term in nature (94.7%), and social protection benefits were unequal across countries. High-income countries provided at least one social protection benefit to 85.4% of the population, while only 13.4% of the

IMF World Economic Outlook: October 2021

Compared to our July forecast, the global growth projection for 2021 has been revised down marginally to 5.9 percent and is unchanged for 2022 at 4.9 percent. This modest headline revision, however, masks large downgrades for some countries. **The outlook for the low-income developing country group has darkened considerably due to worsening pandemic dynamics.** (IMF, 2021, p.vii).

population in low-income countries was covered by at least one social protection benefit (UN 2021e, p.27). Access to social protection benefits were also unequal within countries, with poor/marginalized women, informal sector workers, migrant workers, refugees and their families requiring targeted and responsive social protection measures to bridge the protection gaps, inequalities and

discrimination evidenced during the pandemic (ILO 2021; Azcona et al. 2021)

The global unemployment rate reached 6.5% in 2020, 1.1 percentage points higher than the previous year (UN 2021e, p.42). Rising unemployment had an especially pronounced effect on the livelihoods of women, who suffered a disproportionate share of job losses and increased care work at home. Employment sectors such as accommodation and food services were particularly hard-hit by the pandemic, impacting women most severely in countries where these sectors are highly feminized and often informal (ILO 2020). The pandemic has also intensified violence against women and threatened global progress against child marriage (Azcona et al. 2021). Over the next decade, up to 10 million more

³ Children comprise 46% of the extreme poor (while representing only 28% of the population overall). Globally, 50 million women aged 25-34 lived in extreme poverty before the pandemic, compared to 40 million men.

girls will be at risk of child marriage as a result of the pandemic. Achieving gender equality (Goal 5) by 2030 will require a vast effort in re-shaping and rebuilding systems, laws, and policies (UN 2021e, p.36).

Progress in education was already behind what was required to achieve Goal 4 (Quality Education) pre-pandemic, but one hundred million more children have failed to demonstrate basic reading skills in the pandemic era (UN 2021e, p.34). This regresses all progress achieved in education over the past 20 years. Increasing poverty and the shift to remote learning have put children from the poorest households further behind, exacerbating longstanding inequalities (UN 2021e, p.34). School closures and disruptions in education put girls at heightened risk of school dropout, early marriage and child/teen pregnancy, further exacerbated by gender gaps in digital access and skills (Azcona et al. 2021, p.15). Much of the longstanding impact of COVID-19 on education remains unknown as the pandemic continues.

The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated unequivocally that SDG goals are interdependent: health, well-being, social and economic prosperity, gender equality and environmental sustainability, among others, share multiple interlinkages. To address the setbacks and challenges exposed by the pandemic, governments and the international community must “make structural transformations and develop common solutions guided by the SDGs” (UN 2021e, p.3).

The UN Secretary General has identified this point in time as a global test whereby we must choose between either a breakdown or a breakthrough. In *Our Common Agenda* (UN 2021a, p. 14) he notes:

“Let there be no illusion: COVID-19 may pale in comparison to future challenges if we do not learn from failures that have cost lives and livelihoods. Our best projections show that a stark choice confronts us: to continue with business as usual and risk significant breakdown and perpetual crisis, or to make concerted efforts to break through and achieve an international system that delivers for people and the planet.”

Guided by 12 areas of action, *Our Common Agenda*, presents a roadmap to accelerating the implementation of the SDGs and building back better. Key proposals are guided by 12 commitments⁴: 1) leave no one behind; 2) protect our planet; 3) promote peace and prevent conflicts; 4) abide by international law and ensure justice; 5) place women and girls at the center; 6) build trust; 7) improve digital cooperation; 8) upgrade the UN; 9) ensure sustainable financing; 10) boost partnerships; 11) listen to and work with youth; and 12) be prepared.

2.2. Reform and the UNDS Response

The Early Lessons and Evaluability of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF identified a close link between the implementation of the UNDS reform process and the successful launch and implementation of the COVID-19 MPTF (UN 2021c, p.35-36). Interviews and document reviews carried out for the inception phase of this evaluation further reinforced the connection between reforms and a successful UNDS response.

In June 2017, the Secretary General issued the report: *Repositioning the UN development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda – Ensuring a Better Future for All*. The report makes clear that the over-

⁴ The 12 commitments are drawn from the declaration of the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations (UN 2021).

arching objective of UNDS reform is to better position the UNDS to provide coherent and collective support to national governments (UN 2017, p.4):

“Today, there is an imperative to ensure we have a system firmly in place that emphasizes leadership, accountability, collaboration, efficiency and results. Governments and partners are counting on us - Governments have already requested support as they localize and implement the SDGs.”

In the context of the response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, the most important objectives of the reforms are to enable a coherent and sustained focus on progress toward the SDGs through policy and programme support which is coherent within the framework of the SERPs, draws on the comparative advantages of UNDS entities, and advances the core UN values of human rights, gender equality and LNOB.

Progress in UNDS Reform

The Secretary General has highlighted progress in strengthening the RC system as a core element of the reforms (UN 2021g, p3-4). In particular, his report points to:

- The resident coordinator system meeting its immediate objectives;
- RC leadership and authority facilitating more consistent and coherent UN engagement with Governments and partners, including international financial institutions;
- Investments in core capacities to support RCs showing added value;
- The five professional positions in RCOs facilitating improved UNCT planning, and stronger emphasis on SDG financing and economic policy;
- Development Cooperation Office (DCO) ensuring timely and responsive Secretariat support for the work of the UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) at the global level;
- Evidence that improved leadership, coordination and convening by RCs is translating into a strengthened and more tailored contribution from United Nations country teams.

The achievements identified in the Secretary General’s Report were, to some extent, endorsed by the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment (MOPAN) Report: *Lessons in Multilateral Effectiveness Is this time different? UNDS Reform: Progress, challenges and opportunities* (MOPAN 2021, p.4).

“There has been notable progress across many of the central transformation areas, signifying success in building the architecture of the reform. Key achievements include the establishment of a reinvigorated RC system and a more coherent, inclusive UNCT, brought closer together through and as demonstrated by the COVID-19 response.”

The 2021 Report of the Chair of the UNSDG on the operations of the DCO highlighted the reported advancements in UNDS reform during, and partly as a result of, the COVID-19 crisis (UN 2021f, p.3).

“For the first time, the United Nations development system was able to deliver in “emergency mode” – previously only witnessed on the humanitarian front. Results were facilitated by a swift system-wide effort to develop United Nations socioeconomic response plans, rapid repurposing and mobilization of resources and ensuring United Nations country team business continuity.

In hindsight, the COVID-19 response was not only a stress test for the reforms; it also served to accelerate the emergence of a new generation of United Nations country teams that are better equipped to address complex challenges through an integrated approach, making the most of the assets of the United Nations at all levels. United Nations Socio-Economic Response Plans,

put together by United Nations country teams working with Governments and stakeholders, took the system to a new level in joint planning and results.”

One concrete measure of how UNDS reforms are proceeding at country level can be found in progress in staffing of Resident Coordinators Offices (RCO) (UN 2021f, p.10).

Table 3: Staffing Resident Coordinator Offices (March 2021)

Progress in Staffing RCOs		
Position	2019	2020
Strategic Planner	75	124
Economist	73	125
Data and Results	78	117
Partnerships	71	111
Communications	72	78
Total	369	555
Female	182	273
Male	187	282

Challenges to UNDS Reform

The Secretary General, in his review of the functioning of the Resident Coordinator system, noted two challenges to the full realization of the promise of the reforms (UN 2021f, para.131).

“I focus in on two additional areas that I cannot emphasize enough as being critical determinants of whether we can take the functioning of the RC system and the repositioning of the UN development system to the next level: the incentive for change provided by improved funding practices and the implementation of the accountabilities set out in 72/279. Some progress has been made but, in both cases, the big shift in behavior has yet to occur. Decisive action is now needed. “

The General Assembly responded to the Secretary General’s review in its draft resolution of October 21 by (UN 2021h, p.1):

“Noting with great concern the threat to human health, safety and well-being caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, as well as the severe disruption to economies and societies and the devastating impact on the lives and livelihoods, and that the poorest and most vulnerable are the hardest hit by the pandemic, reaffirming the ambition to get back on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by designing sustainable and inclusive recovery strategies to accelerate progress toward the full implementation of the 2030 agenda.”

The resolution went on to recommend a series of steps aimed at deepening and accelerating UNDS reform in order to better respond to the demands of the pandemic including: urging contributions to the coordination levy on earmarked funds; encouraging voluntary contributions to pooled funds; requesting strengthened training for RCs; and requesting that the UNDS should ensure full adherence to a clear, matrixed, dual reporting model to establish full mutual and collective performance appraisal (UN 2021h, p.3-4).

Similarly, the MOPAN report on UNDS Reform noted (MOPAN 2021, p.4):

“The reform is at a critical juncture in which the strong top-down leadership and political will that have driven implementation to date must transition to a more human-centred phase focused on embedding cultural and behavioural changes that can make the reform self-sustaining. Key challenges to the reform include embedding ownership and buy-in across both UN entities and member states (MS), where inconsistencies in capitals/HQ and field levels lead to behaviour misaligned to global commitments. The COVID-19 crisis has supported progress in collective working and is an opportunity for transformation, but must be actively seized or risk going to waste. Against this positive momentum, the reforms face a number of countervailing forces that threaten to stall or regress the change process – chief among these is a funding environment that has not transformed as envisioned and that presents a particularly worrying outlook.”

