Independent Evaluation Office
United Nations Development Programme

INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION
TURKMENISTAN

Independent Evaluation Office
United Nations Development Programme

INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION
TURKMENISTAN

REPORTS PUBLISHED UNDER THE ICPE SERIES

Afghanistan (Islamic Republic of)
Albania
Algeria
Angola
Argentina
Armenia
Azerbaijan
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbados and OECS
Belarus
Benin
Bhutan
Bolivia
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Botswana
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Cabo Verde
Cambodia
Cameroon
Central African Republic
Chad
Chile
China
Colombia
Congo (Democratic Republic of)
Congo (Republic of)
Costa Rica
Côte d'Ivoire
Croatia
Cuba
Djibouti
Dominican Republic
Ecuador
Equatorial Guinea
Egypt
El Salvador
Eswatini
Ethiopia
Gabon
Georgia
Ghana
Guatemala
Guinea-Bissau
Guyana
Honduras
India
Indonesia
Iraq
Jamaica
Jordan
Kenya
Kosovo
Kuwait
Kyrgyzstan
Lao People's
Democratic Republic
Liberia
Libya
Malawi
Malaysia
Maldives
Mali
Mauritania
Mexico
Moldova (Republic of)
Mongolia
Montenegro
Morocco
Mozambique
Namibia
Nepal
Nicaragua
Niger
Nigeria
North Macedonia
Pacific Islands
Pakistan
Panama
Papua New Guinea
Paraguay
Peru
Philippines
Rwanda
Sao Tome and Principe
Senegal
Serbia
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Somalia
South Sudan
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Syria
Tajikistan
Tanzania
Thailand
Timor-Leste
Togo
Tunisia
Türkiye
Turkmenistan
Uganda
Ukraine
United Arab Emirates
Uruguay
Uzbekistan
Viet Nam
Yemen
Zambia
Zimbabwe

INDEPENDENT UNDP PROGRAMME EVALUATION: TURKMENISTAN

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) would like to thank all those who have contributed to this evaluation.

IEO TEAM

Directorate: Isabelle Mercier (Director) and Richard Jones (Deputy Director)

CPE Section Chief: Ana Rosa Soares

Regional Evaluation Advisor: Saltanat Rasulova

Evaluation Manager: Angela Naletilic

External evaluation team: Lilit Melikyan (Team Leader), Bunafsha Gulakova, Dr Jörn Dosch and Dr Stefan Lang (Particip GmbH)

Internal peer reviewers: Richard Jones and Oyku Ulucay

External reviewers: Angela Bester

Research analyst: Claudia Villanueva

Publication and dissemination: Flora Jimenez and Iben Hjorth

Administrative support: Maya Fridman and Walid Totakhil

The IEO could not have completed the evaluation without the support of the following:

STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERS

UNDP Turkmenistan staff: Narine Sahakyan (Resident Representative), Tomica Paovic (Deputy Resident Representative), Ogulshirin Yazlyyeva (Monitoring & Evaluation Associate), and other staff.

Other stakeholders and partners: Government of Turkmenistan, representatives of United Nations agencies, civil society, bilateral and multilateral development partners.

CONTENTS

FIGURES

ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BDS	Blind and Deaf Society
CO	Country Office
CPD	Country Programme Document
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GES	Gender Equality Strategy
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GF	Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria
HDI	Human Development Index
ICPE	Independent Country Programme Evaluation
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
IFAS	International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea
INFF	Integrated National Financing Framework
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
MFTR	Memorandum of Foreign Trade Regime
MHMI	Ministry of Health and Medical Industry
MLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NAPGE	National Action Plan for Gender Equality
NCD	Non-Communicable Disease
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIM	National Implementation Modality
PSD	Private Sector Development

PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
PwD	Persons with Disabilities
RBM	Results-Based Management
ROAR	Results-Oriented Annual Report
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SLM	Sustainable Land Management
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SMART	Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool
SNA	System of National Accounts
SWM	Solid Waste Management
TB	Tuberculosis
UHC	Universal Health Coverage
UMIC	Upper Middle-Income Country
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNTB	United Nations Treaty Body
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

Evaluation Brief: Turkmenistan

Country Context

Turkmenistan is an upper-middle-income country with a population of more than 7 million. The country has pursued its national development priorities within a centrally administered economic framework, drawing on substantial hydrocarbon resources that underpin foreign exchange earnings and fiscal stability. In recent years, the Government has maintained strong macroeconomic performance and has demonstrated commitment to advancing structural reforms aimed at promoting diversification, private sector development and digital transformation.

The national reform agenda has included notable progress in strengthening human rights institutions, gender equality commitments and the digital economy. Strategic frameworks have been adopted in key areas such as climate change, disaster risk reduction and digitalization, with implementation ongoing during the evaluation period. Environmental challenges such as desertification, salinization, and water stress have been well recognized by the Government and have received increasing attention, particularly in the context of sustainable land and water management and climate change adaptation.

Turkmenistan has established a broad-based social protection system comprising a wide range of social policies and programmes. With support from development partners, efforts have been made to enhance the reach and effectiveness of social services, particularly for vulnerable groups, including women, youth and persons with disabilities. These efforts have reflected the country's commitment to inclusive development and to ensuring that no one is left behind.

UNDP in Turkmenistan and Country Programme Under Review

The UNDP Country Programme Document (CPD) 2021–2025 aligned with Turkmenistan's development goals and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. Its strategic vision was to support a people-centred, inclusive, green and digital transition, focusing on four key areas:

- Governance and Rule of Law – Advancing transparency, human rights and digital public administration
- Economic Diversification – Promoting digital transformation, private sector growth and trade
- Energy and Environment – Supporting climate adaptation, mitigation, disaster risk reduction and biodiversity
- Health and Social Services – Strengthening health infrastructure and inclusive social protection.

UNDP has been a trusted partner of the Government of Turkmenistan, with programming largely co-financed by the Government and international vertical funds. The total CPD budget reached US$208.9 million by March 2024, with a 74 percent disbursement rate.

Findings and Conclusions

Governance and Rule of Law

UNDP supported legal reforms, digitalization of public services and the strengthening of the Ombudsperson's Office. While contributions to human rights compliance were significant, systemic reforms (e.g., judiciary, legal aid) remained modest. Digital governance progressed through the creation of electronic registries and services. While full cross-sectoral integration was still evolving, these efforts laid the foundation for more connected and efficient public administration.

Economic Diversification

UNDP advanced e-governance, paperless trade, mobile banking, and WTO accession processes. While improvements were notable, especially in trade facilitation, systemic issues such as limited access to finance and underdeveloped value chains have constrained impact. Initiatives to support SMEs and women entrepreneurs showed promising results, although full sustainability at scale was yet to be achieved.

Energy and Environment

UNDP contributed to the development of national climate strategies, supported the enhancement of the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and facilitated access to climate finance. It implemented pilot projects on water efficiency, sustainable land management and energy efficiency, some of which were scaled up by the Government. Progress on biodiversity, renewable energy and disaster risk systems was slower due to policy and financial constraints.

Health and Social Services

UNDP played a pivotal role in strengthening the health sector. It managed a $20 million World Bank COVID-19 loan, improved diagnostic capacities, supported pandemic preparedness, and expanded access to treatment and essential medicines for non-communicable diseases. Community-based social services were piloted and embedded in law, although coverage remained limited. Support for youth and persons with disabilities improved livelihoods, although further efforts were needed to broaden systemic impact.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Strengthen SDG Integration and Sustainability. UNDP should reinforce cross-sectoral linkages, enhance project scalability, and promote sector-wide approaches. It should sustain Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) development and expand SDG-aligned financing.

Recommendation 2. Enhance Governance and Human Rights Integration. UNDP should embed good governance, human rights and rule of law principles into all thematic areas. It should advance institutional reforms, including justice sector accountability and e-governance systems.

Recommendation 3. Deepen Climate and Environmental Action. UNDP should support the operationalization of the National Adaptation Plan (NAP), expand green finance and promote systemic solutions for biodiversity, sustainable waste management and disaster preparedness.

Recommendation 4. Consolidate Health and Social Service Gains. UNDP should build on achievements in universal health coverage (UHC) and pandemic response. It should address sustainability of diagnostics, scale up digital health, and develop targeted social protection systems for vulnerable populations.

Recommendation 5. Advance Inclusive Digitalization and Economic Transformation. UNDP should support the creation of a national digital strategy, address the digital divide, and expand access to e-services, digital finance and market entry for SMEs.

Recommendation 6. Institutionalize GEWE and LNOB. UNDP should move from project-based approaches to institutionalized support for gender and inclusion. It should develop a coherent Leave No One Behind (LNOB) strategy and deepen gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) in policy, finance and legal reforms.

CHAPTER 1
BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the purpose, objectives and scope of the evaluation as well as the methodology applied. It also lays out the development context as well as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) programme in Turkmenistan.

1.1 Purpose, objectives and scope of the evaluation

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the UNDP conducts Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPEs) to critically assess UNDP contributions to national development priorities and results.

ICPEs are independent evaluations and are carried out within the overall provisions contained in the UNDP evaluation policy. In the ICPE framework, the evaluation team assessed UNDP's contributions and the effectiveness of UNDP's Turkmenistan Country Office's (TCO) strategy towards achieving the development results articulated in its Country Programme Document (CPD). The CPD and its goals were derived from the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, the programmatic framework for United Nations (UN) agencies operating in the country.

The objectives of this ICPE were to:

- Support the development of the next Turkmenistan UNDP Country Programme by identifying best practices, results and key lessons learned from the current cycle;
- Strengthen the accountability of the UNDP to national and international stakeholders and the UNDP Executive Board; and
- Contribute to knowledge generation, organizational learning and decision-making within the UNDP.

This ICPE was carried out in 2024 and covered the period from 2021 to the end of 2024, i.e., the first three and a half years of the current CPD cycle (2021-2025). This was the second country programme evaluation conducted by the IEO in Turkmenistan. The ICPE covered UNDP activities in the country and interventions funded by all funding sources, including UNDP's resources, donor and government funds. The ICPE also covered non-project activities, such as coordination and advocacy, which were important in supporting the country's political and social agendas.

1.2 Evaluation methodology

The evaluation used outcomes and outputs presented by the country programme for the period 2021-2025 as a framework against which achievements were analysed. It looked at each of the planned outcomes, their relative outputs, and their respective links to the strategic objectives of the programme.

To better understand UNDP's performance and the sustainability of results in the country, and to embed the results achieved into an appropriate context, the ICPE recognized the need to integrate external factors, such as international economic developments and the global political situation that potentially influenced the country programme, either positively or negatively. The ICPE also assessed the TCO's capacity to adapt to changing circumstances and respond to national development needs and priorities. More specifically, the evaluation sought to answer the four evaluation questions presented in Box 1.

The evaluation methodology adhered to the United Nations Evaluation Group Norms and Standards.[1] In line with the UNDP gender mainstreaming strategy, the evaluation examined the level of gender mainstreaming and gender equality in the formulation of the country programme and its operations, as well as the results achieved. Gender marker data was used to analyse the level of expected contribution to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) at programme design. Gender-related results were assessed using the UNDP's Gender Results Effectiveness Scale.[2]

The following methods were used to respond to the evaluation questions:

- Document Review: Analysis of the full portfolio of projects and programmes and other relevant documents, including decentralized evaluations, and Result-Oriented Annual Reports (ROAR) and audits where available. See Annex 3 for a complete list of documents.

BOX 1. Evaluation questions

1. To what extent has the UNDP country programme strategically addressed key national development priorities and the needs of its main stakeholders, including those at risk of being left behind?
2. To what extent was UNDP able to adapt its positioning and programmatic response to shifts in context and other changes in the operating environment, leveraging comparative strengths?
3. To what extent were UNDP approaches and interventions successful in achieving the intended objectives of the country programme and contributing to broader, longer-term national development goals?
4. To what extent did internal and external factors influence UNDP's ability to deliver its programme efficiently and maximize contributions?

- Pre-mission questionnaire with the CO: This captured the performance and results of the programme, as well as major cross-cutting themes, such as gender, partnership, and the design and implementation-related issues of the country programme. It was used bearing in mind that it was a UNDP self-assessment tool.
- Key Informant Interviews: Included 116 key informants (in-person and remote), 52 women and 64 men, from a range of stakeholders involved in the CPD implementation, including government officials, staff from the UNDP, other UN agencies and multilateral organizations, as well as members of civil society and vulnerable communities.[3]
- Site visits and direct observation: See Annex 4 for a complete list of sites visited.

1.3 Challenges and limitations

While the evaluation was thoroughly planned with the CO, engaging some final beneficiaries—particularly those involved in good governance initiatives—was hampered by limited internet access and connectivity. As a result, accessing certain project participants (e.g., trainees from the Academy of Civil Service) online proved difficult.

[1] See the United Nations Evaluation Group website: http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914.

[2] The IEO's Gender Results Effectiveness Scale classifies gender results into five categories: gender negative (results have a negative outcome that aggravated or reinforced gender inequalities and limiting norms); gender blind (results gave no attention to gender, and failed to acknowledge the different needs of men, women, girls and boys and other marginalized populations); gender targeted (results focused on the number of women, men, or marginalized populations that were targeted); gender responsive (results addressed the differential needs of men, women, marginalized populations and focused on the equitable distribution of benefits, resources, status, rights, etc. but did not address root causes of inequalities); and gender transformative (results contributed to changes in norms, cultural values, power structures and the roots of gender inequalities and discriminations).

[3] In the context of this report, the expression 'vulnerable communities' was an umbrella term to refer to, *inter alia*, women, youth, marginalized communities living in remote areas, people living with TB and People with Disabilities (PLD), etc.

To mitigate the challenges posed by the limited and unstable internet connections the evaluation team replaced several planned virtual meetings with in-person interviews. Team members who travelled to the country received thorough briefings from their colleagues beforehand, ensuring that beneficiaries without reliable online access could still be included.

