

# UN DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM REFORM FAQ

## WHAT IS THE REFORM OF THE UN DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM?

The reform of the United Nations development system (UNDS) involves a set of far-reaching changes in the way the UN development system works to help countries around the world in achieving the [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

The reform is mandated by the General Assembly of the United Nations in [Resolution A/RES/72/279](#) of 31 May 2018, which responded to the vision and proposals of Secretary-General António Guterres to reposition the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda.

## WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHANGES TO EXPECT FROM THIS REFORM?

- ✓ The reform aims to reposition the United Nations development system with a stronger, better-defined collective identity as a trusted, reliable, cohesive, accountable and effective partner to countries in the 2030 Agenda; one that Member States invest in, and rely on, because they understand and support what it does, what it can deliver on, and how it functions. The reform should yield a UN development system that is more integrated, more focused on delivery on the ground, with clearer internal and external accountability for contributions to national needs, and with capacities, skillsets and resources better aligned to the 2030 Agenda.

More specifically, the reform will deliver:

- ✓ A reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system with an independent and empowered Resident Coordinator at its centre. On 1 January 2019 all Resident Coordinators will take over their new functions as the highest-ranking development representative of the UN system, leading 131 United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) serving 164 countries and territories, to deliver collective responses to national needs and ensure system-wide accountability on the ground. Resident Coordinators will need to have strong leadership skills and sustainable development expertise, necessary to build trust, transform the work approaches of the UN development system, address national needs and priorities and bring the UN system together to deliver better results on the ground. They will report directly to UN Secretary-General.
- ✓ Clear and more robust lines of accountability, from UN country teams to host governments, from the Resident Coordinator to the Secretary-General, as well as between Resident Coordinators and heads of UN entities at the country level.
- ✓ A more coherent and better-coordinated utilization of global and regional capacities and resources, more focused on delivering support to countries in collaboration with UN country teams, through analysis, policy options and technical expertise that can be easily and reliably accessed.
- ✓ A new generation of UN Country Teams, the composition, roles and profiles of which are tailored to the context, and that deliver shared results, including through a redesigned UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAFs) that becomes the main strategic instrument to respond to national needs and priorities.
- ✓ A more adequate support infrastructure at global, regional and country levels to support the Resident Coordinators and UNCTs in these tasks, and to improve the functions and capacities of the Resident Coordinator offices, notably through an upgraded Development Operations Coordination Office (UNDOCO) at HQ and in the regions, responsible for providing support to Resident Coordinator and UN country teams.
- ✓ A shift in donor funding towards more predictable and flexible resources, that allow, in turn, the UN development system to tailor its support, enhance results delivery, and provide greater transparency, accountability and visibility for resources entrusted to the system.

- ✓ Streamlined operating practices, through consolidation of back offices and service centers, resulting in both efficiency gains and higher quality services.
- ✓ More and better communication on what the UN development system does, how it operates, and what Member States get from their investments in the system.

## HOW IS THIS REFORM DIFFERENT FROM PREVIOUS UN REFORMS?

These reforms respond directly to the paradigm shift ushered in by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SDGs are the reference and the purpose of this reform. The level of ambition of the 2030 Agenda is unprecedented. The needs on the ground are immense and urgent, and the 2030 Agenda represents a historic challenge and opportunity for multilateralism. This is why this reform is the most ambitious and comprehensive change-process of the UN development system since at least the 1960's, affecting every department, office, regional commission and field operation engaged in development work.

Compared to past reform efforts, this reform also benefits from strong leadership and unanimous support from Member States. The reform responds to clear guidance through a robust 2016 QCPR resolution (Quadrennial comprehensive policy review) and will be implemented with the string backing of the General Assembly through its resolution 72/279. While challenges in implementation are inevitable, all Member States continuously reiterate their support for the vision and level of ambition that underpin different aspects of the reform.

Finally, this reform is unparalleled in its scope, on different levels: first, within the UN development system, it touches on how we work at the global, regional and country level; it ranges from the UN's strategic planning approaches and instruments to accountability systems, administrative arrangements, and budgetary practices. The United Nations Sustainable Development Group, for example, was revamped – with the Deputy Secretary-General becoming its new Chair – for strengthened oversight and strategic direction to enable the work of UN country teams.

The reform also applies universally – to all entities of the UN development system and all UN country teams. It also seeks to address structural challenges in coordination mechanisms and mindsets, for a truly transformational impact.

Second, this reform is not just internal; the need for the UN development system to change is a shared responsibility. Therefore, the reform is also about Member State behavior, and in shifting to more predictable and flexible funding approaches that are needed for the UN development system to offer the type of high-quality, integrated and tailored support that the 2030 Agenda requires.

## WHY IS THE REFORM NEEDED? WHY NOW?

The reform is urgent because Member States need the UN development system to be fit for the purpose, opportunities and challenges presented by the 2030 Agenda.