The Early Lessons and Evaluability Assessment of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund found that progress in UNDS reforms in 2019 had helped to enable rapid implementation of the COVID-19 MPTF and had contributed to a more cohesive response through the SERPs (UN 2021a, p.v). However, the same report noted that there were limitations to the extent that UNCTs were able to collaborate at country level - limitations that suggested there is considerable work left to fully realize the reforms (UN 2021c, p.33). The report found that:

- There is still a degree of competition for resources among UNCT entities and this is influenced by specific preferences held by bilateral development partners to either include or exclude a given UN agency from support, influenced to some extent by administrative ease of extending new financing under existing agency-specific programmes.
- Although most UNCT heads of agencies are accepting and ready to engage with the newly empowered RC, they are still directly accountable for resource mobilization, delivering results and overall agency performance to their entity-specific governing bodies. There seems to be a lack of incentives to work jointly and they are held accountable at the entity level first and foremost for individual, rather than collective, results.
- There is still a lack of clarity among some staff of UNCT entities on the purpose and direction of UNDS reform. This is evident in two important ways: a) a misunderstanding of the relative roles of the RC and the UNDP Resident Representative; and b) the level of joint commitment to and accountability for joint results expected of the UNCT.

3. Evaluation scope

3.1. Overall Scope

The primary focus of the evaluation will be the strategic and programmatic orientation of UNCTs as they respond to the call for a coherent socio-economic response to COVID-19 as per the UNDS reform objectives.

The evaluation will not address either the direct health response to COVID-19 or the humanitarian response. However, it will recognize cross linkages among these three pillars at country level where they occur. The humanitarian response is currently being addressed through an OCHA-led Inter-Agency

Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) alongside evaluations planned by WHO to address the health response. This evaluation will liaise with both efforts as progress is made on the evaluation of all three pillars.

The evaluation will take into account results as reported through the UNDS, but will focus more directly on the extent that the UNDS has been able to develop and implement strategies and programs which are relevant to national socio-economic needs emerging during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially during the post-SERP transition period. As a result of this focus, primary data collection through interviewing at country level will concentrate on gaining the views and experience of national stakeholders engaged in-person or remotely depending on travel limitations and conditions at the time.

The evaluation will cover the period from March 2020 to April 2022. The evaluation is intended to capture lessons on improving the coherence and effectiveness of the overall UNDS contribution to response and recovery.

The evaluation will address the following **Areas of Investigation (Aoi)**:

1. The extent that UNCTs have been able, through the SERPs and CFs⁵, to achieve or maintain a coherent and sustained UNDS focus on progress toward the achievement of SDGs during the pandemic. This will encompass the effectiveness of the SERPs and CFs in the context of UNDS reform as planning and programming instruments for the UNDS response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19.
2. The extent that MPTFs pooled financing have been effective instruments for mobilizing resources and planning and implementing programming that is coherent with the collective socio-economic response of UNCTs within the framework of the SERP and the CF - including their use in support of advocacy and policy engagement and consideration of operational and other constraints of the Funds.
3. The extent that UNCTs, within the framework of the SERPs and CFs, have developed and implemented coherent strategies and programmes to advance UN core values of human rights, disability inclusion and environmental sustainability. This will include advocating for and supporting national efforts to address climate change, address human rights and ensure especially gender equality, and disability inclusion.
4. The extent that the SERPs and CFs have contributed to UNCT action to work with national governments and partners to support progress toward the recover better and greener agenda of the UN Framework – including a more equitable and more environmentally sustainable recovery in line with the core values referred to in area of investigation three.
5. The extent of learning by UNCTs (and the UNDS system as a whole) regarding cross-sectoral and inter-agency collaboration as a mechanism to overcome constraints and identify incentive structures which facilitate achieving collaborative results from SERP/CF implementation.

⁵ The evaluation recognizes that the relationship from the SERP to the CF is not linear and one way. While prepared within the guidelines of the UN Framework, SERPs also draw on national priorities and initiatives planned in the pre-existing UNDAF/CF and, in turn, influence the evolution of the CF.

3.2. A theory of change for the UNDS socio-economic response to COVID-19

As noted in the Terms of Reference (UN 2021d, p.7), the evaluation strives to avoid duplicating the efforts of other United Nations evaluation and oversight offices and their staff. It is also important to avoid causing confusion by generating evaluation products which compete with or significantly re-frame vetted theoretical models of the UN response to COVID-19 that are already available.

In 2020, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) prepared a comprehensive Theory of Change (ToC) for the UN Response to COVID-19 encompassing the emergency health response, peace and security response, humanitarian response and (most importantly for this evaluation) the socio-economic response.⁶ The final version was completed after a wide-ranging and thorough consultation process. Key UN entities in the development, peace and security, humanitarian and human rights pillars were provided an opportunity to comment. The ToC was further reviewed by senior staff of the Executive Office of the Secretary General (EOSG) and was presented to the Secretary-General's Senior Management Committee. It was also shared within the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG).

As a result, this evaluation has chosen to build on the existing OIOS-developed ToC while highlighting those elements which are particularly relevant to the UNDS response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. This provides the evaluation with a proven, high-level, and vetted ToC for the UNDS response at a global, regional, and country level. Figure 1 below presents the high-level summary ToC for the overall UN response to COVID-19 as developed by the OIOS. The boxes shaded in green represent those elements of the ToC most directly relevant to the UNDS response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, which is the focus of this evaluation. Figure 2 extracts the key elements from Figure 1 that are most relevant to this evaluation in order to present a ToC that focuses most directly on the socio-economic aspects of the UN response to COVID-19.

⁶ OIOS: Theory of Change High Level Summary Diagram for the UN COVID-19 Response (11 June 2020)

Figure 1: Theory of Change High Level Summary Diagram for the UN COVID-19 Response (Shaded Area Refers to UNDS Response to Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19)

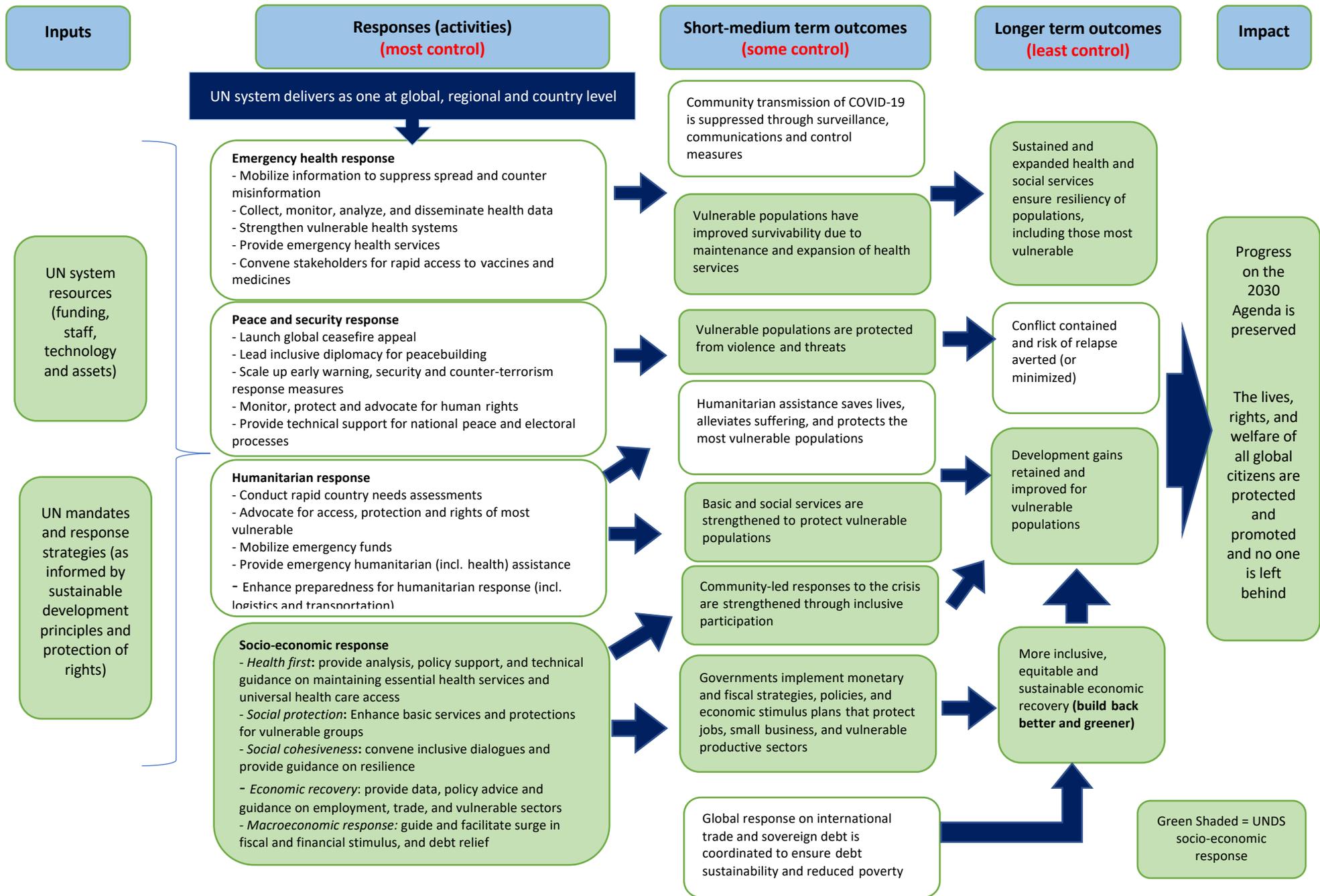
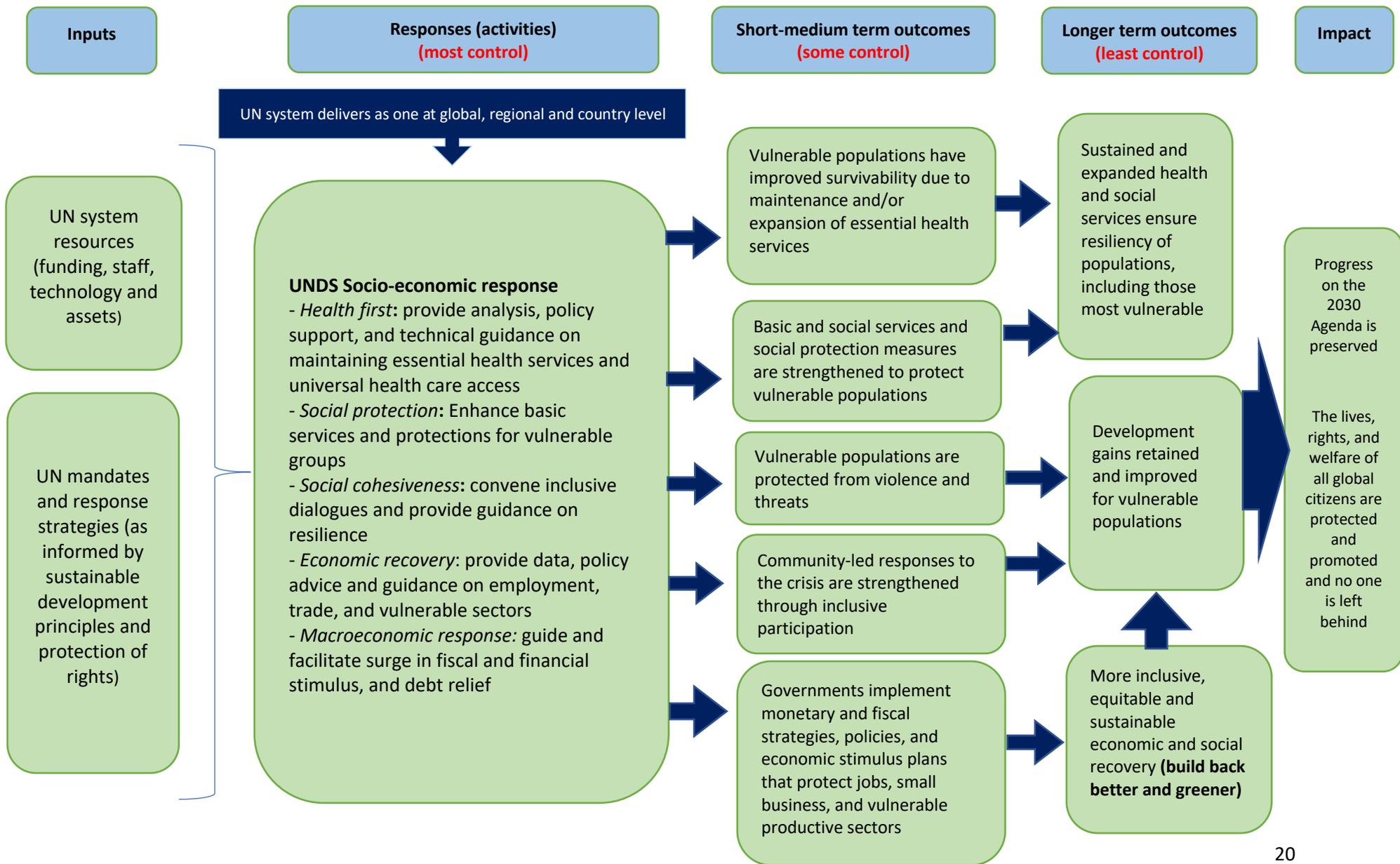