1.4 Country context

Turkmenistan is a land-locked country, located on the south-eastern coast of the Caspian Sea. It shares borders with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Iran. It is the second largest country in Central Asia and is divided into five provinces (Ahal, Balkan, Dashoguz, Lebap and Mary) and one capital city district.[4] Its total population is 7,057,841 people, with 47.1 percent urban and 52.9 percent rural residents.[5]

Economy: Turkmenistan is classified as an Upper-Middle-Income Country (UMIC) since 2012, with a centrally planned economy and a state-run banking system. Officially reported Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth was 6.2 percent in 2022. The International Monetary Fund estimated GDP growth at 1.97 percent for 2023,[6] while the Asian Development Bank reported a growth rate of 6.3 percent.[7] The Government estimated a GDP growth of 6.3 percent for the first 10 months of 2024.[8]

The country faces economic challenges, such as a shrinking manufacturing sector, low foreign direct investment and high inflation, partly due to a parallel exchange rate distorting the economy.[9] Despite high global energy prices boosting foreign reserves and a current account surplus, the reliance on commodity exports, particularly to China, limits diversification, with the expansion of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) constrained by existing regulatory frameworks. Turkmenistan operates a mostly centrally administered, planned economy, with a nearly entirely state-run banking system. Significant revenues come from hydrocarbon exports, particularly natural gas, which made up 82.4 percent of export revenues in 2022.[10] China remains the main trading partner, with Turkmen gas exports to China increasing by 51 percent year-on-year, reaching nearly $10 billion in 2022. This heavy dependence on China—76 percent of gas exports[11]—makes Turkmenistan vulnerable to fluctuations in the Chinese economy. Plans are underway to double natural gas exports and build a fourth pipeline to China. Economic diversification remains a significant challenge. Turkmenistan's import coverage ratio was the lowest in the region in 2022, reflecting a shrinking manufacturing sector (14.7 percent of GDP), limited foreign direct investment (2 percent of GDP), and suppressed household consumption.[12] High global energy prices helped generate a current account surplus of 7 percent of GDP in 2022, with foreign exchange reserves growing to nearly $40 billion (50 percent of GDP) by mid-2023.[13] Economic competition is limited, with private sector growth primarily driven by SMEs.

---

4 Turkmenistan's provinces are known as 'velayats.' Each velayat, as well as Ashgabat, is further subdivided into administrative units called 'etraps,' which function similarly to counties or municipal districts. Etraps encompass towns, villages, and rural areas, serving as local government units responsible for implementing regional policies and managing local administrative tasks. Throughout this report velayats will be referred to as 'provinces' and etraps as districts.

5 State Committee of Turkmenistan on Statistics, Population and Housing Census in Turkmenistan, 2022.

6 IMF, 'IMF Staff Completes 2024 Article IV Mission to Turkmenistan', 15 April 2024. Last accessed: 15 September 2024. Available at: https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2024/04/15/pr24118-turkmenistan-imf-staff-completes-2024-article-iv-mission.

7 Asian Development Bank (ADB), 'Economic forecasts for Turkmenistan.' Last accessed: 7 January 2025. Available at: https://www.adb.org/where-we-work/turkmenistan/economy.

8 Turkmenportal, 'Turkmenistan's GDP grew by 6.3 % in ten months of 2024.' Last accessed: 7 January 2025. Available at: https://turkmenportal.com/en/blog/84544/turkmenistans-gdp-grew-by-63-in-ten-months-of-2024.

9 Gogoberishvili, Levan and Ömer E. Bayar, 'Reassessing GDP Growth in Countries with Statistical Shortcomings – A Case Study on Turkmenistan,' IMF e-library, 2023. Last accessed: 9 January 2025. Available at: https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/001/2023/207/article-A001-en.xml. Also in: United Nations Turkmenistan, 'Common Country Analysis. 2023 Update', 2024. Last accessed: 15 September 2024. Available at: https://turkmenistan.un.org/en/259052-common-country-analysis-2023-update.

10 ADB, 'Turkmenistan Country Brief,' 2023. Last accessed: 16 September 2024. Available at: https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/863591/tkm-ado-april-2023.pdf.

11 United Nations Turkmenistan, 'Common Country Analysis. 2023 Update', 2024. Last accessed: 7 January 2025. Available at: https://turkmenistan.un.org/en/259052-common-country-analysis-2023-update.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

Governance: Turkmenistan adhered to its international reporting responsibilities under the key United Nations Human Rights agreements, maintaining sustained constructive engagement with treaty bodies, Special Procedures mandate holders, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, and other UN human rights mechanisms. Following the third cycle of the UPR, Turkmenistan adopted several measures, including plans addressing human rights, gender equality, children's rights, statelessness, and combating human trafficking.[14] It implemented 314 legislative amendments to strengthen the Human Rights framework, aimed at enhancing judicial independence, easing association registration, and removing employment restrictions for women.[15] Turkmenistan also revised its criminal liability regulations for minors and criminalized discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, religion and other factors.[16] Amendments to the Courts Act strengthened judicial independence, while changes to the Law on Public Associations simplified the registration process for national public associations.[17] Efforts were also made to revise regulations on criminal liability for minors. Seventeen articles from the Criminal Code concerning minors were shifted to the Code of Administrative Offences. In 2020, the State established the interdepartmental commission on combating corruption in Turkmenistan and at the time of writing this report was implementing the National Anti-Corruption Programme, 2020–2024. In 2021, Turkmenistan adopted the National Action Plan on Human Rights for 2021–2025, which was also being implemented at the time of writing this report. From 2021 to 2022, the Office of the Ombudsperson's budget doubled. A joint project of UNDP and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights aimed to support further strengthening the Office's capacity, focusing on a multi-year strategic plan.[18] In October 2024, the Ombudsperson's office was accredited by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) with the status 'B' and two new departments (for children and women rights and business and human rights) were established. Upon receiving its accreditation status from GANHRI, the Ombudsperson's Office committed to addressing the recommendations made alongside the accreditation.[19] Those recommendations focus on resolving ongoing challenges related to independence and impartiality, the capacity to handle individual complaints, the ability to conduct monitoring visits to detention centres, and improving cooperation with the media and civil society organizations to comply with the Paris Principles requirements within the next three years.[20] The fourth UPR acknowledged some progress while emphasizing ongoing concerns. These included the country's limited implementation of key United Nations Treaty Bodies (UNTB) recommendations, issues with the independence of the Ombudsperson's Office, restrictions on freedom of expression, and persistent problems related to discrimination and torture.[21]

Energy, Environment, Climate change: Turkmenistan is among the most energy-intensive economies in the subregion because of its large oil and gas industry, estimated at more than 71 billion tons of oil equivalent,[22] with oil and gas methane emissions around 5 million metric tons representing 3.6 percent of methane emissions from the global energy sector. This was a priority to address and during this CPD, the Government

[14] These are: National Action Plans (NAPs) on Human Rights (2021-2025), Gender Equality (2021-2025), Children's Rights (2021-2025), and Combating Trafficking in Persons (2020-2022), as well as to Eradicate Statelessness (2019-2024).

[15] Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Turkmenistan. Human Rights Council Fifty-fifth Session A/HRC/55/4. 26 February–5 April 2024.

[16] National report submitted in accordance with Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 16/21, Turkmenistan. A/HRC/WG.6/44/TKM/1.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Turkmenistan. Human Rights Council Fifty-fifth Session A/HRC/55/4. 26 February–5 April 2024.

[19] These recommendations were also highlighted during the UN General Assembly Human Rights Council Fifty-fifth session (26 February–5 April 2024) on the UPR of Turkmenistan.

[20] These recommendations were voiced during the UN General Assembly Human Rights Council (6–17 November 2023) and presented in the 'Compilation of information prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights', which welcomed the capacity assessment of the Office of the Ombudsperson, but pointed out the listed points of concern. Please see United Nations General Assembly, 'Turkmenistan Compilation of information prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (A/HRC/WG.6/44/TKM/2)', 2023. Last accessed: 10.01.2025. Available at: https://upr-info.org/sites/default/files/country-document/2023-11/A_HRC_WG.6_44_TKM_2_EN.pdf.

[21] Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Turkmenistan. Human Rights Council Fifty-fifth Session A/HRC/55/4.

[22] United Nations Turkmenistan, 'Common Country Analysis. 2023 Update.' 2024. Last accessed: 15 September 2024. Available at: https://turkmenistan.un.org/en/259052-common-country-analysis-2023-update.

of Turkmenistan committed to it.[23] Some of the most severe climate change impacts projected to affect Turkmenistan in the coming decades relate to the country's water supply, acknowledged as a priority by the Government.[24] Major water supply issues pertain to both agriculture (cotton and wheat growth is heavily dependent on irrigation) and drinking water.[25] Turkmenistan's soils are affected by significant salinization, affecting crop yields.[26] Addressing soil salinization and desertification (with deserts covering 80 percent of the country) are among the Government's main priorities. Turkmenistan possesses a significant level of endemic biodiversity and is noted as one of the global centres of genetic diversity. Despite intensive conservation efforts in recent years, many species of flora and fauna disappeared.[27] The Government acknowledges the need to address this, but systematic measures are only just emerging. A lack of data from historical events provides unique challenges to understanding disaster event risk in Turkmenistan, but risks of droughts, floods and earthquakes are very high.[28] The Government acknowledges the need to address this, but systematic measures to do so are yet to be formulated.

Social aspects: The country scored 0.745 in the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) for 2021/2022, indicating a high level of human development, but with Planetary Pressures-adjusted HDI at 0.632, indicating the strong impact of climate change.[29] The inequality adjusted HDI was 17 percentage points lower, highlighting significant disparities in education, health and income.[30] High urban - rural variations and inequalities were highlighted in the recent UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP) report on Leave No One Behind (LNOB). These inequalities were addressed to some extent by the Government with support from development partners on various projects. The Gini index and the U.N. Gender Inequality Index are not reported for Turkmenistan due to a lack of data. The poverty headcount ratio at $1.90/day was at 0.6 percent according to the UN Common County Analysis 2023, but there is no official poverty line, and independent estimates are much larger. According to the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, 'Country Report for Turkmenistan 2024,' most farmers engage in subsistence farming, and the actual unemployment rate is reported to be around ten times higher than the official 4 percent to 5 percent.[31] The social protection system in Turkmenistan consists of an extensive set of social policies and programmes (both cash and non-cash), but there is no effective public safety net for those who are particularly in need, who ultimately rely on assistance from family, communities and handouts. According to Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys 2019, 67 percent of all the households receive at least some kind of social transfers, but this does not cover unemployed, and the size of the benefits is neither adequate nor adjusted to inflation. A significant part of labour resources, especially women, was not attached to the labour market in 2023.[32] The Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) rate (18-24 years) was 15.4 percent and informal employment was 30 percent for women and 18 percent for men.[33] Youth unemployment and immigration by youth was a growing challenge.[34]

---

23 IEA, 'Key findings.' Global Methane Tracker 2024. Last accessed: 9 January 2025. Available at: https://www.iea.org/reports/global-methane-tracker-2024/key-findings.

24 Yu, Winston, 'Assessment of the role of glaciers in stream flow from the Pamir and Tien Shan Mountains', World Bank Group, 2015. Last accessed: 15 September 2024; Available at: http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/663361468283187700/pdf/AralBasinGlaciers-FinalReport-May-2015.pdf.

25 Luo, Y. at al. 'Contrasting streamflow regime induced by melting glaciers across the Tien Shan – Pamir – North Karakoram.' Scientific Reports 8, 2018. Last accessed 15 September 2024. Available at: https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-018-34829-2.

26 Ibid.

27 Convention on Biological Diversity, 'Turkmenistan - Country Profile.' Last accessed 4 October 2024. Available at: https://www.cbd.int/countries/profile?country=tm.

28 Resilient Central Asia, 'Country Disaster Risk Profile of the Republic of Turkmenistan.' Last accessed: 5 October 2024. Available at: https://www.preventionweb.net/media/98484/download?startDownload=20241005.

29 United Nations Turkmenistan, 'Common Country Analysis. 2023 Update', 2024. Last accessed: 15 September 2024. Available at: https://turkmenistan.un.org/en/259052-common-country-analysis-2023-update.

30 Ibid.

31 Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index, 'Country report for Turkmenistan 2024'. 2024. Last accessed: 15 September 2024. Available at: https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/TKM.

32 United Nations Turkmenistan, 'Common Country Analysis. 2023 Update', 2024. Last accessed: 15 September 2024. Available at: https://turkmenistan.un.org/en/259052-common-country-analysis-2023-update.

33 Ibid.

34 Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (2024), 'Country report for Turkmenistan 2024'. Last accessed: 15 September 2024. Available at: https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/TKM.

Health: The Government implements voluntary health insurance, with premiums set at 2 percent of salary or other income, allowing a 90 percent discount on medicines from the approved list and a 50 percent discount for fee-based services and other benefits. Out-of-pocket health expenditures are high – 79.2 percent according to the World Health Organization (WHO)[35] — and the high cost of medication is contributing to that. High premature mortality due to non-communicable diseases (NCDs)[36] is a leading cause of death. Despite efforts and progress in controlling TB, the high prevalence and mortality due to drug-resistant tuberculosis[37] requires attention. The high burden of viral hepatitis[38] compared to other countries in the region is also a public health concern.

GEWE: The Government showed political commitment for GEWE, with a National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2021-2025 that included measures promoting gender equality, gender-responsive health care, equal access to education, economic empowerment of women and girls, and countering gender-based violence (GBV).[39] Efforts were also made to lift employment restrictions for women in hazardous jobs[40] and increase the representation of women in political life, particularly in the national parliament. Women remained underrepresented in decision-making positions, including in the judiciary and the legislative and executive bodies, especially in high-level positions.[41] Despite continuous recommendations to adopt a specific law prohibiting domestic violence, it is still not explicitly classified as a distinct crime in the Criminal Code of Turkmenistan. Instead, domestic violence is addressed under other offenses. Discussions are ongoing to amend national legislation to better align with international standards.[42] In the national strategies related to health, references to gender mostly focus on improving reproductive health and improving breast and cervical cancer screening. Gender norms and roles were not well addressed as a social determinant of health. According to the World Bank, despite some advancements, gender gaps, GBV, and unfavourable social norms continued to affect women and girls, leaving their potential in human capital underutilized.[43] Nearly 60 percent of women are unable to make independent decisions on fundamental issues such as healthcare, contraception and consenting to sex (2021).[44] In 2015, the Government passed a law restricting abortion to only up to five weeks.[45] According to the results of the first national survey, 'Health and Status of Women in the Family in Turkmenistan' (2021), 58 percent of women aged 15–49 believed that failing to comply with restrictions and obligations set by their spouse may be a reason for the spouse to use violence.[46]

---

35 World's Health Organization (WHO), 'Health Expenditure Profile Turkmenistan.' Last accessed: 7 January 2025. Available at: https://apps.who.int/nha/database/country_profile/Index/en.