Since 1945, the United Nations system has contributed to improving the lives of millions of the poorest and most vulnerable people on the planet. But the current system, mostly designed at a time of different global challenges and priorities, has outstripped its capacity to be nimble and respond to the needs of today's world. Current global challenges, from climate change to growing inequality and entrenched poverty require global and integrated responses, which no single agency can fully and unilaterally provide. The nature of the 2030 Agenda and its urgency are driving the nature and the timing of this reform.

In doing so, the reform is also a response to re-emerging skepticism about the value of multilateralism and the relevance of multilateral institutions in today's world. Building on its many past achievements,

the UN development system needs to demonstrate that it can be even more effective, efficient and transparent in supporting countries and their priorities.

## WHO'S DOING WHAT IN THE REFORM PROCESS?

The reform is a collective, system-wide endeavor, requiring and benefiting from the engagement of the entire UN development system as well as Member States.

The Secretary-General established a transition team, working under the leadership of the Deputy Secretary-General to support implementation of all aspects of the reform. Various inter-agency mechanisms, led by different UN entities, are mobilized to advance these various aspects, with the UN SDG, convened by the Deputy Secretary General with all Principals providing strategic guidance and oversight. The composition, levels, lifespan, and degree of formality of each of these mechanisms vary depending on the task at hand.

Many work streams, for example the re-design of the UN Development Assistance Framework or the review of Multi Country Offices, benefit from the engagement of colleagues in the field, through ad hoc reference groups or task teams. Town halls with staff at HQ or in the field are organized regularly.

Consultations with Member States are held on a regular basis, through structured or semi-structured mechanisms, in closed and open formats, and with the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General convening the entire Membership regularly to provide comprehensive updates, in addition to their regular bilateral engagement at HQ or at capital level.

Finally, and more specifically, a working group comprising of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Development Operations Coordination Office (UNDOCO), the Department of Management (DM) and the Office of the Legal Affairs (OLA) is actively working on the transition of the Resident Coordinator system and of UNDOCO into the Secretariat.

## WHAT IS THE BUDGET OF THE RC SYSTEM?

The reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system will cost USD281 million annually, which is roughly 1 per cent of contributions to UN operational activities for development. This includes USD246 million for Resident Coordinators and staffing and operating costs of 131 Resident Coordinator Offices and UNDOCO. The remaining USD35 million per annum is for a dedicated Fund for use by Resident Coordinators at the country level to support joint initiatives and activities with the UNCT and with government around coordination goals.

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS REFORM?

- Higher quality, more integrated, and appropriately tailored operational support and policy advice for governments in their efforts to meet the SDGs
- A more collaborative and coherent UN development system where all the relevant UN mandates, resources and competencies at the global, regional and country level are brought together in support of the 2030 agenda
- More effective and efficient operations, quantifiable in savings and costs, with improved service quality and timeliness

- More tailored and responsive UN presence in countries, anchored in national priorities, leading to economies of scale and enhanced collaboration amongst UN agencies, funds and programmes
- Transparency and accountability in results achieved and resources used, allowing Member States and the general public to better understand what the UN development system does, how and to what ends
- Dedicated, independent and empowered coordination of development activities, with a new Resident Coordinator system able to leverage system-wide thinking and resources
- Improved funding practices by donors/Member states, with more predictable and flexible resources that incentivize integrated, tailored UN support to countries

## WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

Whether it is in development, or the other pillars of the reform – management and peace and security – the reform is not an end in itself. What matters are results on the ground. The reform of the UN development system will only be successful if the enhanced support that the United Nations offers to countries allows them to accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

Towards that sole purpose, success, or evaluation criteria, will be measured through a number of dimensions including: the quality, coherence and reliability of policy support that the UN provides to governments; the ability to identify, design or support new partnerships that allow countries to access new sources of financing and expertise for their national priorities; enhance ownership by Member States and host governments of the UN development system and its coordination; the discipline of the UN system to act and support countries as one, reducing transaction costs for its partners; and the efficiency and effectiveness by which this support is delivered.

## HOW WILL THE REFORM PROCESS BE TRACKED?

A core element of the Secretary-General’s vision for this reform is transparency; both in terms of the clarity with which the UN reports on results achieved and resources used; and the extent to which the UN development system is open to the world, and governments and citizens around the world understand and support its roles and activities.

To this end, all the reform deliverables will be evaluated through dedicated mechanisms, currently being established. The implementation of a reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system will be reported annually to the ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment. At the field level, the UN development system is committed to providing better access to results achieved on a country’s SDG priorities, including through online platforms that track what the UN is doing for any SDG, and what activities are being funded through the system. Also planned for 2019, using existing resources and with the support of the UN evaluation group (UNEG), the UN development system will establish dedicated mechanisms to increase the quality and credibility of UNDAF evaluations, to better tailor and harmonize UN country level activities to meet urgent national priorities, and to contribute to the aggregation and synthesis of the results of UN support regionally and globally.