Figure 2: Theory of Change Specific to the UNDS Repose to the Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19)



Note to the Theory of Change

The theory of change presented in Figure 2 covers only those elements directly associated with the UNDS socio-economic response to COVID-19. However, the evaluation will need to recognize the linkages between the socio-economic response and the other pillars of the overall UN response as depicted in Figure 1: the emergency health response; the peace and security response; and the humanitarian response. This can be done by maintaining close contact with other evaluations aimed at addressing these responses (including for example the ongoing Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation-IAHE of the humanitarian response.) Careful selection of case study countries will also allow the evaluation to examine the UNDS socio-economic response in light of, for example, large scale humanitarian action.

Key Assumptions to the Theory of Change

As with the overall UN response ToC, the Theory of Change for the UNDS response to the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic rests on important assumptions about both UN activities and the environment in which they take place. If these assumptions are not met, while positive outcomes will still be possible, the scope and impact of those outcomes will be diminished. Key assumptions for each UNDS response area are summarized in Table 4. It is important to note that the assumptions listed in table 4 are developed and expanded from those in the original OIOS ToC. Assumptions have been further informed from the document reviews and interviews undertaken during the inception phase; assumptions are not listed in order of priority.

How the Theory of Change Serves the Evaluation

While helping to illustrate the link from inputs to results, the main importance of the ToC for the design of this evaluation lies in its usefulness in identifying key evaluation assumptions. These assumptions are then used to ensure that the detailed evaluation sub-questions address all of the underlying conditions which are necessary for the UNDS socio-economic response to achieve its intended results. This is in keeping with the evaluation focus on the coherence, relevance and effectiveness of UNDS support to policies and programmes at country level. Rather than focusing on cataloguing results as its primary function, the evaluation aims to verify whether the key assumptions noted at each level of the chain of effects are actually realized and what effect that has on the likelihood of achieving results, including preservation of progress toward the 2030 Agenda. Of course, results will be assessed through the overall reporting structure for the response (UNINFO) as well as results reported for selected pooled funds. Table 4 provides an overview of the key assumptions that are integral to the ToC.

Table 4: Key Assumptions Underlying the UNDS Socio-Economic Response Theory of Change

Response Area	Key Assumption
Under Inputs	
1. UN rules, procedures and bureaucracy and funding	<p>1.1 UN rules and procedures allow for rapid, dynamic and collaborative action, and entities are able to react quickly to new information and circumstances.</p> <p>1.2 Funding received for the socio-economic response is timely and sufficient.</p> <p>1.3 Member States sustain funding levels to the UNDS for work across all pillars of the socio-economic responses.</p> <p>1.4 Member States increase funding to multi-stakeholder pools in accordance with the Funding Compact.</p>
2. Business continuity	2.1 The UNDS is able to safely maintain business continuity of its mandated critical functions for development pillars during the pandemic and the recovery.
Under Responses	
4. UN system-wide coordination and collaboration	4.1 At country level UNCTs are able to enhance coordination across the UN systems with clear roles, responsibilities, procedures and resources to deliver as one.
5. Coherent UNDS offer of services	<p>5.1 UN reform results in UNCTs that are well positioned to provide a coherent⁷ offer of resources, policy advice and coordinated support to enhance country socio-economic responses.</p> <p>5.2 UNDS advocacy, policy support, and technical and operational support reflects the most appropriate and relevant combination of UNCT capacities, including those of non-resident agencies (NRA).</p>
6. Data collection, analysis and needs assessments	6.1 Governments, UNDS entities and other stakeholders have been able to undertake timely and reliable data collection, analysis and needs assessments of all vulnerable populations and to disaggregate data as needed.
7. Oversight and learning	7.1 The UNDS monitors, investigates, evaluates and learns from response implementation in order to ensure that the intended outcomes are being achieved, and that it continuously course corrects.
8. Human Rights	8.1 UNCTs provide coherent support which addresses gender equality, inclusion and LNOB values under an overarching human rights approach. This extends to strategies and programmes supporting an equitable and environmentally sustainable recovery to build back better and greener.
9. Development partner capacities	9.1 Development partners (including governments, community-based organizations, NGOs and private sectors) are responsive to advocacy and other support to deliver targeted services to beneficiaries (including the most vulnerable and those at risk of being left behind) despite COVID-19 conditions.
Under Outcomes	
10. Member State involvement	10.1 National governments have the will and capacity to coordinate with the UN and other stakeholders to respond to COVID-19 , including on agreements on development assistance, debt, trade, and other initiatives.

⁷ Coherence is defined by OIOS as: “The extent to which the whole of UN support is aligned to country level needs and priorities and is delivered in an integrated, coordinated and complementary fashion across pillars and sectors and consistent with Agenda 2030 goals.”

3.3. Evaluation Questions and Sub-Questions

Evaluation questions reflect the Areas of Investigation

The higher level, overall questions to be addressed in the evaluation are derived directly from the Areas of Investigation listed in section 3.1.

1. To what extent have UNCTs been able, through the SERPs and CFs, to achieve a coherent and sustained UNDS focus on progress toward the achievement of SDGs during the pandemic?
2. To what extent has pooled financing been an effective instrument for mobilizing resources and planning and implementing programming coherent with the collective socio-economic response of UNCTs?
3. To what extent have UNCTs developed and implemented coherent strategies and programmes to advance core UN values of human rights, inclusion and LNOB?
4. To what extent have SERPs and CFs contributed to UNCT support to partners to achieve progress toward the recover better and greener agenda – including a more equitable and sustainable recovery?
5. To what extent have UNCTs and the UNDS system learned lessons from the SERP and CF processes regarding mechanisms to overcome constraints and identify incentive structures to achieve collaborative results?

In addressing these questions, the evaluation must also recognize that expectations at the time that SERPs were developed have been radically altered over the course of the pandemic itself. The COVID-19 crisis has continued through an uneven vaccine response and successive variants of concern and related waves of infection that have delayed the foreseen transition to recovery in many countries. At the same time, the climate crisis has deepened and more countries are involved in conflicts. Additionally, the volume of foreseen financial contributions to the social and economic response has fallen short of expectations. All these factors are important to consider in an effort to assess progress under the SERPs.

Evaluation sub-questions provide depth and serve to test key assumptions

The ToC and its key assumptions have been used to help specify the sub-questions under each of the main evaluation questions listed above. By addressing the sub-questions, the evaluation will not only examine different dimensions of the overall evaluation questions, it will test the validity and durability of the assumptions which underly the theory of change.