36 The probability of dying prematurely (between the ages of 30 and 70 years) from one of the major NCDs was 26.9 percent. This has significant socioeconomic consequences for the development of the country and calls for immediate strengthening of the health system to respond to the growing burden of NCDs. World Health Organization (WHO), 'Better noncommunicable disease outcomes: challenges and opportunities for health systems: Turkmenistan country assessment,' 1 October 2019. Last accessed: 15 September 2024. Available at: https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/WHO-EURO-2019-3612-43371-60842.

37 WHO. 'Global Tuberculosis Report 2023' 2023. Last accessed: 10.01.2025. Available at: https://www.who.int/teams/global-tuberculosis-programme/tb-reports/global-tuberculosis-report-2023/tb-disease-burden/1-2-tb-mortality.

38 S. Davlidovaa, Z. Haley-Johnsonb, K.Nyhanc, A.Farooqd, S. H. Vermunde, S. Alia, 'Prevalence of HIV, HCV and HBV in Central Asia and the Caucasus: A systematic review,' *International Journal of Infectious Diseases*. 2020. Last accessed: 9 January 2025. Available at https://www.ijidonline.com/article/S1201-9712(20)32592-3/pdf.

39 In 2015, the Law on State Guarantees of Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women was adopted, and the country's 2016 Constitution guarantees equality of women and men before the law. Turkmenistan also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1997 and the Optional Protocol to CEDAW in 2009.

40 National report submitted in accordance with Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 16/21, Turkmenistan. A/HRC/WG.6/44/TKM/1.

41 Human Rights Committee. 'Concluding observations on the third periodic report of Turkmenistan.' CCPR/C/TKM/CO/3. 2023.

42 Human Rights Council. 'Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Turkmenistan. Human Rights Council Fifty-fifth Session' A/HRC/55/4.

43 World Bank, 'Turkmenistan Gender Landscape.' 2023. Last accessed: 22 October 2024. Available at : https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099959307042220313/pdf/IDU10fb2ba741b77a140b21adab1c27710b19f13.pdf.

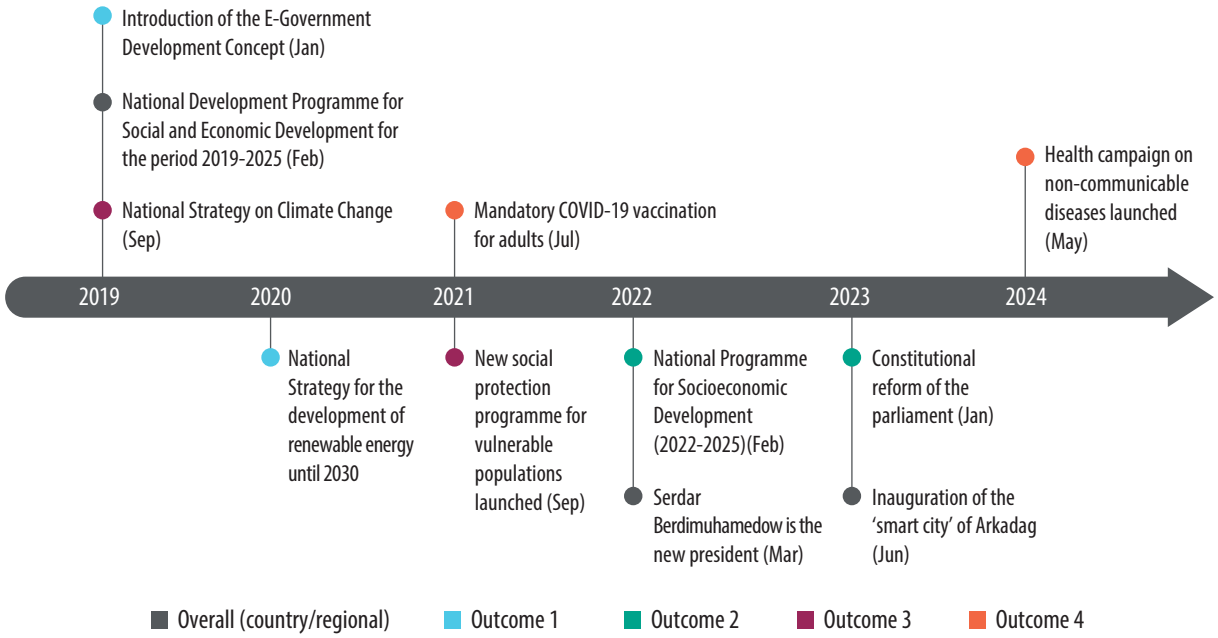
44 UNFPA 'Expanding choices for women and girls will save $87mln for Turkmenistan UNFPA study finds.' 2021. Last accessed: 22 October 2024. Available at: https://turkmenistan.unfpa.org/en/news/expanding-choices-women-and-girls-will-save-87mln-turkmenistan-unfpa-study-finds.

45 Ministry of Health and Medical Industry of Turkmenistan. Laws. Last accessed: October 22, 2024. Available at: https://saglykhm.gov.tm/ru/docs/turkmenistanyn-kanunlary?page=1.

46 UNFPA, 'Health and Status of a Woman in the Family in Turkmenistan.' 2022. Last accessed: 22 October 2024. Available at: https://turkmenistan.unfpa.org/en/publications/health-and-status-woman-family-turkmenistan.

Figure 1 below summarizes important events that potentially impacted the implementation of the UNDP Country Programme during the period under review.

FIGURE 1. ICPE Turkmenistan - Timeline of events 2019-2024



Source: Evaluation team

1.5 UNDP in Turkmenistan and country programme under review

The UNDP country programme 2021-2025 derived directly from the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2021-2025 and was developed in partnership with the Government in consultation with other stakeholders, including the private sector, civil society and other development partners. The programme vision supported accelerated economic diversification and growth, linked to the sustainable management of natural wealth and use of green technologies. It was aligned with the National Programme for Socio-Economic Development 2011-2030 and complemented the Presidential Programme for Socio-Economic Development of Turkmenistan 2019-2025.

The UNDP Turkmenistan Country Programme for 2021-2025 built on the experiences and lessons from the previous cycle, with a renewed focus on enhancing its role as the Government's primary development partner. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was the backbone for this CPD, emphasizing people-centred governance, sustainable economic diversification, and inclusive prosperity, ensuring no one was left behind.

The Programme focused on the four CPD Outcomes as presented in Figure 2. It introduced a dedicated outcome on Health and Social Services, significantly expanding its focus on public health and social protection for vulnerable populations. This included addressing critical gaps in health systems through innovative approaches, such as the procurement of laboratory equipment to improve diagnostic services, funded partly through a $20 million World Bank loan. These efforts reflected a commitment to building resilience in health systems and meeting the emerging needs of those at risk of being left behind.

FIGURE 2. ICPE Turkmenistan – Focus Areas of Outcomes

Source: UNDP CO

Following the pandemic, the UN adopted a 'building back better' approach, with UNDP emphasizing green recovery efforts and integrated solutions across sectors. The actions towards global climate action commitments were intensified, and included support for the development of the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) process at institutional level and integrating climate adaptation measures into the Enhanced Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). These initiatives were informed by global best practices and tailored to local needs, contributing to systematic approaches to climate resilience. The support to meeting the NDC paved the way for Turkmenistan joining the Methane Pledge.

UNDP's work strongly aligned with its Signature Solutions, focusing on resilience, environmental and climate action, and energy. Under resilience, efforts included improvements in meteorological forecasts, seismic risk assessment, and sustainable land and natural resources management. In environmental and climate action, the programme promoted biodiversity preservation, sustainable solid waste management (SWM), and land restoration pilots. Under the energy agenda, UNDP supported renewable energy solutions, such as solar-powered water points, and energy efficiency, through both policy-level support and practical interventions, such as LED-based street lighting in remote areas.

Digitalization featured prominently across all outcomes, aligning with Turkmenistan's 'Concept for the Development of the Digital Economy (2019–2025).' Innovations included expanding e-services for businesses, promoting mobile banking, and establishing a statistical business registry to streamline administrative processes. However, significant challenges, such as the digital divide, rural infrastructure gaps, cybersecurity concerns, limited digital skills, and persistent internet censorship, constrained the transformative potential of these efforts.

The current cycle placed a stronger emphasis on leveraging comparative advantages to tackle key development challenges. This included a heightened focus on gender equality and integrating civil society, the emerging private sector, and other development partners, and the prerogative to align national and sectoral programmes with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The programme underscored the importance of strengthening institutional capacities, digitalization, private sector and trade development, supporting social service provision and health system responses to infectious diseases such as TB, and promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation. There was a sharper focus on efforts directed towards supporting local service delivery by enhancing capacities and innovation. The CPD highlighted the need to place more effort on addressing human rights.

TABLE 1. Outcomes and related CPD outputs

Outcome	CPD Focus Area	Outcome	Related CPD outputs	Budget allocation and expenditure
Governance	Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Rule of Law, Human Rights, Development Finance	O1: By 2025, people have access to more effective, innovative, and transparent public administration based upon the rule of law, human and labour rights, gender equality and quality data	Output 1.1. Policies, institutional, and financing mechanisms strengthened for implementation, measurement, and monitoring of nationalised SDG indicators and targets Output 1.2. State institutions have improved public administration systems with electronic government systems and digital public services for the population, with special focus on services for vulnerable groups Output 1.3. Legislation, policies, programmes and their implementation are strengthened to address recommendations from United Nations human rights mechanisms, including the Universal Periodic Review, treaty bodies, and special procedures, with civil society participation	Budget: $2,749,824.46 Expenditure:[47] $2,348,278.84
Economic Diversification	Banking Digitalization SMEs Trade	O2: By 2025, conditions for sustainable and inclusive economic diversification are strengthened with competitive private and financial sectors, enhanced trade and investment promotion, and the adoption of new technologies	Output 2.1. Public institutions and private sector have strengthened regulatory, institutional, and human capacity for realization of diversification, digitalization, and trade promotion with focus on creation of employment opportunities, including for women and vulnerable groups Output 2.2. Private sector, particularly SMEs and women entrepreneurs, utilize simplified procedures of doing business and have expanded access to information, technology and financing Output 2.3. Innovative financial and banking instruments introduced to support green economy and SDG financing, including for SMEs	Budget: $6,638,977.94 Expenditure: $4,704,997.78

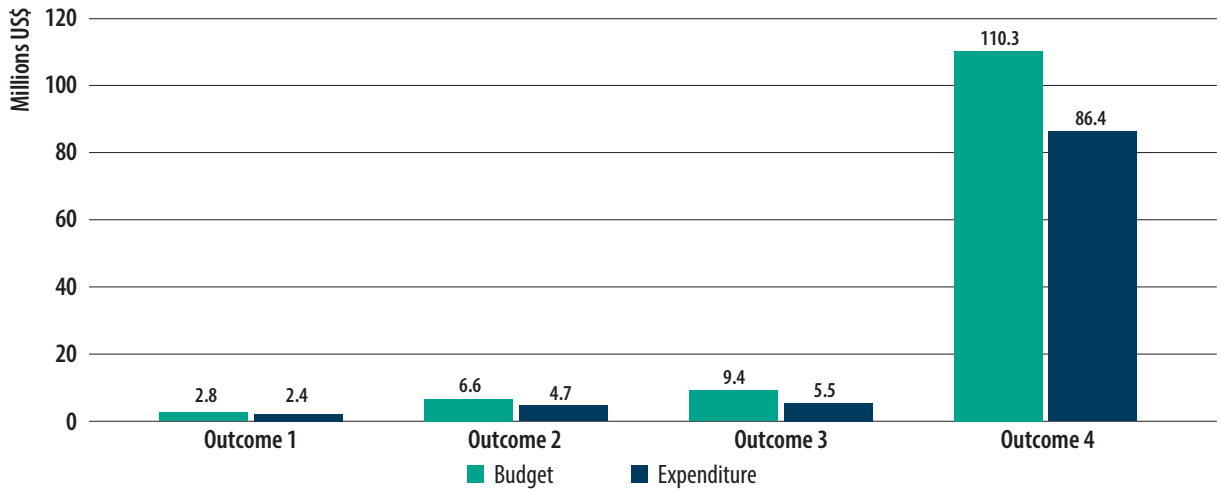
[47] The expenditure figures reported were based on the expenses recorded by the UNDP CO during the current CPD cycle until 13 March 2024.

Outcome	CPD Focus Area	Outcome	Related CPD outputs	Budget allocation and expenditure
Energy and Environment (E&E)	Energy Environment Land and Water Disaster Risk Reduction	O3: By 2025, there is effective design and implementation of disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation and mitigation measures, enabling a more rational use of resources, increased resilience, and a 'green' economy transition	Output 3.1. Policy and regulatory framework was strengthened to facilitate CCA and mitigation, disaster risk reduction and monitoring mechanisms Output 3.2. Strategic plans and investments are designed and implemented to promote water efficiency, sustainable land use, conservation of biodiversity, ecosystem management, restoration of degraded lands, disaster risk reduction sustainable energy, use of renewables, and green urban development, with gender equality and women's empowerment considerations Output 3.3. Green economy, climate and disaster risk reduction awareness and knowledge are increased through educational programmes	Budget: $9,374,500.03 Expenditure: $5,547,141.16
Health and Social (H&S) Services	Health System COVID Response Social protection	O4: By 2025, the population of Turkmenistan enjoys higher quality and inclusive health and social protection services	Output 4.1. National health services provide quality treatment for tuberculosis and other infectious diseases Output 4.2. National health services provide high-quality treatment for major NCDs Output 4.3. Social protection system and outreach strengthened for vulnerable groups	Budget: $108,429,748.70 Expenditure: $84,640,263.72

While the planned budget for the CPD cycle was $50.1 million, ultimately, the total budget available for the implementation of the CPD was $208.9 million, of which $153.5 million was disbursed by March 2024, representing 74 percent execution rate at the time of this evaluation.[48] Figure 3 illustrates the total budget and expenditures between 2021 and 2024. The large budget for Outcome 4 is explained by large funding from the Government for the health sector (including the $20 million World Bank loan for the COVID project). This Outcome area was prioritized given that the CPD was drafted during COVID and in the light of the high priority attached for the health sector by the Government, where UNDP is its main partner for implementation.