Table 5: Evaluation Questions and sub-questions

Evaluation Questions	Key Assumptions	Evaluation Sub-Questions
<p>1. To what extent have UNCTs been able, through the SERPs and CFs, to achieve a coherent and sustained UNDS focus on progress toward the achievement of SDGs during the pandemic?</p>	<p>1.1 Rapid collaborative action 2.1 Business continuity 4.1 Coordination 5.1 Coherent UNDS offer 5.2 Appropriate and relevant combination of UNCT capacities 8.1 Human rights and environmental sustainability 9.1 Development partner capacity 10.1 Member state involvement programming</p>	<p>1. What progress has been made at country level in implementing SERPs as a means of operationalizing UNCT support to the national response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19? To what extent have the SERPs and CFs contributed to the socio-economic response while being guided by national priorities, existing UNCT programme capacities and the UN Framework?⁸</p> <p>2. Has the development of the SERPs influenced in any way the offer of UNDS support, including the extent to which support is able to draw on the most relevant capacities of UNCT entities (resident and non-resident)?</p> <p>3. Have UNCTs been able to leverage UNDS reforms to engage in joint planning, programming and M&E to ensure a genuinely <u>collaborative</u> and <u>strategically relevant</u> UNDS response to the pandemic? Has this collaboration been based on clear roles and responsibilities, particularly in relation to the role of the Resident Coordinator, the UNDP Resident Representative and other Heads of Agencies (HOAs)? How has the guidance and Strategic Plans of UN entities help collaborative and strategically relevant UNDS response?</p> <p>4. To what extent do the SERPs draw on the UNDAF/CR and in return, to what extent have they been integrated into CFs as they reach their completion dates? How responsive are current UNCT operations to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 in this country, and to the needs and capacities of stakeholders including national governments?</p> <p>5. Have UNCT actions guided by the SERP and CF supported national governments (and other stakeholders) to implement and sustain the initiatives planned under the SERPs and the CFs?</p> <p>6. To what extent does UNCT support across the five pillars of the UN Framework directly engage with the challenge of re-establishing progress toward the SDGs in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic? Is there emerging qualitative or quantitative evidence of results?</p>
<p>2. To what extent has pooled financing been an effective instrument for mobilizing resources and planning and implementing programming coherent with the collective</p>	<p>1.1 UN rules and procedures 1.2 Timely funding 1.3 Funding across UNDS response pillars 1.4 Funding to multi-stakeholder pools</p>	<p>7. Have pooled funds (including the COVID-19 MPTF, the Spotlight Initiative Fund and the Joint SDG Fund) been effective as instruments for mobilizing resources in support of the UNDS socio-economic response to COVID-19?</p> <p>8. To what extent have pooled funds made a contribution to collaborative, coherent programming by the UNDS?</p> <p>9. What operational constraints may limit the effectiveness of pooled funds in supporting the UNDS socio-economic COVID-19 response? What lessons have been learned regarding positive changes which can increase their effectiveness?</p>

⁸ As the SERPs come to an end in late 2021 and early 2022, they may be expected to influence the content of Cooperation Frameworks defining collaboration between the UN and host governments. The term CF is used here to refer to “older” UNDAFs as well as new generation Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (CFs) and their contents.

Evaluation Questions	Key Assumptions	Evaluation Sub-Questions
socio-economic response of UNCTs?		
3. To what extent have UNCTs developed and implemented coherent strategies and programmes to advance core UN values of human rights, inclusions and LNOB?	8.1 Human Rights and environmental sustainability 9.1 Development partners capacity 10.1 Member state involvement	10. Have UNCTs responded to the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic with support that is adequately focused on human rights, gender equality, inclusion (including persons with disabilities) and reaching the most vulnerable? 11. To what extent has UNCT support assisted national governments and other key stakeholders to respond and to deliver targeted support to the most vulnerable including strategic support to build back better? 12. What (if any) role have the SERPs/CFs played in facilitating the HR/GE/LNOB focus in the response at country level? What (if any) role have pooled funds played? 13. What constraints have limited the degree to which the UNCT response has put core values (HR/GE/Inclusion/LNOB) at the center of operations? What have been facilitative factors?
4. To what extent have SERPs and CFs contributed to UNCT support to partners to achieve progress toward the recover better and greener agenda – including a more equitable and sustainable recovery? ⁹	8.1 Human rights and environmental sustainability 9.1 Development partner capacity 10.1 Member state involvement	14. How effectively has the UNDS response as mobilized through the SERPs and CFs addressed issues of environmental sustainability, including climate change adaptation and fostered forward-looking, “build back greener” strategies? 15. What role (if any) have pooled funds played in helping to ‘build back better and greener’? 16. What constraints have limited the degree to which the UNCT response has focused on building back greener? What have been facilitative factors?
5. To what extent have UNCTs and the UNDS system learned lessons from the SERP and CF processes regarding mechanisms to overcome constraints and identify incentive structures to achieve collaborative results?	6.1 Data collection, analysis and needs assessment 7.1 Oversight and learning	17. To what extent has the UNDS response been supported by well defined systems of results definition and reporting? Are these systems capable of providing disaggregated data on results achieved for vulnerable groups? 18. How well has the UNDS been able to learn and adjust approaches during the response and recovery? What has enabled/constrained learning and adapting? 19. How well do systems for defining, monitoring and reporting the results of UNDS support work at global, regional and country level in order to contribute to collective accountability for results by the system as a whole rather than individual entities? 20. Are there adequate provisions in management and accountability frameworks which incentivize collaborative action by UNCTs under the leadership of the RC? Are there changes which would strengthen collective accountability and increase the incentives for collaboration?

⁹ It will be important in addressing question four to take account of the ongoing and evolving nature of the pandemic and the fact that, for many countries, the emergency stage has persisted much longer than anticipated and recovery is still more theoretical than real.

3.4. Addressing OECD/DAC Evaluation Criteria

Table 6 illustrates the extent that the evaluation questions provide coverage of the current OECD/DAC evaluation criteria.

Table 6: Coverage of OECD/DAC Evaluation Criteria by Evaluation Question

Evaluation Questions	OECD/DAC Criteria ¹⁰				
	Relevance	Coherence	Effectiveness	Efficiency	Impact
1. To what extent have UNCTs been able, through the SERPs and CFs, to achieve a coherent and sustained UNDS focus on progress toward the achievement of SDGs during the pandemic?					
2. To what extent has pooled financing been an effective instrument for mobilizing resources and planning and implementing programming coherent with the collective socio-economic response of UNCTs?					
3. To what extent have UNCTs developed and implemented coherent strategies and programmes to advance core UN values of human rights, inclusions and LNOB?					
4. To what extent have SERPs and CFs contributed to UNCT support to partners to achieve progress toward the recover better and greener agenda – including a more equitable and sustainable recovery?					
5. To what extent have UNCTs and the UNDS system learned lessons from the SERP and CF processes regarding mechanisms to overcome constraints and identify incentive structures to achieve collaborative results?					

4. Approach and Methodology

As set out in the terms of reference, (UN 2021d, p.6-7) the evaluation will maintain its core focus on the country and the UNCT as the central unit of analysis. At country level, the evaluation will be guided by the DCO/UNEG Guidelines for the Evaluation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNDCO/UNEG 2021). The main data collection methods used will be:

¹⁰ Criteria are as defined in: OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation, Better Criteria for Better Evaluation: Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use. Pgs. 7-11

- A review of key documents at global and country level. Global documents will include those providing guidance to UNCTs, including but not limited to, select UNDS entity strategic plans;
- Key informant interviews at global, regional and country level;
- A synthesis of lessons learned from completed evaluations undertaken by UNEG members and applicable to the UNDS COVID-19 socio-economic response;
- Country case studies of the UNDS response as realized through the SERP and the UNDAF/CF in selected countries;
- A review of data provided through the results reporting portals of the UNDS (UNINFO) and selected MPTFs (the COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF, the Joint SDG Fund and the Spotlight Initiative Fund).

All data sources will be reviewed in relation to the evaluation questions detailed in Section 3.0 and resulting findings will be triangulated using evidence from all the applicable data sources.

4.1. Subsidiarity and the Role of UNEG

The evaluation is designed to respect the principle of subsidiarity by ensuring that the role of evaluating programming by each UNCT entity remains the purview and mandate of the entities themselves, in keeping with the policy on SWE as enumerated in the 2020 QCPR.

Country case studies carried out for the evaluation will conform to the joint UNDCO/UNEG guidelines on evaluation of the CF. The guidelines define CF evaluation (UNDCO/UNEG 2021, p.5) as follows:

“Evaluation of the CF is a mandatory independent system-wide country evaluation and is separate from an annual review. CF evaluations ensure accountability, support learning and inform decisions regarding the design of subsequent CF cycles. They systematically assess the contributions of the CF by focusing on achieved development results, as well as internal and external gaps and overlaps in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).”

The guidelines (p.8) also identify the differing responsibilities of the DCO, the RC and UNCT members, with the DCO responsible for quality assurance throughout, and the RC originating and coordinating the process. The evaluation will follow a similar structure but with the Senior Coordinator for SWE responsible for project management and quality assurance, coordinating with the external evaluation team and DCO.

In addition, it is essential that the work of the evaluation should not duplicate or repeat evaluation efforts by UN entities that are directly relevant to the Terms of Reference.

A further step in this process is to rely to the extent possible on findings and/or lessons learned in relevant evaluation studies completed by UNEG members. Discussion has been initiated for close cooperation between the evaluation team and UNEG regarding the synthesis of evaluation lessons learned during COVID-19, this includes an invitation to UNEG to develop a synthesis of the findings and lessons learned from evaluation of the COVID-19 response.

4.2. Synthesis of Lessons Learned from UN Evaluations

While the evaluation will make use of available findings of the synthesis of evaluation findings and lessons learned as undertaken by UNEG in the coming months, the scope, subject and timing of that effort will be defined and managed by UNEG. UNEG and the SWE evaluation team will remain in close liaison throughout the process. Given the different scheduling realities and reporting requirements of this evaluation and the planned UNEG synthesis of COVID-19 evaluation results, the evaluation will incorporate synthesis results in two stages:

- In the first stage, a focused synthesis of currently available evaluation reports directly relevant to the UNDS response to COVID-19, selected from the evaluation reports listed in Annex 3, will be undertaken by the evaluation team as evidence to inform the Interim Report in March 2022;
- In the second stage, analysis and data consolidation for the final report in September 2022 will make use of the results of the UNEG synthesis process which are most relevant to the UNDS response to COVID-19.

The evaluation has implemented a process to identify the universe of available, completed evaluation studies applicable to evaluating the UNDS response as per the ToRs. The two-step process first involved a scan of all UNDS member evaluation data bases for published evaluation reports conforming to specific selection criteria. This was followed by circulating the preliminary list of documents to UNEG members so that they could identify missing documents that the preliminary scan may have missed. The criteria called for three main types of evaluation reports to be included:

- Thematic or joint evaluations and synthesis of evaluations of UN entity action in response to COVID-19 including regional evaluations;
- Real time assessments (RTAs) or synthesis of RTAs of UN entity response including global and regional evaluations; and
- Annual Evaluation Review reports by UN entities which include significant references to evaluation lessons learned regarding the COVID-19 response.

When the two lists were combined (the original list plus new reports nominated by UNEG members) the universe of relevant evaluation included 42 individual reports (Annex 3). The evaluation will select from this list, augmented by suggestions from UNEG members, to produce a smaller sample of the most relevant evaluation reports providing evidence gathered from the widest possible range of UNDS members.

Given the small number of available and relevant evaluation reports, a quantitative analysis of existing evaluation findings in those reports would be less useful than a summary of the most important lessons learned. It will be most useful to identify the overall conclusions and thematic lessons learned from these evaluations as published by the independent evaluation offices of UN entities – to the extent that they are directly applicable to the UNDS response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19.

Evaluations at country level, including UNDAF and CF evaluations and Country Program Evaluations by selected UNCT members will be reviewed during the country case study process and used in triangulation of evaluation evidence.

4.3. Document Reviews and Key Informant Interviews

Document Reviews

The evaluation team has begun compiling a comprehensive set of documents for analysis at both global and country level. All documents have been collected and uploaded to a common drive for access by all team members. The google-drive repository will ultimately host all relevant documentation for the exercise. Table 7 highlights some of the most significant types of documents gathered and reviewed at this point in time.

Table 7: Sample of Global and Country Level Documents by Type (to be modified and updated)

Examples of Documents for Review by Type
UN Frameworks
- UN Framework for Immediate Response to Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19
- UN Comprehensive Response to COVID-19: Saving Lives, Protecting Societies, Recovering Better, June 2020
- The UNSDG Knowledge Portal and its Components
- UN COVID-19 Response, Theory of Change (OIOS)
- United Nations UNCT-SWAP Gender Equality Scorecard and Disability Inclusion Scorecard
- Our Common Agenda, Report of the Secretary General (2021)
- UNDS member entity Strategic Plans
- Internal DCO Reviews of SERPs
- LNOB Operational Guidance (UNSDG 2019)
Documents related to UN Reform
- Report of the Secretary General on the Implementation of GA resolution 71/243 (QCPR 2020)
- Report of the Secretary General on the Review of the functioning of the Resident Coordinator System
- 2020 and 2021 Report of the Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group on the DCO
- Funding Compact Indicator Framework
- Management and Accountability Framework (and Revised Framework) of the UNDS RC System
- United Nations Sustainable Cooperation Framework Guidance (UNSDG 2019)
- Consolidated Annexes to Cooperation Framework Guidance (UNSDG 2019)
- Strengthening system-wide evaluations in the UN development system: Roadmap for Implementation
Pooled Fund Published Reports and Guidelines
- Global Reports of the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund
- Financial Data on Fund Contributions and Disbursements: MPTFO
- Minimum requirements checklist for integrating gender equality in the implementation of the UN Framework for the Socioeconomic Response to COVID-19 ¹¹
- Proposals for Call 1 & Call 2 MPTF COVID-19
- Steps for Earmarking to Countries Under the UN COVID-19 MPTF
- MPTF COVID-19 RBM Framework
- Checklist for a Human-Rights-Based Approach to Socio-Economic Responses to COVID-19
- Communications Guidelines: COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund
- Guidance Note: UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund: Gender Equality Marker
- Spotlight Initiative COVID-19 Programme Budget Adaptation Analysis (2020)
- Spotlight Initiative Mid-term Assessments
- Spotlight Initiative COVID-19 Response – Key Highlights
- Paths to Acceleration: 2020 Annual Report of the Joint SDG Fund

¹¹ Accessed at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/07/ianwge-minimum-requirements-checklist-for-integrating-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response>

Examples of Documents for Review by Type
- Mid-Term Review: Portfolio of Joint Programmes on Integrated Social Protection and Leaving No One Behind: Joint SDG Fund 2020
Country Case Studies, for each country
- Common Country Assessment
- United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and Predecessors (UNSDCF/UNDAF)
- Socio-Economic Response Plan (SERP)
- SERP Self-Evaluations
- Social and Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 (SEIA)
- COVID-19 Data Portal, Country Dashboard (including programmatic indicators)
- Pooled Fund Country Factsheet (Spotlight Initiative Fund, COVID-19 Response and Recovery Funds and the Joint SDG Fund)
- Joint Work Plans and Selected Country Program Documents
- UNCT-SWAP Gender Equality Scorecard reports
- Disability Inclusion Scorecard reports
Documents on Evaluation Practice and the UN System
- OIOS/UNEG COVID-19 Response Evaluation Protocol
- DCO/UNEG Guidelines for the Evaluation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
- UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation (2016)
- UNEG Guidance on Integrating Gender Equality and Human Rights in Evaluation (2011)
- UNSDG Group: Strengthening system-wide evaluations in the UN development system: Roadmap for implementation – September 2020
Academic and Non-UN Reports and Articles
- Connolly, L. and Roesch, J.L., <i>Unpacking the UN's Development System Reform</i> , in International Peace Institute, July 2020
- German Development Institute: <i>Towards More Policy Advice: Maximizing the UN's Assets to Build Back Better</i> (2020)
- Buvinic, Mayra et al. <i>Understanding Women's and Girls' Vulnerabilities to the Covid-19 Pandemic: A gender analysis and data dashboard low and lower-middle-income countries</i> (Nov 2020)
- MOPAN

Key Informant Interviews

Given available resources and time, the evaluation team will undertake up to 60 interviews at global and regional level based on the questions detailed in section 3.3. Those to be interviewed include:

- Senior officials of the Executive Office of the Secretary General (EOSG) and the UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG)
- Senior staff of the Development Cooperation Office (DCO) at headquarters and regional level
- Leaders and staff of the Secretariats for the three pooled Funds (COVID-19 Response and Recovery, Joint SDG and Spotlight Initiative)
- Staff of UNDS member UN Entities
- Staff of Evaluation Offices of UNEG members, including the UNEG Chair
- Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) staff engaged in evaluation of the RC system
- Staff of UN Economic and Social Commissions
- Staff of selected International Financial Institutions
- Staff of selected donor agencies
- Others as identified during data collection phase.

In each of the countries chosen to provide a country-level perspective through a case study approach, the evaluation team will seek to interview:

- The Resident Coordinator
- Staff of the RCO
- UNCT Heads of Agencies
- UNCT technical staff assigned to thematic working groups and results groups
- Senior National Government representatives
- Staff of implementing agencies, especially Civil Society Organizations representing vulnerable groups
- Staff of selected bilateral donor agencies active in the socio-economic response to COVID-19 in the case study countries
- Others as identified in each case study country.

After country level data and documentary evidenced has been collected and analyzed and country-level interviews conducted, the principal author of each case study will conduct a stakeholder feedback and verification session prior to finalizing the case study. The final case study product will consist of a slide deck from the power point presentation and a brief summary note on key lessons learned as per the ToR.

4.4. Qualitative Analysis of Evidence from Document Reviews and Interviews

Complementing the documentation review, the team will use *Dedoose* to classify and assist in the analysis of stakeholder interviews at global, regional and country level. The team will code all stakeholder responses to identify those responses most relevant to the evaluation questions and sub-questions addressed by each interview protocol. Through careful coding of text searches, the team will clearly identify evidence for triangulation to guide and support the relevant findings and lessons learned through interviews, document reviews and country case studies. It is important to note that the software will be used only as a complement to analysis and triangulation of interviews and documentary evidence by the team leads for each case study, and to facilitate collation and comparison of evidence at all levels (global, regional, country).

4.5. Case Studies

In a System-Wide Evaluation, country case studies serve the essential purpose of illustrating the effectiveness of the UNDS response in a wide variety of country contexts. While they will produce findings useful to the UNCT in each case study country, they are not designed to support a comparative analysis of the specific characteristics of the response in each country. While respecting the different contexts faced by the response across a diverse set of countries, the case studies will allow the evaluation to focus on commonalities and to highlight differences which illustrate the operations and effectiveness of the overall response.

Focus of the Country Case Studies

The country case studies will address the five evaluation questions and 20 evaluation sub-questions detailed in Section 3.3. In keeping with the ToRs, the evaluation will focus on the extent that the UNCT in each case study country was able to mount a cohesive UNDS offer of support to the national government in its response to the immediate socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 and to effectively

support a national recovery strategy in keeping with the build back better and greener agenda. This will include the extent that the UNCT was able to support the country in its efforts to realize the SDGs and attain a path to the achievement of Agenda 2030.

Defining Selection Criteria and Selecting Sample Case Countries

Yishak and Bakar suggest that: “purposive sampling is useful for case study in three situations: (1) when a researcher wants to select **unique cases that are especially informative**, (2) when a researcher would like to select members of a difficult-to-reach, specialized population, and (3) when a researcher wants to identify particular types of cases for in-depth investigation” (Yishak and Bakar 2014, p.29). Following this logic, the study will follow a purposive sampling method.