[48] The provisional assessment was based on the financial figures provided by UNDP CO in Turkmenistan.

FIGURE 3. Total budget and expenditure by outcome, 2021-2023



Source: Atlas/ Quantum data.

CHAPTER 2
FINDINGS

This chapter presents 22 findings, summarizing the results of the outcome analysis and an assessment of cross-cutting issues of the UNDP country programme in Turkmenistan. The main factors that influenced UNDP's performance and contribution to results are also described. The focus of section 2.1 is relevance, alignment and coherence aspects of the CPD. Section 2.2 assesses the results achieved in each of the four Outcome areas. Section 2.3 covers the factors affecting overall CPD performance.

2.1 UNDP strategic and programmatic offer

Finding 1. UNDP's Country Programme responded flexibly and adequately to Turkmenistan's evolving national priorities, addressing critical development challenges such as public health, climate resilience, and digital transformation. Innovation was an essential dimension of UNDP support but was unevenly spread across the CO'S activities.

UNDP's CPD, developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, responded well to Turkmenistan's evolving context, for example, by including a separate Outcome on Health and Social Services. UNDP's Country Programme demonstrated strong alignment with Turkmenistan's national development priorities and strategies across multiple sectors, building on past UNDP support. In governance, UNDP continued to strengthen the capacities of national partners in fulfilling the State's obligations related to human rights. Its digitalization initiatives supported the 'Concept for the Development of the Digital Economy (2019-2025)' and related national plans, aimed at fostering e-governance and digital public services. Under economic diversification, interventions aligned with the 'Programme of Socio-Economic Development of Turkmenistan (2011-2030),' focusing on private sector growth, trade facilitation and digital transformation. In energy and environment, UNDP's efforts were guided by the 'National Strategy on Climate Change (2019)' and the 'National Strategy for Renewable Energy to 2030,' promoting renewable energy, climate change adaptation, and mitigation measures, among others. The Country Programme also advanced public health priorities under the State Health Programme ('Saglyk') and adopted a 'building back better' approach post-COVID-19 to integrate sustainable recovery and development solutions.

UNDP's focus on sustainable solutions demonstrated forward-looking approaches and its support for innovations was key to enhance the design and implementation of national policies in various policy areas (see details in section 2.2). For example, UNDP support for driving digital transformation cut across different sectors, promoted innovative approaches and sought to address digital inclusion needs. However, while UNDP continued to strengthen the capacities of national partners in fulfilling the State's obligations related to human rights, and the need for such interventions remained high, there was limited evidence of innovations in terms of change in the modalities of implementation and the types of stakeholders involved. The use of digital tools, integration of human rights into broader development frameworks, or adoption of community-driven, participatory approaches was not evident in the previous or current cycle. In other words, the approaches remained conventional, which may have limited their effectiveness and scalability. Stakeholder engagement also lacked diversification, with activities primarily focused on traditional partners, such as government institutions or established civil society organizations. Expanding stakeholder involvement to include the private sector, grassroots movements and marginalized communities could enhance the impact, reach and sustainability of human rights initiatives by incorporating diverse perspectives and leveraging additional resources. Institutional fragmentation (e.g., in the area of disaster risk reduction) limited UNDP's ability to contribute to systemic change.

Finding 2. The CO utilized the comparative advantages of UNDP effectively, building on the well-established relationship with the Government while utilizing UNDP's global network for knowledge sharing, delivering on the CPD Outcomes and beyond. UNDP's signature solutions and strategic enablers contributed to the effective implementation of the Country Programme.

The current CPD built on the experiences and lessons from previous cycles and integrated recommendations from ICPE 2019, maintaining UNDP's strategic positioning as a trusted, long-term, and neutral development partner of the Government.

UNDP effectively leveraged its comparative advantages in Turkmenistan, including: i) a proven track record of supporting policy reforms while implementing innovative pilot projects (e.g., support to government strategies to address climate change); ii) strong operational capacity, enabling the implementation of large-scale initiatives even in challenging conditions, demonstrated for example, in UNDP's support to the Government in handling the COVID-19 crisis; iii) the ability to draw on a strong international network to facilitate knowledge transfer and apply best practices from other contexts (e.g., on themes such as digitalization and health services); and iv) its neutrality, which positioned UNDP as a trusted partner in complex areas of cooperation. UNDP also demonstrated its ability to mobilize partnerships and resources, such as coordinating with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to improve community social services, or with the World Health Organization (WHO) in supporting progress towards universal health coverage, and facilitating a $20 million World Bank loan for COVID-19 health responses (see Section 2.2.4 for more details). Together, these strengths enabled UNDP to address national priorities effectively, while fostering innovation and helping the Government to lay the foundation for systemic change.

UNDP's integration of Signature Solutions strengthened the Country Programme by addressing key development priorities and drivers of systemic changes. For instance, UNDP enhanced meteorological forecasting and seismic risk assessments, laying the groundwork for improved disaster preparedness, and promoted sustainable land and natural resources management, aligning with the 'Resilience' Signature Solution (discussed further in section 2.2). In line with the 'Environment' Signature Solution, UNDP supported biodiversity preservation, promoted climate change adaptation (e.g., through the support to sustainable land management and the development of the National Adaptation Planning process at institutional level, as well as with pilots supporting sustainable SWM). In alignment with the 'Energy' Signature Solution, UNDP promoted climate change mitigation by supporting the evolution of the regulatory framework,[49] and demonstrated innovation through the development of LED-based street lighting and solar-powered water supply points in pastures, promoting solutions that improve energy efficiency and access in remote areas.

Two of the UNDP's Strategic Enablers—digitalization and innovation—were strongly leveraged, enhancing the Country Programme by driving cross-cutting efficiencies and scalability. In the area of sustainable financing (the third enabler), UNDP supported the initiative on introducing an Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF), which, when adopted, has the potential to mobilize and align resources for sustainable development.

Finding 3. UNDP took up its SDG integrator role in Turkmenistan by coordinating development efforts, fostering synergies among UN agencies, and advancing SDG monitoring and financing. While UNDP promoted strong collaboration and alignment with national strategies, under most outcomes challenges such as shifting government priorities and limited joint projects with other actors, including UN agencies, constrained the full realization of its integrative potential.

UNDP fulfilled its SDG integrator role in Turkmenistan by coordinating development efforts, fostering synergies, and advancing SDG monitoring and financing. As a trusted, long-term partner of the Government, UNDP facilitated coordination and cooperation among UN agencies, the development community, and national stakeholders. This was in line with the Whole of UN ('UN 2.0') approach, which emphasized leveraging the comparative advantages of each agency to deliver integrated development solutions and enhance programme sustainability.

[49] UNDP supported the drafting of Laws on 'Renewable Energy Sources' (2021) and 'On Energy Saving and Energy Efficiency' (2024).

UNDP promoted strong coordination among development partners both within and beyond the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), advancing common approaches to development challenges. Several joint initiatives were implemented, particularly under the climate change and digitalization themes, with key partners such as Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the European Union (EU). However, the majority of the joint projects were concentrated in the Health and Social Outcome sector. UNDP played a pivotal role in strengthening sectoral alignment by collaborating with UNICEF and UNFPA to introduce a community social services referral mechanism as well as with WHO to improve public health and promote Universal Health Coverage (UHC). The CO facilitated knowledge exchange and partnerships, enriching programmes, enhancing the sustainability of outputs, and aligning sectoral priorities with global best practices. Despite these achievements, the limited number of joint projects under most of the outcomes suggested that there was untapped potential for deeper collaboration in areas such as trade promotion/economic development, promotion of sustainable energy and promotion of rule of law Engagement with International Financial Institutions (IFIs)/Development Banks, such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), was limited. However, UNDP successfully implemented a project linked to the Government's COVID response financed by the World Bank and signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), which are both significant milestones and steps to significant cooperation with the IFIs.

UNDP's role as an SDG integrator was demonstrated through its support for SDG monitoring, including improvements in statistics and the development of a publicly accessible SDG portal. UNDP contributed to addressing SDG financing gaps, including with the Development Financing Assessment (DFA)[50] which paved the way for the drafting of the INFF (see Section 2.2.1 for more details).

Finding 4. UNDP strengthened internal coherence by promoting integrated approaches across outcomes and thematic areas, with the emphasis on digitalization as a cross-cutting issue across outcomes as a strong example. Synergies between good governance (particularly human rights and rule of law) and other thematic areas became increasingly evident. Their full impacts were expected to become observable as the initiatives mature and achieve greater effectiveness.

The CPD 2021-2025 reflected the recommendations from the ICPE 2019, with more integrated portfolios. There were notable examples of integrated approaches, as well as cross-outcome and cross-thematic linkages. For instance, the CO's interventions under Outcome 3 were closely linked to Outcome 2 on economic diversification, such as efforts to empower private farmers with innovative, climate-resilient practices, and to Outcome 4, which focused on providing livelihoods support to the most vulnerable households (see Section 2.2.3 for more details). A strongly integrated Health cluster was evident, with close inter-project linkages across outcomes.

Digitalization was a key cross-cutting theme across all outcomes. Under Outcome 1, it supported the digitalization of government administrative ecosystems and civil registration. Under Outcome 2, it enhanced trade, customs and international banking services. Under Outcome 3, it contributed to water supply management and Sustainable Land Management (SLM). Under Outcome 4, it advanced the digitalization of health services. Given that digitalization aligned with one of the country's key strategic priorities and spanned across all four outcomes, it was chosen as the pilot for the portfolio approach. The implementation of this portfolio approach was still in progress at the time of writing this report.

[50] This is a tool developed by UNDP, the purpose of which is to outline a process for supporting governments and their partners to take a more integrated approach to SDG financing, see https://sdgfinance.undp.org/resource-library/development-finance-assessment-guidebook.

There was no evidence of a comprehensive mapping of potential linkages between specific sub-themes for both existing and planned projects and initiatives at the design stage. The absence of such a mapping was a missed opportunity to foster enhanced synergies and strengthen links across outcomes.

2.2 UNDP contributions to programme objectives

2.2.1 Governance

Outcome 1: By 2025, people have access to more effective, innovative, and transparent public administration based upon the rule of law, human and labour rights, gender equality and quality data.

Corresponding outputs:

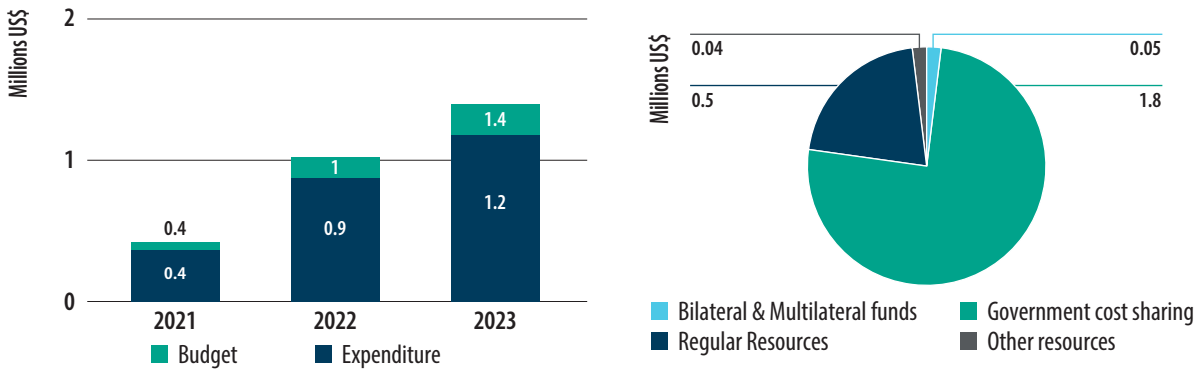
Output 1.1: Policies, institutional and financing mechanisms strengthened for implementation, measurement, and monitoring of nationalized SDG indicators and targets.

Output 1.2: State institutions have improved public administration systems with electronic government systems and digital public services for the population, with special focus on services for vulnerable groups.

Output 1.3: Legislation, policies, programmes and their implementation are strengthened to address recommendations from United Nations human rights mechanisms, including the Universal Periodic Review, treaty bodies, and special procedures, with civil society participation, transparency and accountability.

The 11 projects under Outcome 1 had a total budget of $2.8 million, with $2.35 million spent between January 2021 and December 2023. During the current CPD cycle, most of the funding came from government cost sharing ($1.8 million), supported by contributions from CO's Regular Resources ($0.5 million), bilateral and multilateral funds ($0.05 million), and other resources[51] ($0.04 million). Figure 4 provides an overview of the budget allocated to Outcome 1.

FIGURE 4. Budget, expenditure and source of funding in Outcome 1



Source: Based on Atlas/ Quantum data.

[51] This category encompasses specific donor contributions or funds that are earmarked for particular initiatives or projects.

Finding 5. UNDP contributed to enhancing digital infrastructure, skills, and cybersecurity, enabling greater public access to e-government services with a potential to support good governance. However, resource challenges, limited infrastructure and internet censorship, along with the substantial digital divide, constrained the full impact of these efforts. The absence of a comprehensive framework for cross-sector integration hindered the full realization of the Government's digital policies and limited synergies with other outcomes. Despite these challenges, strong national ownership and complementarity with other donors' initiatives supported the sustainability of the support to digitalization.

UNDP's support for digitalization in Turkmenistan focused on three areas: i) strengthening policy and regulatory frameworks; ii) enhancing digital skills through capacity-building initiatives; and iii) advancing infrastructure and public service digitalization. Examples include contributing to the national cybersecurity plan and regulations for the Centre for the Assessment of Professional Training; support to launching a Master's programme in 'Digital Management' and tailored civil servant training; supporting the roadmap for a unified civil registry; and the Electronic Data Interchange System (EDIS) to streamline governance and trade (see section 2.2.3 for more details). The CO built on past interventions to support the formulation of policies, and the design and implementation of a regulatory framework related to digitalization, aligning with Turkmenistan's national priorities as outlined in the 'Concept for the Development of the Digital Economy (2019–2025)' and the 'State Programme for the Development of the Digital Economy (2021–2025).' Key contributions included support for the expansion of internet connectivity and the development of Turkmenistan's national cybersecurity plan (2022–2025). These changes to the regulatory framework facilitated transformative changes, such as enhancing access to digital services in underserved and rural areas, with internet penetration increasing from 21.3 percent in 2017 to between 35[52] and 38.2 percent in 2023,[53] helping narrow the country's digital divide.