Sampling case study countries

The evaluation has identified a sample of eight countries to serve as case studies. A total of eight country case studies was established because:

- The purpose of the country case studies is to provide evaluation evidence in a broad variety of contexts based on commonalities and differences in the UN socio-economic response to COVID-19 across those different contexts.
- The number of countries sampled for case studies must be manageable within the envelope of resources available for the study and able to be completed in a limited time frame while limiting the burden of work for the host UNCTs. It should also allow for a reasonably thorough review of relevant documentation on the country experience with the socio-economic response to COVID-19 as well as exploratory and confirming interviews with the RC, UNCT members and other key stakeholders in each case study country.
- Most importantly, a sample set of eight countries is able to adequately cover the set of criteria developed during the inception phase and detailed below.

Selection Criteria for a Purposive Sample of Country Case Studies

The selection of case study countries was developed by applying a screen of six specific criteria:

1. The need for **geographic balance**, including at least one Small Island Developing State (SID);
2. The need to ensure an adequate representation across **different national income levels**;
3. The need to ensure the sample included countries that were making use of at least one but preferable two or three of the **pooled funds of special interest** (the Joint SDG Fund, COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund and the Spotlight Initiative Fund);
4. The need to include countries at different stages of the **UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Cycle** to examine the link between SERPs and CFs;
5. The need for representation by countries at **different levels of gender inequality** as measured through the GDI; and,
6. The need for a mix of **smaller, mid-size and larger countries by population size**.

For classifying levels of gender inequality by GDI countries are divided into five groups by absolute deviation from gender parity in HDI values defined as follows:¹²

- Group 1 comprises countries with high equality in HDI achievements between women and men (absolute deviation of less than 2.5 percent);
- Group 2 comprises countries with medium to high equality in HDI achievements between women and men (absolute deviation of 2.5– 5 percent);
- Group 3 comprises countries with medium equality in HDI achievements between women and men (absolute deviation of 5–7.5 percent);
- Group 4 comprises countries with medium to low equality in HDI achievements between women and men (absolute deviation of 7.5–10 percent);
- Group 5 comprises countries with low equality in HDI achievements between women and men (absolute deviation from gender parity of more than 10 percent).

The suggested case study countries include two countries (Jordan and Sierra Leone) with lower equality in human development achievements between women and men (Group 5). It also includes four countries (Indonesia, Rwanda, Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan) with medium equality (Group 2-3) and two (Argentina and Barbados) with a high level of equality (Group 1).

Selected sample countries

The eight countries suggested for case studies during the evaluation in combination, meet all of the criteria described above. The suggested countries are:

- Argentina
- Barbados
- Indonesia
- Jordan
- Rwanda
- Sri Lanka
- Sierra Leone
- Uzbekistan

The recommended country sample is described in more detail in Table 8. At this time, the evaluation is planning to undertake the **pilot country case study in Jordan** in January 2022 to further refine data collection and analysis methods and to provide supporting evaluative evidence for the Interim Report.

¹² UNDP. Human Development Report 2020, Gender Development Index. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-development-index-gdi>

Table 8: Country Case Study Criteria and Sample

Region	Country	Income Level	Joint SDG	COVID-19 MPTF	Spotlight Initiative	UNDAF/CF	CF Cycle	Gender Dev. Index	Pop. (Million)
Africa	Sierra Leone	Low	1	0	0	2020-2023	MID	5	8
Africa	Rwanda	Low	1	1	0	2018-2022	END	3	13
SCA	Uzbekistan	Lower-middle	1	1	0	2021-2026	START	3	33
South Asia	Sri Lanka	Lower Middle	1	1	0	2018-2022	END	2	21
Asia Pacific	Indonesia	Lower-middle	1	1	1	2021-2026	START	3	275
MENA	Jordan	Upper-middle	1	1	0	2018-2022	END	5	10
LACRA	Barbados	High	1	0	0	2017-2022	END	1	0.3
LACRA	Argentina	Upper-middle	1	1	1	2021-2026	START	1	45

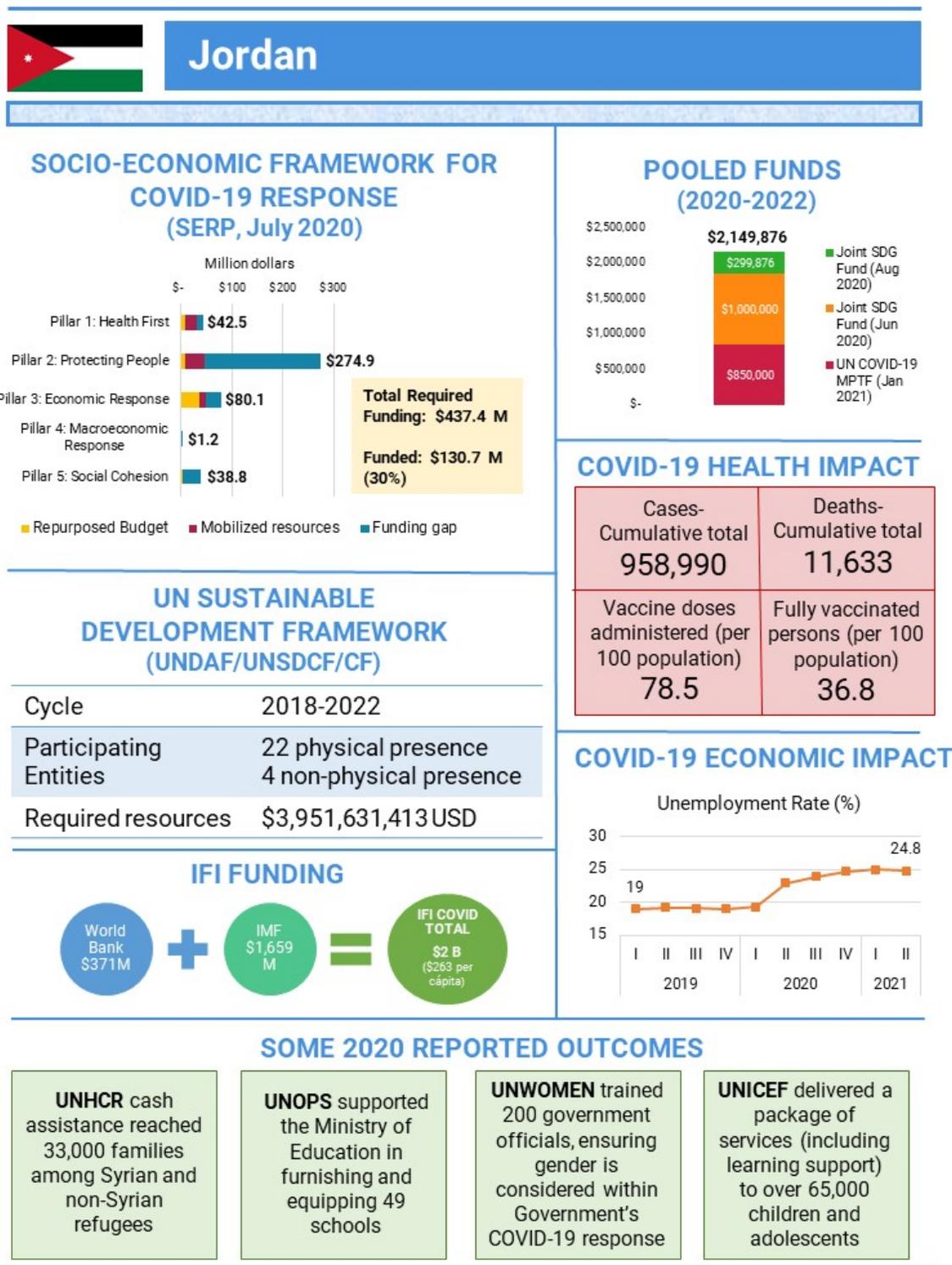
4.6. Compiling and Analyzing Quantitative Country Data

During the exercise, the team will assemble a quantitative database for each country in the selected sample. The exercise will quantitatively profile the countries by extracting data from the COVID-19 UN-Info Data Portal, Socio-Economic Response Plans, UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, national statistics portals, and WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard, amongst other sources.

Example Data Profile: Jordan

Figure 3 below provides an overview of some important context setting data for the UNDS response to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 in Jordan. A similar profile will be developed in advance of conducting the case study missions to all case study countries. The data presented here will be updated and augmented during the data collection and analysis phase of the evaluation.

Figure 3: Country Data Profile: Jordan



Sources: Jordan SERP, Jordan UNSDCF, Jordan 2020 Results Report, Jordan Department of Statistics, WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard, UN-INFO COVID-19 Data Portal, and MPTF Gateway Portal.

4.7. Assessing Gender, LNOB and Human Rights

The United Nations leave no one behind (LNOB) commitment seeks to combat inequalities and discrimination grounded in the foundational principles of the UN Charter and inter/national human rights law. LNOB exclusions may be on the basis of ethnicity, race, gender, age, disability or other dimensions as well as on a combination of multiple vulnerabilities depending on individual contexts. This evaluation will integrate a cross-cutting focus on Human Rights (HR) and Gender Equality (GE) in line with the principles of LNOB and the imperative to protect the rights of the most vulnerable members of society. It is important to highlight that the focus on inclusion and LNOB includes an explicit commitment to ensuring that supported programming recognizes and addresses the needs of persons with disabilities.

The evaluation will build upon the findings of the *Early Lessons and Evaluability of the UN-COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF* (2021) to deepen understanding of the extent to which UNCTs, within the framework of the SERPs and CFs, have developed and implemented coherent strategies and programmes to advance UN core values of human rights, gender equality, disability inclusion and other vulnerable groups within the LNOB framework. The table below offers a representation of how relevant findings in the early lessons study will be further explored and interrogated in the evaluation, drawing on evaluation sub-questions as entry points into discussions in semi-structured interviews.