However, the absence of a comprehensive framework for cross-sector integration limited the full realization of the Government's digital policies by constraining coordination and alignment across key sectors such as governance, health, trade and education. This fragmentation resulted in siloed approaches, where sector-specific digital initiatives were not fully leveraged to create synergies, thereby hindering progress in scaling these initiatives and ensuring their sustainability.

Capacity building linked to digitalization was implemented through a series of training programmes and educational initiatives that increased digital literacy within government institutions and the population. UNDP supported the Civil Service Academy under the President of Turkmenistan[54] in expanding its curriculum and enriching it with components linked to digitalization. One of the main outcomes of the initiative was the Master programme 'Digital Management', tailored to future civil servants, which was developed and piloted with the support of specialists from the Academy of Management under the President of the Republic of Belarus. As of March 2024, 20 specialists from various Turkmenistan government entities were enrolled in the graduate programme.[55] UNDP also built the capacities in the government administration through a Training of Trainers (ToT) programme in partnership with the Academy of the

[52] Government data included in Institute for War & Peace Reporting, Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'The Overview of National Digitalisation Strategies of Central Asian States: Challenges and Opportunities for Development,' 25 October 2022. Last accessed: 15 September 2024. Available at: https://cabar.asia/en/national-digitalization-strategies-of-central-asian-states-challenges-and-opportunities.

[53] Kemp, Simon, 'Digital 2023: Turkmenistan,' Datareportal, 14 February 2023. Last accessed: 15 September 2024. Available at: https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-turkmenistan.

[54] The Civil Service Academy under the President of Turkmenistan – 'Türkmenistnyn Prezidentinin Yanyndaky Döwlet Gullugy Akademiyay.'

[55] The participants enrolled included representatives from the Ministry of Finance and Economics, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection, the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Policy, the State Committee for Statistics, the Central Bank, the Academy of Sciences, and several key transport, logistics, and communication agencies.

Civil Service to familiarize civil servants with main trends of the digital economy[56] and equip them with a basic skill set to effectively use the technology relevant to their respective government entities. Civil servants from specific government agencies received tailored training, e.g., a training for remote learning for the Academy's staff.[57] According to project documents, instruments for a structured assessment of the usefulness and application of the acquired skills were under design at the time of this evaluation.

UNDP supported the development of the Regulations on the Centre for the Assessment of Professional Training at the Academy of the Civil Service[58] (as well as Regulations on the Procedure for organizing and conducting testing by the Centre). That initiative was aborted after the successful development and piloting of the Digital Civil Service software. The Ministry of Adalat (Ministry of Justice) decided to continue with the establishment of the new Digital Economy Certification Centre without UNDP support.[59]

UNDP's contributions to advancing infrastructure and public service digitalization included support to the design of the EDIS. It was under development at the time of this evaluation, expected to integrate 20 institutional databases, allowing the provision of 20 different public services starting in early 2025. This development of the system was accompanied by the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SoP), which provided structured guidelines for its operation and aimed to facilitate better data exchange between government entities. The UNDP support to the EDIS aimed to unlock the potential for efficiency and coordination throughout the government by standardizing and streamlining data sharing processes, reducing administrative silos, and improving real-time decision-making capabilities. At the time of writing this report, there was no data available to confirm measurable outcomes or the extent of EDIS utilization across government departments. During interviews, stakeholders mentioned that the coordination process was ongoing, and progress was slow due to the institutional fragmentation and the absence of a shared vision. The absence of a comprehensive framework for cross-sector integration[60] limited the potential of the Government's digital policies by hindering coordination and alignment across key sectors such as governance, health, trade, environment and education. This fragmentation led to siloed approaches, where sector-specific digital initiatives were not fully leveraged to create synergies. As a result, the scaling of these initiatives was impeded, and their sustainability was limited.

Digitalization was also supported by other development partners, e.g., United States Agency for International Development (of Parliamentary activities),[61] IsDB (including with webinars on 'Digital Development and E-Governance'),[62] and a few others, and this, coupled with the extensive UNDP engagement and strong national ownership, added up to the overall good prospects for the sustainability of the interventions supported by UNDP in digitalization. The enhancement of public administration through digitalization of public services required a unified coordinated approach from the Government, which was not yet fully in place at the time of writing this report. Obstacles included continued internet censorship, coupled with the still large digital divide.

---

56 Including, e.g., international best practices in digitalization and eGovernance, a basic understanding of cyber security and the most prevalent regulatory issues in a digital economy.

57 UNDP, 'UNDP Turkmenistan introduces education professionals to a newly developed Distance Learning Teachers' Manual.' 2023. Last accessed: 22 October 2024. Available at: https://www.undp.org/turkmenistan/press-releases/undp-turkmenistan-introduces-education-professionals-newly-developed-distance-learning-teachers-manual.

58 The Civil Service Academy under the President of Turkmenistan – 'Türkmenistnyn Prezidentinin Yanyndaky Döwlet Gullugy Akademiyay.'

59 UNDP, Results-Oriented Annual Report (ROAR) 2023.

60 UNDP Turkmenistan and IRH, 'Digital Transformation in Turkmenistan: Sketch Overview.' 2024.

61 USAID, 'USAID Promotes Digitalization of Parliamentary Activities in Turkmenistan.' 1 November 2023. Last accessed: 8 January 2025. Available at : https://tm.usembassy.gov/usaid-promotes-digitalization-of-parliamentary-activities-in-turkmenistan/.

62 IsDB, 'International Webinar on "Digital Development and E-Governance" by IsDB, ADB, and CAREC Institute.' 10 November 2021. Last accessed: 8 January 2025. Available at :https://www.isdb.org/news/international-webinar-on-digital-development-and-e-governance-by-isdb-adb-and-carec-institute.

Finding 6. UNDP led UN efforts in advancing SDG monitoring and reporting in Turkmenistan. The transition to an online, publicly accessible SDG platform streamlined workflows and enabled more timely statistical outputs. Persisting needs included: i) further integration of the 2008 System of National Accounts (SNA) standards; ii) enhanced SDG monitoring and reporting through improved data openness, quality, and availability; and iii) more comprehensive mainstreaming of SDGs into national policies. UNDP's initial support for developing an Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) laid the groundwork for strengthening SDG financing.

UNDP's efforts to build national statistical capacities were met by strong national ownership. Methodologies for GDP calculation aligned with the SNA 2008 standards were adopted and implemented by the State Statistics Committee.[63] Interviewed stakeholders acknowledged UNDP's substantial contributions, such as the introduction of five new classifiers[64] since 2019, which addressed critical gaps in the macroeconomic data system, including finance-related data. The SNA 2008 standards also informed the development of the Statistical Reporting and Business Register Platform, which incorporated registers for both physical and non-physical entities (refer to Outcome 2, Section 2.2.2). These improvements strengthened SDG monitoring capabilities and held potential for enhancing policymaking processes. Further incorporation of SNA 2018 standards was still needed to fully align statistical systems with international benchmarks.

The SDG Database, developed with UNDP support, marked a significant step in advancing SDG monitoring and reporting. UNDP advocacy ensured public access to the database,[65] which was utilized by government agencies, research institutes, and development partners for policymaking and monitoring. UNDP also facilitated the creation of the Integrated SDG Insights Report,[66] which leveraged multiple data sources to provide a rapid landscape analysis, highlighting SDG trends, national priorities, interlinkages, and potential development pathways. The national report on the progress of achieving the SDGs for 2015-2022 was prepared and submitted to the Government by the Ministry of Finance and Economy. UNDP also supported the preparation of the Government's 2nd Voluntary National Report on SDG implementation, presented at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2023. This was paired with UNDP support to capacity building activities on preparation and presentation of the VNR II, on development finance and SDG budgeting, and on the SDG Regional Information Platform for CA countries. These reports showcased the utility of the SDG database and laid the foundation for sustained governmental efforts in SDG monitoring. However, UNDP's assessment identified capacity gaps that required further improvements in data monitoring, measurement, target-setting and reporting, alongside better mainstreaming of SDGs in national policies.

In 2022, UNDP, jointly with the Regional Platform on the SDGs in Central Asia, supported the Government to address development finance challenges in Turkmenistan, conducting a Development Finance Assessment, which provided an in-depth analysis of the national financial landscape and identified entry points for the development of an INFF. UNDP's initial support focused on capacity-building initiatives, including innovative approaches to SDG-based state budgeting, SDG costing methods, and an overview of insurance

[63] The SNA describes a coherent, consistent and integrated set of macroeconomic accounts in the context of a set of internationally agreed concepts, definitions, classifications and accounting rules. In addition, the SNA provides an overview of economic processes, recording how production is distributed among consumers, businesses, government and foreign nations. It shows how income originating in production, modified by taxes and transfers, flows to these groups and how they allocate these flows to consumption, saving and investment. Consequently, the national accounts are one of the building blocks of macroeconomic statistics forming a basis for economic analysis and policy formulation. The 2008 SNA is the international statistical standard for national accounts. Available at: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/nationalaccount/docs/NAbrochure_2022.pdf.

[64] Statistical classification refers to the process of developing rules to assign new data to specific classes based on known class labels in training data.

[65] Government of Turkmenistan, 'Sustainable Development Goals.' Available at: https://sdg.stat.gov.tm.

[66] This report is available at: https://sdgpush-insights.undp.org/turkmenistan. Last accessed: 08 January 2024.

and securities markets.[67] Turkmenistan's planned INFF aimed to strengthen public financial management and increase private sector financing for sustainable development.[68] With UNDP's guidance, potential avenues for further work were identified,[69] positioning UNDP as a key partner to support the Government in collaboration with other UN agencies.

Finding 7. UNDP support improved the State's capacities and the regulatory environment for good governance, particularly through legal reforms addressing international standards in human rights and gender equality, as well as capacity-building for institutions such as the Ombudsperson's Office. However, progress under Outcome 1 was uneven, with tangible outcomes in areas such as judiciary reform, legal aid expansion, public service accountability, and corruption prevention yet to fully materialize.

The UNDP Turkmenistan CPD (2021–2025) aimed to align national legislation with international standards, particularly in the Rule of Law (RoL) and human rights. Key achievements included aligning the definition of torture in the new Criminal Code (2022) with international standards and updating the definition of people with disabilities (PwD) to global norms, advancing gender equality through legal reforms, and addressing UNTB recommendations. The programme also focused on capacity-building to enhance legislative skills, contributing to a legal framework that upholds international human rights norms. To this end, the CO's support led to notable advancements in the RoL thematic area, including aligning the definition of torture in the new Criminal Code (2022) with international standards, updating the definition of PwD to global norms, and, according to interviews, introducing key legal amendments on gender equality, such as laws on sexual harassment, criminalization of forced abortion, forced prostitution, refusal of work, and migration. These achievements, made possible through capacity building and international expertise, addressed long-awaited UNTB recommendations. However, the tangible outcomes of these efforts—such as implementation and societal impact—did not fully materialize by the time of this report, underscoring the need for sustained support and monitoring.

The ICPE 2019 recommendation to further empower institutions such as the Ombudsperson's Office and the Human Rights Commission to fulfil human rights obligations and integrate global human rights values was acted upon. Continuous support from the CO was instrumental in strengthening the Ombudsperson's Office (a relatively new institution), ensuring its development and integration into the broader governance framework. However, interviewed stakeholders provided no evidence of advocacy for implementing international obligations related to political and social human rights issues. This gap highlighted the challenge of translating legal and institutional reforms into actionable measures on the ground.

The support for the Ombudsperson's Office demonstrated sustainability, with the institution showing ownership of its progress through internal capacity building and external engagements, such as achieving the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions accreditation and Asia Pacific Forum membership. The Asia Pacific Forum provided strategic planning support to the Ombudsman's Office of Turkmenistan. Similarly, the Institute of State, Law, and Democracy and the Interagency Commission's Working Group, tasked with implementing and reporting on national obligations under UN human rights mechanisms and preparing national reports for the UPR and other UN conventions, demonstrated sufficient capacity to continue their work independently. However, institutional capacity-building efforts need further strengthening to address more complex human rights obligations effectively.

[67] UNDP, 'UNDP promotes financing for sustainable development,' 10 November 2022. Last accessed: 15 September 2024. Available at: https://www.undp.org/turkmenistan/news/undp-promotes-financing-sustainable-development.

[68] Integrated National Financing Frameworks, 'Turkmenistan.' Last accessed: 15 September 2024. Available at: https://inff.org/country/turkmenistan.

[69] Source: ROAR 2023.

Despite these efforts, progress towards sustainable reforms in judiciary systems, law enforcement, legal aid expansion, public service accountability, and corruption prevention remained limited. A sustainable path towards achieving these outcomes did not yet emerge, as systemic challenges—including fragmented implementation and insufficient stakeholder engagement—continued to impede transformative change. Bridging these gaps required more targeted technical and financial support, along with efforts to ensure that reforms led to tangible and lasting societal impact. Two new projects had the potential to improve the situation. The project 'Increasing the Capacity of the Boards of Lawyers in Turkmenistan in the Field of Ensuring Human Rights' aimed to develop the legal aid system and establish a National Association of Lawyers. Another new project with the Central Commission on Elections and Referendums in Turkmenistan focused on creating a unified voter register, building the capacity of election commission members, and promoting women's political participation. These initiatives helped to address some of the gaps identified during the implementation of the CPD.

2.2.2 Economic diversification

Outcome 2: By 2025, conditions for sustainable and inclusive economic diversification are strengthened with competitive private and financial sectors, enhanced trade and investment promotion, and the adoption of new technologies.

Corresponding outputs:

Output 2.1: Public institutions and private sector have strengthened regulatory, institutional, and human capacity for realization of diversification, digitalization, and trade promotion with focus on creation of employment opportunities, including for women and vulnerable groups.