<u>Early Lessons Findings</u> <u>(COVID-19 MPTF and SERPs)</u>	<u>Evaluation Exploration</u> <u>(SERPs, CFs and Pooled Funds)</u>
A. UNDS commitment to gender equality, human rights and LNOB was supported by clear messaging from the highest levels of the relevance of GE/HR/LNOB to socio-economic responses	<u>Sub-Question 13</u> : What constraints have limited the degree to which the UNCT response has put core values (HR/GE/LNOB) at the center of operations? What have been facilitative factors?
B. UNDS commitment to HR/GE/LNOB was enabled by systemwide architecture and frameworks in place at the start of the pandemic	<u>Sub-Question 13</u> : What constraints have limited the degree to which the UNCT response has put core values (HR/GE/LNOB) at the center of operations? What have been facilitative factors?
C. Inclusion of agencies with cross-cutting mandates in governing bodies was a critical opportunity to reinforce and more fully operationalize systemwide commitments to GE, LNOB and HR	<u>Sub-Question 12</u> : What (if any) role have the SERPs/CFs played in facilitating the HR/GE/LNOB focus in the response at country level? What (if any) role have pooled funds played? <u>Sub-Question 13</u> : What constraints have limited the degree to which the UNCT response has put core values (HR/GE/LNOB) at the center of operations? What have been facilitative factors?
D. Timely, facilitative guidance and technical support helped operationalize GE/HR/LNOB to varying degrees. Financial incentives for GE were highly impactful. QA review impact was variable due, in part, to a lack of feedback structure.	<u>Sub-Question 12</u> : What (if any) role have the SERPs/CFs played in facilitating the HR/GE/LNOB focus in the response at country level? What (if any) role have pooled funds played? <u>Sub-Question 13</u> : What constraints have limited the degree to which the UNCT response has put core values (HR/GE/LNOB) at the center of operations? What have been facilitative factors?

E. In the context of an immediate emergency responses, MPTF COVID-19 projects funded under Call 1 showed limitations in addressing gender equality and supporting vulnerable groups. Call 2 projects were more systematic in operationalizing a GE and vulnerable group focus.

Sub-Question 10: Have UNCTs responded to the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic with support that is adequately focused on human rights, gender equality, inclusion (including persons with disabilities) and reaching the most vulnerable?

Sub-Question 11: To what extent has UNCT support assisted national governments and other key stakeholders to respond and to deliver targeted support to the most vulnerable including strategic support to build back better?

Sub-Question 12: What (if any) role have the SERPs/CFs played in facilitating the HR/GE/LNOB focus in the response at country level? What (if any) role have pooled funds played?

F. HRBA and disability inclusion were insufficiently operationalized in the Fund and SERPs despite the availability of relevant guidance and QA support.

Sub-Question 10: Have UNCTs responded to the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic with support that is adequately focused on human rights, gender equality, inclusion (including persons with disabilities) and reaching the most vulnerable?

Sub-Question 11: To what extent has UNCT support assisted national governments and other key stakeholders to respond and to deliver targeted support to the most vulnerable including strategic support to build back better?

Sub-Question 13: What constraints have limited the degree to which the UNCT response has put core values (HR/GE/LNOB) at the center of operations? What have been facilitative factors?

G. The approach taken by the Fund to elevate gender equality in programs demonstrated the efficacy of a comprehensive, coordinated approach that included high level priority messaging, interagency engagement, technical guidance, capacity development support and (most critically) financial targets to incentivize UNCTs. It will need to be emulated in processes and requirements for other core values if the UN is to fully deliver on its GE/HR/LNOB commitment

Sub-Question 10: Have UNCTs responded to the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic with support that is adequately focused on human rights, gender equality, inclusion (including persons with disabilities) and reaching the most vulnerable?

Sub-Question 11: To what extent has UNCT support assisted national governments and other key stakeholders to respond and to deliver targeted support to the most vulnerable including strategic support to build back better?

In line with *UNEG Guidance on Integrating Gender Equality and Human Rights in Evaluation* (2011), the assessment will treat gender and inclusion as critical lines of inquiry that will cut across all relevant areas of investigation. The review will draw on the knowledge of key informants with specialized expertise on systemwide accountability frameworks for human rights, gender, disability and youth. The evaluation will further draw on available secondary data and analysis, including LNOB and gender reviews, application of gender equality markers in pooled funds and Joint Work Plans and results from country-led Scorecards that assess common processes for gender, disability and youth inclusion.

Integration of gender, disability and other categories of exclusion will also be explored via coding and analysis of primary interview data generated by this evaluation using the *Dedoose* software. Special attention will be paid to assessing the extent to which the UN has demonstrated cohesiveness and has been able to speak and act as one to elevate human rights and prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable women and men, girls and boys in response and recovery schemes. Evidence will be sought to better understand the extent to which the UN has supported countries to ‘build back better’ in terms of reducing inequalities and addressing vulnerabilities as part of recovery schemes across the five Framework Pillars (health, protection, economic, macro-economic and social cohesion) to reveal trends and identify gap areas.

Case studies will complement broader findings with in-depth exploration to better understand the extent to which the UN socio-economic response, as conducted through the SERPs and CFs, has adequately operationalized a human rights-based approach and addressed the needs of the most vulnerable/excluded segments of society at the country level. Case studies will be supported by short (1-2 page) working briefs to highlight key HR/GE/LNOB issues for each case study country.

4.8. Evaluation and COVID-19

The evaluation has been designed and carried out to respond to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in an ethical manner. It follows the guiding principles identified in the OIOS/UNEG Synthesis of Guidelines for UN Evaluation Under COVID-19. The synthesis reviewed 11 sets of UN guidelines and classified the results under three headings: Guiding Principles, Work Planning and Evaluation Approaches. Within that grouping some of the guidelines of special relevance to the evaluation include (UN OIOS 2020, p.2):

Guiding Principles

- Adapt throughout the evaluation
- Do no harm and prioritize safety

Work Planning

- Address criticality and limitations
- Adjust scope as required
- Develop work plan scenarios

Evaluation Approaches

- Greater reliance on secondary data
- Development of hybrid data collection models.

The evaluation design makes maximum use of on-line resources including web-based data portals, online document searchers, and remote interviews with key informants. This both reduces the burden on UN staff and other key stakeholders and ensures the safety of the evaluation team and key informants. The design of the case studies allows for maximum flexibility if the need arises to switch from in-person to virtual interviews (see Table 8 on risks to the evaluation).

To the extent that travel restrictions and local conditions allow, the design calls for each country case study to be carried out by a member of the core team. The pilot case study scheduled for January 2022 will be led by the evaluation team leader and attended by one member of the core team (if travel restrictions permit). This will allow the team to ensure a calibrated approach to subsequent case studies.

If the conditions of the pandemic in any case study country pose an unacceptable risk to the safety of either the evaluation team member or stakeholders, the case study will be carried out through remote data collection methods. This approach has been proven in the Early Lessons and Evaluability Assessment of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF.

4.9. Risks and Limitations

Addressing Risks

The primary risk to the completion of the evaluation is a result of the rapidly evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the recent (November 2021) emergence of the Omicron variant, the world is seeing rapidly changing restrictions to international travel. While the intention is to complete the case studies through an in-person mission to each of the countries, this may not be possible as planned. There is a very real risk that team members will be banned from travelling to the case study country, returning to their home base or transiting through a third country as necessary.

There are two potential strategies for responding successfully to this risk: alternative case study countries and reverting to a remote data collection strategy. Either approach can be effective and the evaluation will maintain the freedom of action to implement either or both as needed.

Table 9: Addressing Risks

Risks to the Evaluation	Responses
Rapid changes in travel restrictions limit or exclude in-country data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain flexibility to apply remote data collection methods in countries as required Be prepared to substitute one or two case countries as needed
Limited time frame to preparation of the interim report with a risk of limited data availability as of March 2022.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Careful critical path planning and prioritized selection and scheduling of global key informant interviews Conducting a pilot country case study during the preliminary phase (January 2022) to provide preliminary results ground proofed in at least one country Conducting the preliminary synthesis of lessons learned from evaluation on a priority basis. Accessing on-line data from multiple sources
Limited sample of case study countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Careful definition and selection of case countries to provide widest possible set of contextual factors within the time and resource limits of the study Careful treatment of the resulting evidence to ensure it is understood by users as an illustrative sample
Limited evidence of outcome level results given time elapsed (18 months) for the response)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Triangulation of evidence across and within data collection methods Focus on coherence, relevance, and effectiveness of the response points to anticipated higher level outcomes (or does not)

Risks to the Evaluation	Responses
Continuing evolution of the pandemic, the UNDS Response and UNDS reform during the evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioning additional studies as needed reviewing key contextual elements of the evolving pandemic – for example, changing patterns for inequitable economic recovery • Acknowledging institutional changes over the course of the evaluation

Addressing Limitations

As noted, the main risk to the successful completion of the evaluation arises from the unpredictable evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic and the possibility of unforeseen travel restrictions. To the extent that this and the related risks described in Table 9 are managed, the evaluation has a high probability of a successful completion. Outside of these risks there are two notable limitations to the evaluation:

- The short period of elapsed time from the development of the SERPs as the main vehicle for organizing the UNDS response which limits the potential for the emergence of meaningful data on the results of the response at outcome level – especially relating to progress toward the SDGs and achieving Agenda 2030.
- The limited time and resources available to the evaluation to ensure that results are timely and can support decision making in 2022, especially as it relates to the recovery as detailed in *Our Common Agenda*.

The evaluation will manage these limitations by:

- Focusing on the coherence and responsiveness of UNDS support to the policy and programmatic needs of host countries as they implement strategies for an effective socio-economic response and an equitable and sustainable recovery;
- Identifying evaluation evidence which suggest or contra-indicates that the support provided by UNCTs has the potential to accelerate progress toward the SDGs and Agenda 2030;
- Making maximum use of available secondary data, including the results of evaluations carried out by UNEG; and
- Liaising with ongoing reviews and evaluations of the UN response to facilitate information and data sharing.

On balance, the evaluation design will provide UNDS and member states with a strong combination of both valid and timely findings, conclusions and recommendations which can help strengthen strategies and programmes for a more equitable and sustainable recovery.