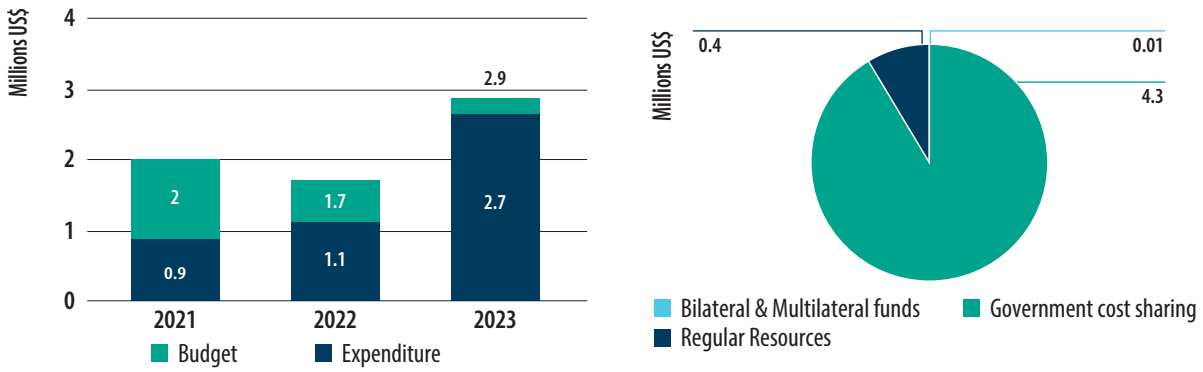
Output 2.2: Private sector, particularly SMEs and women entrepreneurs, utilize simplified procedures of doing business and have expanded access to information, technology and financing.

Output 2.3: Innovative financial and banking instruments introduced to support green economy and SDG financing, including for SMEs.

The seven projects under outcome 2[70] had a total budget of $6.6 million, with $4.7 million spent between January 2021 and December 2023. During the current CPD cycle, most of the funding came from government cost sharing ($4.3 million), supported by contributions from the CO's Regular Resources ($0.4 million) and bilateral and multilateral funds ($0.01 million). Figure 5 provides an overview of the budget allocated to outcome 2.

[70] More specifically outputs 2.1 and 2.3. There was no project directly linked with output 2.2.

FIGURE 5. Budget, expenditure and source of funding in Outcome 2



Source: Based on Atlas/ Quantum data.

Finding 8. UNDP's support for digitalization and capacity building significantly advanced capacities and infrastructure for government-provided online services for businesses, with early results evident in the progress on paperless trade and streamlined business registration. The scope of the interventions was on enhancements of international trade and procedures for Turkmen businesses. UNDP also contributed to a culture of digital innovation to ensure sustainability, although challenges, such as those linked to coordination on the side of the Government, impeded results.

UNDP supported the development of digital ecosystems across three key areas, contributing to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure). The CO supported: i) the advancement of e-government services, including the implementation of the online business register to simplify business processes; ii) promotion of digitalization of financial services, such as introducing mobile banking systems for international transactions to enhance integration into international financial systems; and iii) facilitation of the harmonization and simplification of customs procedures through the Single window for import-export operations and the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA),[71] which streamlined cross-border trade processes. UNDP also contributed to the expansion of e-services for utility payments and transportation, further broadening the scope of digital transformation initiatives.

In partnership with the State Statistics Committee of Turkmenistan, UNDP launched the 'Electronic Statistical Reporting and Business Register' platform, set to transform the way statistical data was collected and processed in Turkmenistan, enabling legal entities and entrepreneurs to submit and manage statistical forms online. By eliminating manual paperwork, the system was expected to simplify business registration, optimize reporting processes, and significantly improve efficiency in data collection and analysis. The platform offered a range of benefits, including enhanced real-time data access for better decision-making, reduced administrative costs for respondents, and streamlined operations, potentially also contributing to the reduction of bureaucratic hurdles and fostering transparency.[72] The platform was launched on October 1, 2024. The scale of the effects and sustainability prospects of this initiative need some time to materialize.

[71] ASYCUDA is an information and communications technology (ICT)-based customs management system targeted at reforming the customs clearance processes of developing and middle-income countries. It computerizes and simplifies procedures.

[72] UNDP, 'UNDP and Turkmenistan Launch "Electronic Statistical Reporting and Business Register" Platform,' 16 September 2024. Last accessed: 15 September 2024. Available at: https://www.undp.org/turkmenistan/press-releases/undp-and-turkmenistan-launch-electronic-statistical-reporting-and-business-register-platform.

Building on a project from the previous CPD cycle, UNDP, in cooperation with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) supported the development of a 'Single window for import-export operations' - a portal for cross-border operations, which aimed to complement the ASYCUDA[73] and help streamline customs processes. These initiatives successfully assisted the Government in laying the foundation for reducing the time and cost associated with international trade and customs clearance. By convening 15 ministries and government agencies, the portal offered a route to improved efficiency in trade processes, potentially contributing to the reduction of bureaucratic bottlenecks by enabling the centralized submission and processing of documents,[74] the monitoring the compliance of processing deadlines, and the issuance of results.[75] While it was too early for a robust assessment of the full contributions of the project, the physical and digital infrastructure had been established at the time of this evaluation. Interviews with stakeholders further confirmed that the capacity building components implemented by UNDP were highly useful in the daily operation both for staff in the Ministry of Trade as well as in the State Customs Service.[76]

Initiatives such as the digital statistical business registry, the Electronic Data Interchange system, and the Single Window portal were designed to enhance data centralization, reliability, and inter-agency coordination among government entities. However, the varying levels of digitalization across ministries and departments posed a significant challenge. Despite this, the strong support from both the Government and other development partners indicated promising prospects for long-term sustainability. The progress in digitalization supported the implementation of the legislation regulating online commerce,[77] but security issues were a reason for concern.[78]

UNDP collaborated closely with the State Bank for Foreign Economic Affairs of Turkmenistan to develop and implement an innovative digital banking platform and software. This initiative aimed to expand online financial services in alignment with the Government's National Banking Strategy and the Programme for the Development of the Economic, Financial, and Banking Sector for 2019–2025. A pilot version of the platform was scheduled to launch in September 2024. While UNDP's cooperation with the State Bank for Foreign Economic Affairs of Turkmenistan focused on international transactions, the use of electronic transactions was increasing in the domestic market,[79] demonstrating a growing interest in the population for the digitalization of the financial sector. Despite these positive achievements, ensuring the security of online services remained an area for improvement.

Finding 9. UNDP's support for Turkmenistan's WTO accession was crucial in aligning regulatory frameworks, strengthening institutional capacities, and advancing trade policy reforms, paving the way for the country's integration into the global economy.

---

73 ESCAP, 'Readiness Assessment for Cross-Border Paperless Trade: Turkmenistan.' 2022. Last accessed: 9 January 2025. Available at https://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/readiness-assessment-cross-border-paperless-trade-turkmenistan.

74 UNECE, 'Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation: ECE Regional Report 2024,' p.59. 2024. Last accessed: 9 January 2025. Available at https://unece.org/trade/publications/digital-and-sustainable-trade-facilitation-ece-regional-report-2024-ecetrade483.

75 ESCAP, 'Readiness Assessment for Cross-Border Paperless Trade: Turkmenistan.' 2022. Last accessed: 9 January 2025. Available at https://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/readiness-assessment-cross-border-paperless-trade-turkmenistan.

76 Karymshakov K, and Sulaimanov B., 'Trade Facilitation, Infrastructure, and International Trade, in Central Asian Countries,' ADB. 2023. Last accessed: 9 January 2025. Available at https://www.adb.org/publications/trade-facilitation-infrastructure-central-asian-countries.

77 Consumer Protection Law (2019) ensures consumers' rights to quality goods and services. It was fully in force and regulates consumer rights based on contracts for goods or services; Law About Trading Activity (2016) governed both wholesale and retail trade and promotes the use of digital tools within trade networks. It is fully in force and crucial for e-commerce growth; Law on Legal Regulation of Internet Development and Internet Services (2014) governs internet infrastructure, including the regulation of internet services and online communication systems; Rules for Distance Selling of Goods (2020), created by the Ministry of Trade and Foreign Economic Relations, regulate e-commerce and remote selling based on the laws of consumer protection and trade activities.

78 The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is focusing on training on digital skills. See : https://turkmenportal.com/en/blog/76095/ebrd-invites-to-a-training-on-digital-marketing-for-business-in-ashgabat; International trade Centre launched the EU-funded 'Turkmenistan: Enhancing Trade Resilience and Integration' project. See: https://www.intracen.org/our-work/projects/turkmenistan-enhancing-trade-resilience-and-integration.

79 Azernews. 'Turkmenistan discloses number of Mobile Banking service users.' 27 January 2023. Last accessed: 28 November 2024. Available at: https://www.azernews.az/region/205563.html.

UNDP supported the Government in attaining the status of 'acceding country' in the WTO in 2022 and its continued progress toward full membership after that. The CO contributed to the preparation of draft regulatory acts in services and investment development, aligning these with WTO obligations under the General Agreement on Trade in Services. It further contributed to drafting lists of obligations for market access in banking, financial, and other service sectors and aligning Turkmenistan's tax code with WTO agreements. The Government's focus was rather technical, concentrating on the preparation of the Memorandum of Foreign Trade Regime (MFTR) required by the WTO Secretariat. UNDP advocated for a more comprehensive approach to WTO accession to enable transformational economic reforms.

The preparation of the MFTR was a first important milestone for Turkmenistan, and the Ministry of Finance and Economy (which was the responsible party for this) was very engaged and active in this process, based on the interviews conducted for this ICPE. The final draft of the MFTR was developed with the help of the WTO secretariat and was expected to be endorsed by the Government at the time of writing this report.

UNDP's support to the country's WTO accession included building the capacity of government institutions to design effective trade policies, negotiate international agreements, and support local businesses. UNDP's complementary efforts in reducing bureaucratic obstacles through digitalization and increasing trade transparency further strengthened these reforms.

UNDP provided targeted support to the Ministry of Finance and Economy, including training and advisory support. The progress made has laid a strong foundation for Turkmenistan's first Working Group meeting with the WTO, scheduled to take place in 2025. This would mark a critical milestone in Turkmenistan's accession process and pave the way for trade policy reforms that could enhance export volumes and market diversification in the mid-to-long term.

Finding 10. UNDP contributed to Private Sector Development (PSD) by enhancing trade capacities, promoting green and inclusive practices, and fostering innovation and entrepreneurship. However, the effectiveness of UNDP's initiatives was constrained by systemic challenges such as limited access to finance, anticompetitive pressures and underdeveloped value chains, highlighting the need for broader economic reforms to fully achieve the potential of UNDP support.

UNDP provided technical support to PSD through several thematic areas, focusing on enhancing international trade capacities, promoting sustainable practices, and fostering equal and inclusive opportunities. In trade facilitation, UNDP helped private companies access international markets by offering technical assistance and training, including support for trademark registration.[80] Following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the UNCT and the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, UNDP explored ways to enhance the international competitiveness of Turkmen products through advisory services on standards and promotion strategies. With organizations such as the International Trade Centre[81] and EBRD[82] already active in this area, UNDP's specific niche was likely to focus on promoting creative and circular economies and companies working in these sectors.

[80] UNDP Turkmenistan. 'UNDP supports the country to improve trademark registration practices.' 16 August 2021. Last accessed: 28 November 2023. Available at: https://www.undp.org/turkmenistan/press-releases/undp-supports-country-improve-trademark-registration-practices.

[81] ITC, 'Turkmenistan: Enhancing trade resilience and integration.' Last accessed: 9 January 2025. Available at: https://www.intracen.org/our-work/projects/turkmenistan-enhancing-trade-resilience-and-integration.

[82] The EBRD also aimed at expanding private sector operations in the corporate and financial institutions sectors through policy dialogue. For more information see: https://www.ebrd.com/where-we-are/turkmenistan/overview.html.

UNDP advanced green practices by supporting private farms and companies in adopting renewable energy solutions, improving energy efficiency, and implementing water-saving and environmentally friendly technologies. These initiatives were complemented by pilots, grants, and training to integrate sustainable SWM into broader policies (see Section 2.2.3).

UNDP also promoted inclusive business practices by supporting women entrepreneurs and enhancing women's employable skills through targeted training. New initiatives, such as a project launched in collaboration with the British Embassy in September 2024 to foster a creative economy for women and youth,[83] were still in their early stages at the time of reporting but had the potential to enhance PSD outcomes once implemented.

Despite the important progress, UNDP's impact was constrained by systemic challenges facing the emerging private sector, including an underdeveloped value chain, dual exchange rate regime, anticompetitive pressures and limited access to affordable finance. When designing future interventions, UNDP could consider broader engagement in supporting structural economic reforms in cooperation with the initiatives of other developmental partners,[84] actively identifying unique niche areas for engagement.

2.2.3 Sustainable Energy and Environment

Outcome 3: By 2025, there was effective design and implementation of disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation and mitigation measures, enabling a more rational use of resources, increased resilience, and a 'green' economy transition.

Corresponding outputs:

Output 3.1: Policy and regulatory framework was strengthened to facilitate climate change adaptation and mitigation, disaster risk reduction and monitoring mechanisms.

Output 3.2: Strategic plans and investments are designed and implemented to promote water efficiency, sustainable land use, conservation of biodiversity, ecosystem management, restoration of degraded lands, disaster risk reduction, sustainable energy, use of renewables, and green urban development, with gender equality and women's empowerment considerations.

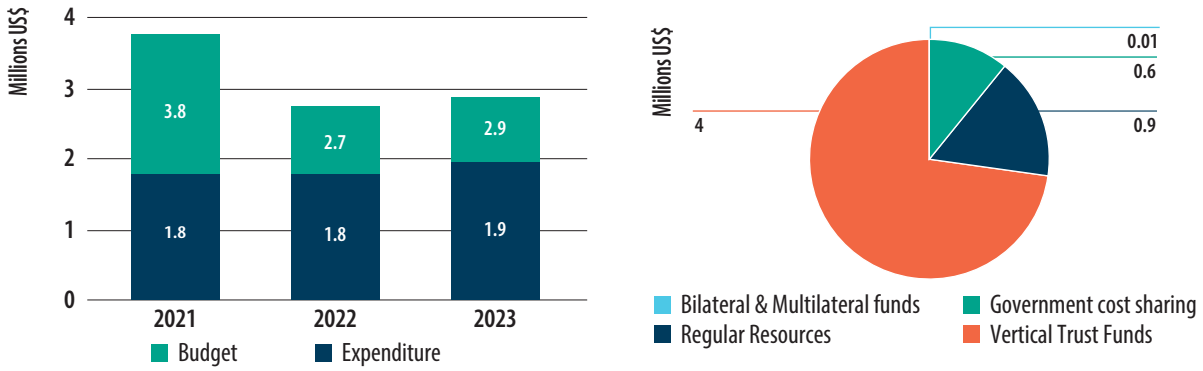
Output 3.3: Green economy, climate and disaster risk reduction awareness and knowledge are increased through educational programmes.