4.10. Consolidating and Analyzing Evidence

The evaluation team will be in contact with regular on-line consultation meetings throughout the evaluation process. In addition, they will conduct two, in-person data consolidation and analysis workshops. The first will be conducted in late January 2022 to analyze evaluation evidence in support of the draft and final Interim Report due in March 2022. The second will take place at the end of the data collection phase and prior to development of the draft and final report of the evaluation (due in September 2022).

In every case the evaluation team will triangulate evaluation evidence from all sources; global and regional interview, global document reviews, commissioned sub-studies, country case study interviews and profiling of quantitative evidence.

4.11. Quality Assurance

The evaluation features a layered system of management, quality assurance (QA) and oversight. The key elements of this system are:

- The consultant team leader is the principal author of draft and final reports (Inception Report, Interim and Final Report) and reviews, edits and approves all outputs of the team before they are submitted to the Senior Coordinator for SWE and the Quality Assurance Panel.
- The two-person Quality Assurance Panel reviews all team outputs and provides feedback to the team leader and the Senior Coordinator
- The Evaluation Reference Group acts as the main advisory body for the exercise and provides commentary and feedback at key points in the process.
- The UN Evaluation Advisory Group and Donor Evaluation Advisory Group members provide comments and feedback on the draft Inception and Final Reports.

The roles of the Quality Assurance Panel, the Evaluation Reference Group and both Evaluation Advisory Groups are described in full in the evaluation terms of reference (UN 2021b, p.10).

5. Schedule and Workplan

5.1. Key Events and Associated Deliverables

Table 10: Key Dates and Study Deliverables

Key Event or Deliverable	Associated Dates for Planning
Mobilization of the study team and start-up meeting	November 2021
Draft Inception Report Circulated to the ERG	December 10, 2021
Meeting of the ERG for Presentation and Discussion of the Draft Inception Report	December 21, 2021
Discussions with UN and Donor Evaluation Advisory Groups on the Inception Report	December, 2021
Finalized Inception Report	January 13, 2022
Pilot Country Case Study Mission (Jordan)	January 22 to February 1, 2022
Data Consolidation Workshop Number One	January 28-29, 2022
Draft Interim Report	February 24, 2022
Final Interim Report	March 14, 2022
Data Collection Phase – Including Case Studies	January to July 2022
Data Consolidation Workshop Number Two	August 2022
Draft Final Report to ERG	August 2022
ERG Meeting on Draft Final Report	September 2022
Consultations and Finalization	September 2022

The detailed workplan for the exercise is provided in Annex 4.

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Annex 2: Interviews Conducted in the Inception Phase

Name	Organization	Position
Aleshina, Olga	COVID-19 MPTF Secretariat	Head of the Secretariat
Angela Neil, Natalie	OIOS	Evaluation Officer
Arapakos, Demetra	OIOS	Evaluation Officer
Baki, Yasser	OCHA	Head, COVID-19 Team: Jan 2021 to present
Bhatia, Anita	UN Women	Deputy Executive Director for Resource Management
Cronin, Eileen	Joint Inspection Unit	Inspector
Grogan, Brian	OCHA	COVID-19 Response and Recovery Focal Point
Guarnieri, Valerie	WFP	Assistant Executive Director
Gyles-McDonnough, Michelle	Office of the Deputy Secretary General	Director for SDGs
Igarashi, Masahiro	FAO and UNEG	Chair, UNEG
Kalapurakal, Rosemary	Development Coordination Office	Acting Deputy
Kehris, Ilze Brands	OHCHR	Assistant Secretary General for Human Rights
Kenney, Erin	Spotlight Initiative	Technical Unit Head
Kowbel, Nicholas	OIOS	Evaluation Officer/Team Leader
Kim, Heewoong	Joint SDG Fund Secretariat	Reporting and Evaluation Specialist
Kurbeil, Lisa	Joint SDG Fund Secretariat	Head
Landry, Magda	UNESCO	Senior Coordinator Field Security
Lust-Bianchi, Philippe	Spotlight Initiative	Technical & M&E Specialist
O'Malley, Stephen	OCHA	Head, COVID-19 Team; March 2020 to December 2020
Piper, Robert	Development Coordination Office	Assistant Secretary General for Development Coordination
Rye-Pedersen, Anders	RCO, Jordan	Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator
Rubian, Renata	UNDP	Policy Advisor, Regional Bureau for Asia and Pacific
Than, Nguyen	ESCAP	Sustainable Development Officer, Office of Executive Secretary.
Valji, Nahla	Spotlight Initiative	Head
Woo Guo, Yee	OIOS	Director, Inspection and Evaluation Division

Xu, Haoliang	UNDP	Assistant Secretary General Director of Bureau for Policy and Programme Support
Zahedi, Kaveh	ESCAP	Assistant Secretary General

Interviews are continuing for the 60 identified key stakeholders at the global level

Annex 3: Available Evaluative Reports for Synthesis

UNDS Entity	Criteria Category	Title
FAO	Overall evaluations of the Entity's COVID-19 Response Plan	Real-time evaluation of FAO's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme
FAO	Overall evaluations of the Entity's COVID-19 Response Plan	Evaluation of FAO's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme
ILO	Overall evaluations of the Entity's COVID-19 Response Plan	High-level Evaluation on the response of ILO to COVID-19
UNCTAD	Overall evaluations of the Entity's COVID-19 Response Plan	2020 Evaluation of UNCTAD activities: Overview
UNDP	Overall evaluations of the Entity's COVID-19 Response Plan	UNDP's COVID-19 Adaptation and Response: What worked and how?
UNHABITAT	Overall evaluations of the Entity's COVID-19 Response Plan	COVID-19 Response Report of Activities
UNICEF	Overall evaluations of the Entity's COVID-19 Response Plan	Global Synthesis Report: Real-Time Assessment (RTA) of the UNICEF response to COVID-19
UNICEF	Overall evaluations of the Entity's COVID-19 Response Plan	Covid-19 response Real Time Assessment Report EAPRO
UNICEF	Overall evaluations of the Entity's COVID-19 Response Plan	Community Rapid Assessment on COVID-19 in Eastern and Southern Africa
UNICEF	Overall evaluations of the Entity's COVID-19 Response Plan	Real-Time Assessment of UNICEF's Ongoing Response to COVID-19 in Europe and Central Asia
UNICEF	Overall evaluations of the Entity's COVID-19 Response Plan	Real-Time Assessment (RTA) of UNICEF's Ongoing Response to COVID-19 in Eastern and Southern Africa
UNICEF	Overall evaluations of the Entity's COVID-19 Response Plan	Real-Time Assessment (RTA) of UNICEF's response to COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)
UNICEF	Overall evaluations of the Entity's COVID-19 Response Plan	MENA Real Time Assessment COVID 19 Response
UNICEF	Overall evaluations of the Entity's COVID-19 Response Plan	Real-time assessment of the UNICEF South Asia Response to COVID-19
UNWOMEN	Overall evaluations of the Entity's COVID-19 Response Plan	Report on the UN Women global response to COVID-19
CEPAL	Thematic and sectoral evaluations of the Entity's response	Final Assessment Report: Addressing critical socio-environmental challenges in Latin America and the Caribbean
ILO	Thematic and sectoral evaluations of the Entity's response	ILO's response to the impact of COVID-19 on the world of work: Evaluative lessons on how to build a better future of work after the pandemic
ILO	Thematic and sectoral evaluations of the Entity's response	ILO's response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on workers and enterprises: What evaluative lessons can be drawn from the ILO's past response to an economic and financial crisis?
IOM	Thematic and sectoral evaluations of the Entity's response	External Evaluation of the Migration Health Programme
UNCDF	Thematic and sectoral evaluations of the Entity's response	Independent evaluation of UNCDF's Strategic Framework and Gender Policy and Strategy
UNDP	Thematic and sectoral evaluations of the Entity's response	Evaluation of UNDP Support to Climate Change Adaptation
UNDP	Thematic and sectoral evaluations of the Entity's response	Evaluation of UNDP Support to Conflict-Affected Countries

UNESCO	Thematic and sectoral evaluations of the Entity's response	Evaluation of the UNESCO Global Priority Gender Equality
UNICEF	Thematic and sectoral evaluations of the Entity's response	UNICEF COVID-19 Learning Evaluation
UNICEF	Thematic and sectoral evaluations of the Entity's response	Rapid Assessment of Global Social Protection Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic
UNICEF/UNFPA	Thematic and sectoral evaluations of the Entity's response	Assessment of Adaptations to the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage in light of COVID-19
UNWOMEN	Thematic and sectoral evaluations of the Entity's response	Corporate evaluation of UN Women's UN system coordination and broader convening role in ending violence against women
UNWOMEN	Thematic and sectoral evaluations of the Entity's response	Corporate thematic evaluation of UN Women's support to National Action Plans on women, peace, and security
WFP	Thematic and sectoral evaluations of the Entity's response	Strategic evaluation of the Contribution of School Feeding Activities to the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals
FAO	Annual Evaluation Report	Programme Evaluation Report 2021
IFAD	Annual Evaluation Report	2021 Annual Report on Results and Impact of IFAD Operations
IFAD	Annual Evaluation Report	2020 Annual Report on Results and Impact of IFAD Operations
ILO	Annual Evaluation Report	Annual Evaluation Report 2020-2021
ITC	Annual Evaluation Report	2020 Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report
UNAIDS	Annual Evaluation Report	2020 Annual Report for Evaluation
UNDP	Annual Evaluation Report	UNDP 2020 Annual Evaluation Report
UNECE	Annual Evaluation Report	Annual Report on Evaluation 2020
UNESCO	Annual Evaluation Report	UNESCO Synthetic Review of Evaluations 2021
UNFPA	Annual Evaluation Report	Annual Report on the evaluation function 2020
UNICEF	Annual Evaluation Report	Annual report for 2020 on the evaluation function in UNICEF
WFP	Annual Evaluation Report	Annual Evaluation Report 2020