The 13 projects under Outcome 3 had a total budget of $9.4 million, with $5.5 million spent between January 2021 and December 2023. During the current CPD cycle, most of the funding came from vertical funds ($4 million), supported by significant contributions from the CO's Regular Resources ($0.9 million), government cost sharing ($0.6 million), and bilateral and multilateral funding ($0.01 million). Figure 6 provides an overview of the budget allocated to outcome 3.

[83] The Times of Central Asia, 'Project to Support Women and Youth Launched in Turkmenistan.' 24 September 2024. Last accessed: 22 November 2024. Available at: https://timesca.com/project-to-support-women-and-youth-launched-in-turkmenistan/.

[84] The ADB's 2024-2028 Country Program Strategy was built upon three pillars: (i) supporting the green transformation to a sustainable and climate-resilient economy; (ii) strengthening economic competitiveness through diversification, private sector development, and human development; and (iii) promoting structural reforms and institutional development. For more information see: https://www.adb.org/documents/turkmenistan-country-partnership-strategy-2024-2028.

FIGURE 6. Budget, expenditure and source of funding in Outcome 3



Source: Based on Atlas/ Quantum data.

Finding 11. UNDP championed support to climate change mitigation and adaptation and a more sustainable use of natural resources. It also contributed to strengthening the capacities of various institutions in the disaster risk reduction area. While policy level work was strong in all areas, progress on the ground was particularly visible in the area of climate change adaptation.

UNDP championed support to Turkmenistan's climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts at various levels, continuing from previous programming cycles. UNDP made significant progress in helping the Government strengthen the national policy and legal framework linked to Outcome 3. During the period under review, Turkmenistan submitted an updated and ambitious Enhanced NDCs in the context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; joined the Global Methane Pledge during COP 28 in Dubai; and adopted laws on Renewable Energy Sources (2021) and Energy Saving and Energy Efficiency (2024). The drafting of an ambitious National Adaption Plan was also initiated. UNDP played a key role in all these initiatives.

UNDP policy support was accompanied by an active engagement in strengthening the capacities of ministries and government agencies. The evidence gathered converges on the fact that UNDP made strong contributions to strengthening the country's capacities on sustainable energy and environment. According to the CO, more than 3,000 industry specialists were trained to support the implementation of climate change adaptation and mitigation (including renewable energy and energy efficiency) measures. UNDP continuously engaged with the same specialized institutions in the implementation of projects on environment and climate change, thereby contributing to their growth as centres of expertise. These included the National Institute of Deserts, Flora and Fauna as well as higher education institutions such as the Dashoguz State Agriculture Institute and Turkmen Agrarian University.[85] Although the scope of this support was limited geographically, UNDP also contributed to enhancing the capacities of local state administrative bodies in the context of pilot projects.

UNDP also contributed to enhancing the capacities of various institutions working on disaster risk reduction. UNDP supported improved meteorological monitoring by Hydromet, thereby strengthening national capacities for drought prediction. UNDP contributed to the adoption of the Turkmenistan State Programme for Seismic Risk Reduction under the previous CPD. UNDP support built on this achievement and contributed

[85] UNDP support to exchanges at regional level and direct support to institutions in Turkmenistan contributed to discussions on the potential creation of a Regional Centre for Climate Change Technologies for Central Asia.

further to the enhanced seismic resilience of the country during the period under review. Several aspects of the seismic risks assessment for Ashgabat were scaled up under this programme, enhancing the city's preparedness for earthquakes.[86]

Various projects contributed to strengthening research and approaches to assessment in the area of climate change. UNDP supported a large Climate Risks and Vulnerability Assessment covering the water sector in Ashgabat and Dashoguz. Pilot initiatives helped to gather enhanced knowledge on the use of innovative climate technologies in specific local contexts.

Finding 12. The scaling up of several supported initiatives, along with the potential for expanding others, underscored UNDP's significant contributions to helping the Government achieve its sustainable energy and environmental goals, although the development of some of the national responses to environmental and climate change challenges was still at an early stage.

UNDP supported the implementation of a variety of pilot initiatives. Some pilots were not replicated or institutionalized. Pilots on the development of energy efficiency measures based on energy audits in the hospitality industry[87] were not scaled up, partly explained by the lack of incentives for such measures in geographic areas connected to the national electricity grid.[88] The Agricultural Information Centres established with UNDP support in two pilot regions to enhance knowledge sharing on adaptation-based agriculture management practices were not scaled up either. Similarly, some tools (e.g., Multilevel Cluster Mapping) were not used and the Local Adaptation Plans (LAPs) piloted in some geographic areas were not integrated in legislation and policymaking. Despite the limited success building on these projects, several interviewees highlighted that UNDP-supported pilots created useful knowledge and experience for the future implementation of such a strategy. The adoption of the Roadmap for the National Adaptation Plan (NAP), which was still in drafting stage at the time of this evaluation, would likely help to establish dedicated finance mechanisms for climate adaptation, creating a more conducive environment for the expansion of successful pilots.

In the area of biodiversity conservation, progress was limited, with the potential National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) still at a very early stage of development. However, UNDP supported measures to improve the management of protected areas and ecological monitoring, which could be used as entry points to support more systemic measures in the future. This included the testing of innovative practices such as SMART[89] patrols. Similarly, although efforts in disaster risk management were limited by a fragmented institutional environment, UNDP-supported initiatives, including the development of drought prediction and improved seismic assessment methods (see finding above), laid crucial groundwork for the development of the project concept for a comprehensive and modern Multi-Hazard Early Warning System (MHEWS) in the future.

Climate-sensitive agricultural extension services required significant strengthening, as the existing system was ineffective in providing training and consultancy to farmers. Efforts to address this through a project proposal by the CO were stalled due to UNDP's re-accreditation process with the Adaptation Fund.[90]

---

86 UNDP, 'Strengthening National Capacity for Seismic Risk Assessment, Prevention, and Response to potential earthquake project,' Project Implementation Review, 2022.

87 Promoted in the context of the 'Sustainable Cities' project.

88 UNDP support to the use of solar energy for water points in rural areas demonstrated better potential for replication.

89 Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool.

90 As of 11 October 2024, UNDP has received its second re-accreditation with Adaptation Fund until 11 October 2029. Source: Adaptation Fund, 'UNDP.' Last accessed: 9 January 2025. Available at: https://www.adaptation-fund.org/imp_entity/un-development-programme-undp/.

The Government scaled up important initiatives and institutionalized several innovative practices promoted through the UNDP-supported pilots, often allocating state funding for this, although data (including financial data) to precisely measure the extent of scaling up efforts was not always accessible. The adoption of LED-lamps for street lighting in Ashgabat and Arkadag are examples of successful scaling up of UNDP-supported pilots. During the period under review, government efforts to scale up successful pilots and ownership of UNDP-supported initiatives were particularly strong in the promotion of efficient water use and Sustainable Land Management (SLM). Examples in this area include the adoption of innovative techniques to grow climate resilient crops that use less water; the expansion of water-saving irrigation techniques; and the introduction of innovative technologies to measure water use.[91] Green finance mechanisms (including grants and subsidized loans) for promoting water saving technologies were in place and were used. The Government has made relevant loan and credit schemes available to private farmers to support water-saving irrigation technologies in the last decade. However, the take up was limited to greenhouse producers of vegetables as part of turnkey projects in foreign currency under the Presidential Programme on import-substitution. Wider producers could access these schemes only in national currency, making them unattractive and economically not feasible. UNDP support to sustainable SWM practices in the context of the Sustainable Cities project was expected to inform and lead to the adoption of specific laws and policies in this area. As the pilots were operated by private companies, this was also a good example of private sector engagement on sustainable energy and environment issues.

Despite efforts at different levels and significant improvements in the national policy and legal framework, overall progress in climate change mitigation was slow during the period under review. The continued presence of large, across-the-board energy tariff subsidies disincentivized the use of green energy and energy efficiency affecting the scale of the expected results of UNDP-supported efforts. Green finance mechanisms for renewable energy (e.g., green bonds, renewable energy auctions) were not in place. Given the lack of incentives for national partners and challenging context for advancing policy discussions and implementing large initiatives in this area, efforts by UNDP and other actors, including International Financial Institutions (e.g., ADB, EBRD), to raise awareness of the benefits of investing in this area existed but remained limited.

Finding 13. UNDP contributed to the reduction of the consequences of the Aral Sea basin environmental crisis through both in-country measures and regional cooperation. UNDP contributed to Turkmenistan's continuous efforts to develop relations with other Central Asian countries on water issues.

The main UNDP project focusing on the Aral Sea basin environmental crisis implemented during the period under review (SLM-Aral) experienced several challenges and delays.[92] UNDP supported the implementation of multiple initiatives related to the Aral Sea crisis over many years, with particular attention paid to the development of community-based adaptation solutions. According to interviewees, UNDP support contributed to improvements in the socio-economic conditions of the population in targeted agricultural communities in the Lebap and Dashoguz province. While, overall, negative trends regarding environmental degradation and water stress persisted, the continuous support made significant contributions to help

[91] UNDP. Terminal Evaluations of the UNDP projects 'Supporting climate resilient livelihoods in agricultural communities in drought-prone areas of Turkmenistan,' and 'Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy for Sustainable Water Management in Turkmenistan'. 2022.

[92] Including: i) delays and changing priorities as a result of the Ministry of Environment splitting from the Ministry of Agriculture (a needed reform, but one that caused issues in project implementation); and ii) UNDP's decision early on to choose a private company for a Responsible Party Agreement (RPA).

address these challenges. UNDP also played a pivotal role in the resolution to reduce the consequences of the Aral Sea basin crisis supported by Government and adopted at the 79th session of Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP).[93]

In a context of strong regional interdependencies linked to the energy-water nexus and tensions around the management of water resources, UNDP supported initiatives across Central Asian countries to strengthen regional approaches and establish enhanced mechanisms for cooperation in environmental protection and sustainable development. UNDP contributed to Turkmenistan's continuous efforts to develop relations with other Central Asian countries on water issues both at bilateral[94] and multilateral[95] levels. There is evidence that regional cooperation efforts led to some successes in improving the situation at the local level, for instance in terms of water availability in the Amudarya basin.[96] Beyond creating the conditions for implementing local initiatives addressing specific environmental issues such as around the Aral Sea, UNDP's continuous engagement with key regional actors (e.g., the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea – IFAS, and the Interstate Commissions for Water Coordination and Sustainable Development) supported initiatives strengthening regional dialogue (e.g., regional seminar on water diplomacy in April 2024).

2.2.4 Health and Social Protection

Outcome 4: By 2025, the population of Turkmenistan enjoys higher quality and inclusive health and social protection services.

Corresponding outputs:

Output 4.1: National health services provide quality treatment for tuberculosis and other infectious diseases.

Output 4.2: National health services provide high-quality treatment for major NCDs.

Output 4.3: Social protection system and outreach strengthened for vulnerable groups.

The 16 projects under Outcome 4 had a total budget of $108.4 million, with $84.64 million spent between January 2021 and December 2023. During the current CPD cycle, most of the funding came from government cost sharing ($64 million), supported by significant contributions from bilateral and multilateral funds ($11.7 million), Vertical Trust Funds ($9.8 million), and the CO's Regular Resources ($0.9 million). Figure 7 provides an overview of the budget allocated to Outcome 4.

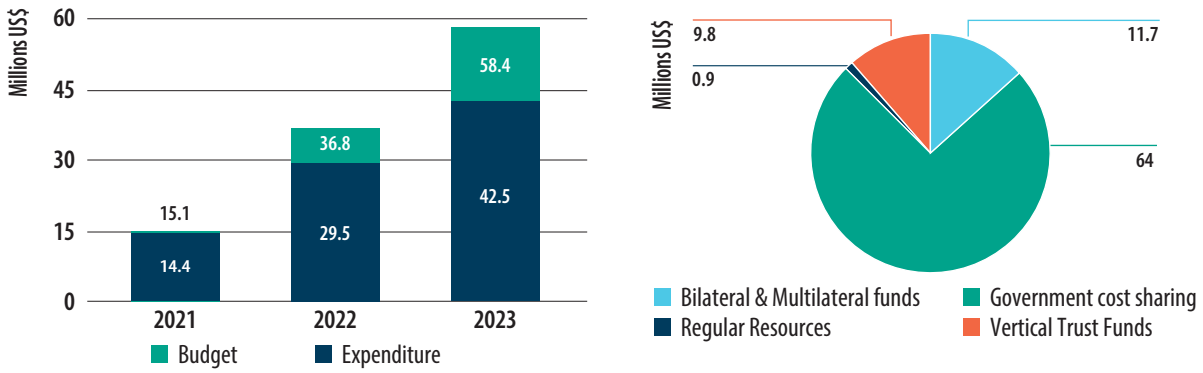
[93] The ESCAP at its 79th session in Bangkok (Thailand) unanimously adopted the resolution put forward by Turkmenistan 'Consideration of the conditions for establishing a special United Nations program for the Aral Sea basin.' Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'At the initiative of Turkmenistan ESCAP Resolution adopted.' 21 May 2023. Last accessed: 9 January 2025. Available at: https://mfa.gov.tm/en/news/3820.

[94] In particular, within the framework of intergovernmental working groups on use of water resources.

[95] In particular, within the framework of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) and the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination.

[96] Suyunov, Sh., 'Water Diplomacy in Central Asia,' in *Water Diplomat*. 2022. Last accessed: 25 November 2024. Available at: https://www.waterdiplomat.org/story/2022/12/water-diplomacy-central-asia.

FIGURE 7. Budget, expenditure and source of funding in Outcome 4



Source: Based on Atlas/ Quantum data.

Finding 15. UNDP strongly contributed to improved health services and Turkmenistan's progress towards achieving Universal Health Coverage, enhanced health outcomes and better pandemic preparedness. UNDP support with the digitalization of health services was progressing according to the workplan, already contributing to more accessibility of health services and improved management of health infrastructure. The Government scaled up several UNDP-supported initiatives and plans to scale up others in the near future; overall, their sustainability prospects remain strong.

UNDP played a substantial role in advancing Turkmenistan's progress toward Universal Health Coverage (UHC) by ensuring the efficient procurement, delivery and distribution of life-saving medications, medical goods and equipment. These efforts contributed significantly to promoting SDG 3 by reducing rates of TB[97] and viral hepatitis and improving outcomes for other infectious diseases and NCDs[98] through the provision of pharmaceuticals[99] and enhanced diagnostic capabilities. UNDP's support extended to maternal and child health, with the supply of essential medicines bolstering healthcare services in this critical area.

While improved health outcomes were observed nationwide, interviews with stakeholders indicated that these improvements were less pronounced in remote regions. Despite being a priority for UNDP, regional disparities persisted due to the limited availability of highly qualified health professionals and the lower frequency with which residents in these areas sought medical advice. The distribution of state-of-the-art diagnostic laboratory equipment through the Lab Project and the strengthening of primary healthcare facilities with medical equipment in urban and rural areas improved access for many residents. However, stakeholders highlighted significant gaps in diagnostic equipment in remote regions, underscoring the need for further targeted interventions.

UNDP, together with the WHO and UNICEF (with WB funding), contributed to the strengthening of Turkmenistan's pandemic preparedness, successfully completing the delivery of the $20 million WB loan. The National Emergency Communication Plan was updated; a Knowledge, Awareness and Practices (KAP) survey was carried out; more than 5,800 healthcare staff were trained on COVID-19; 10 laboratories were upgraded to perform PCR tests; and

[97] Cases declined from 29.7 per 100,000 population in 2021 to 28,4 in 2022 (latest available). Source: UNDP, ROAR 2023, based on data from the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry (MHMI).

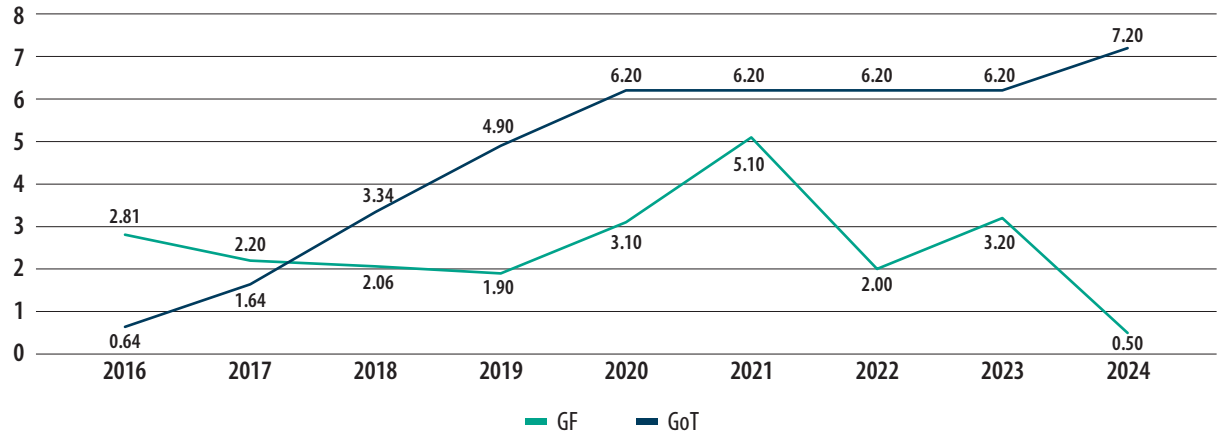
[98] At the time of writing of this report, the UN did not receive MHMI's actual data for 2023.

[99] With more than 100 essential medicines made available to patients through UNDP procurement support, including insulins, medicines for treatment of cancer, various cardio-vascular, chronic respiratory and mental diseases.

a mobile PCR lab was procured for rapid response to outbreaks.[100,101] With this, UNDP contributed to SDG 3.d.: Emergency preparedness: Strengthen the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks.

Positive changes enabled by the UNDP programme under the health portfolio strongly contributed to: i) more accurate (given the state-of -the art lab equipment) diagnoses (only according to interviews as no hard data was available for this); and ii) more effective (as was demonstrated with, for example declining TB cases) and more affordable health services (given the supply of free medicines for the designated groups). There was more engagement with the communities in the context of TB response by the National Red Crescent Society. Even though the social mobilization component under the Global Fund (GF) project was not funded in the last two cycles (planned to be reintroduced, to reduce stigma), home visits were conducted to support individual patients and their families.

FIGURE 8. Funding for TB and other communicable diseases (Millions US$)



Source: UNDP

UNDP was successful in supporting the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry (MHMI) to further strengthen its procurement capacity. This progress was reflected in the increasing procurement volumes managed directly by the Government, which surpassed those handled by the GF already in 2017, as illustrated in Figure 8. This achievement mitigated concerns about the sustainability of the efforts to tackle infectious diseases in Turkmenistan. It underscores the success of the CO's support to the MHMI and the capacities built through the growing self-reliance and capability of the MHMI in managing essential health-related procurements.

UNDP's support to the health sector in Turkmenistan addressed critical needs in stock management, digitalization, and innovation, laying the groundwork for long-term development. The increasing scope and scale of medical supplies and equipment prompted the government to approach UNDP for assistance in establishing an effective stock management system, which became a key prerequisite for enhancing

[100] UNDP, ROAR 2023.

[101] According to the WB, the project (a) ensured the development and periodic update of the comprehensive national COVID-19 risk communication plan, including standardized, evidence-based information targeted to different population groups; (b) surpassed the target for the number of COVID-19 designated laboratories with verified diagnostic equipment and test kits (18 vs. the target of 5); (c) surpassed the target for the number of designated beds for COVID-19 patients with access to continuous oxygen supply (1,000 vs. the target of 600); and (d) ensured the regular updating of the National Pandemic Preparedness and Response Plan tailored for each region. World Bank, 'Turkmenistan COVID-19 Response Project (Loan 9285-TM) Aide Memoire for the Implementation Support Mission', October 9-13, 2023.

healthcare services. Initial efforts focused on digitalizing aspects of health services, NCD applications, and COVID e-surveillance tools. Plans for advanced innovations, including Artificial Intelligence-powered x-ray analysis and video-supported treatment, showcased the integration of digital solutions to improve accessibility and management of health infrastructure, particularly through remote health services.[102]

In parallel, primary healthcare facilities in urban and rural areas were equipped with essential medical devices, although diagnostic needs remained higher in remote regions. UNDP's role extended to fostering government ownership of innovative projects, such as the NCD and lab initiatives promoted by UNDP which were likely to be scaled up due to demonstrated national commitment. However, challenges persisted regarding sustainability, including the shortage of trained specialists for lab equipment maintenance and the high cost of NCD medicines (e.g., through MHMI procurement or private pharmacies).

Finding 16. UNDP, together with UNICEF and UNFPA, contributed to improved community-based social services for vulnerable groups, mainstreaming the concept into laws and policies. However, this was operational in only 20 of 59 districts due to reported budget constraints. Overall, the system of supporting vulnerable groups achieved certain progress, but required systemic changes, including targeted social assistance and addressing the root causes of vulnerability, particularly for youth NEET.

With UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA support, the concept of community-based social services was mainstreamed in: i) the Law on Social Services passed in 2021 along with five related regulatory acts, (e.g., on standards); ii) the Socio-Economic Development Programme until 2025 (2022) and the Presidential programme on Socio-economic development 2022-2028; and iii) the higher education system.[103] The Law on Social Services stipulated the elaboration of a national programme on the development of community social services, but the draft was still at Mejlis[104] at the time of the evaluation. UNDP piloted services for 12 new categories of the vulnerable, but this was not in the legislation at the time of writing this report. At the time of writing this report, social workers were available only at 20 out of 59 districts, due the cut of the requested budget lines in the state budget formulation process. While the UNDP-piloted mechanism for prevention of violent extremism through Youth Training Centres enhanced the skills of targeted youth, incorporating additional mechanisms—such as structured internships, mentorship programmes, and active private sector engagement—could have further amplified its effectiveness and long-term impact. These Centres, established within local representative offices of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP) to promote sustainability, faced challenges in achieving consistent use for their intended purpose. Efforts to replicate the model on a broader scale by the Government fell short, limiting the initiative's overall reach and sustainability.

UNDP trained youth at risk under the Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) project contributing to youth empowerment, with most of the young people involved reflecting in the subsequent evaluation of this regional project that they gained better skills to enable finding jobs or start a business.[105] Although it was aligned with the 'National Action Plan for 2021-2024 on the implementation of the Strategy of Turkmenistan to Prevent Violent Extremism and Counter Terrorism,' it did not produce a sustainable model for addressing the core challenges faced by vulnerable youth. Youth Training Centres opened at six regional branches of the MLSP were not used sustainably for their intended purpose (they were used only from time to time when there were MLSP-led events, according to the interviews). They supported the youth with job searches

[102] See also Statista, 'Digital Health – Turkmenistan.' Last accessed: 28 November 2024. Available at: https://es.statista.com/outlook/dmo/digital-health/turkmenistan#revenue.

[103] An undergraduate social work programme opened in two higher education institutions.

[104] The Mejlis is the parliament of Turkmenistan, serving as the country's national legislative body. It operates as a unicameral institution and is one of the key organs in Turkmenistan's governance structure.

[105] The respondents from Turkmenistan assessed the outcomes positively more than 80 percent. Source: UNDP Kazakhstan, 'Final Evaluation report: Strengthening Community Resilience and Regional Cooperation for Prevention of Violent Extremism in Central Asia.'

and training but did not provide mechanisms such as internships or other links to companies as potential employers. The experience with these Training Centres was not replicated in other districts, due to the cut of the requested budget lines in the state budget formulation process.

Support for the Blind and Deaf Society (BDS) improved the livelihoods of the members through training and equipment, but the needs of the organization were larger than the programme provided, with further scaling required. UNDP helped build the capacities of the BDS with training and modern equipment, contributing to improved livelihoods of Visually and Hearing-Impaired People, with them gaining decent work conditions and increasing their earnings,[106] but the need for the capacity building for the BDS could not be fully addressed. The Manual on Mentoring in the Workplace for the Visually and Hearing-Impaired People of the BDS was developed and shared among 10 Territorial Production Enterprises of the BDS, marking the first steps for scaling up the assistance provided to the three enterprises.

While UNDP and other UN agencies, together and individually, strengthened the capacity of the MLSP, the overall system of supporting the vulnerable was in need of systemic changes with the introduction of a system of targeted social assistance, also covering the unemployed. The need to address the needs of the vulnerable youth by addressing the root causes of vulnerability was evident. At the time of writing this report, several UN agencies, including UNDP, were planning to embark on a project supporting youth NEET.

2.3 Overall performance and cross-cutting issues

Gender

Finding 17. UNDP Turkmenistan made coordinated and, overall successful, efforts to promote better programming for GEWE, reflected in the CO's Gender Equality Strategy (GES). This was reflected in the enhanced efforts to promote GEWE, supporting the Government's NAPGE 2021-2025 implementation. Gender mainstreaming varied by Outcome. Overall, there was a need to address root causes of gender inequality.

The CO strengthened GEWE integration in its programming models through the establishment of a Gender Focal Team, which led the development, coordinated and monitored the implementation of the CO GES 2023-2027[107] and accompanying Action Plan.[108,109] The GES guided UNDP's efforts to promote GEWE, as described under Finding 18. All draft Project Documents were subject to mandatory gender review.

In 2023, the CO achieved a 'Bronze' level certification,[110] recognizing the internal changes in the CO as a result of the Gender Seal exercise.[111] Enhancing alignment with UNDP's Gender Equality Strategy, the CO enhanced its gender-responsiveness, widened the CO's outreach on promoting GEWE and built dedicated capacities

[106] Support to BDS facilitated the creation of 75 new jobs for PwDs, and expanded the income of BDS members by 40 percent, according to UNDP (ROAR 2023).

[107] In development of the GES the UNDP CO was guided with UN normative and policy frameworks to which GoT was a signatory state, such as CCPR, CESCR, CEDAW, CERD, CAT, CRPD, The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995, and 2030 Agenda, including the recommendations of the human rights mechanisms - Universal Periodic Review, Treaty Bodies, the ILO Supervisory Bodies and other, across all four strategic priorities.

[108] The action plan included components both on the level of the UNCT as well as the CO, including sensitization workshops, checklists to integrate gender aspects into programming and the use of gender-sensitive indicator in results frameworks.

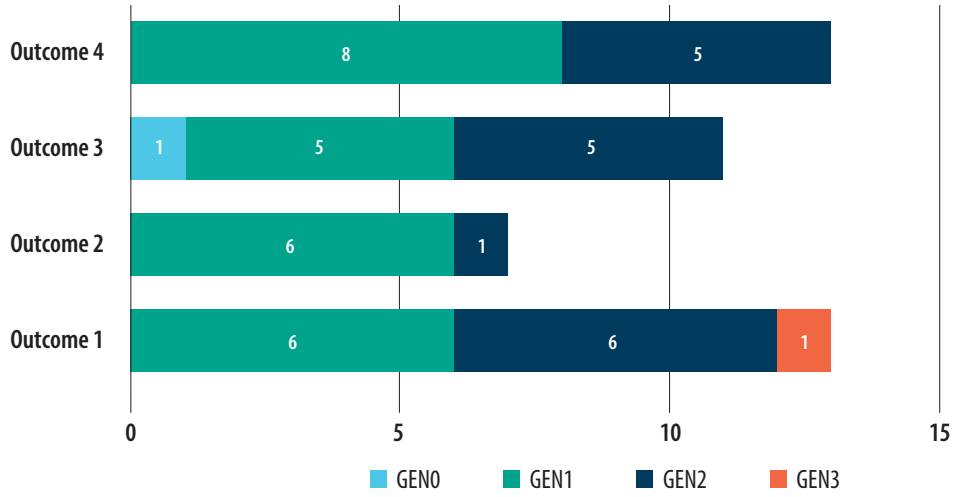
[109] UNDP committed to: i) engage women and girls at community level to better understand the specific needs and barriers they face; ii) convey, jointly with partners, gender equality messages concerning power imbalances and negative social norms and values, and iii) invest in learning related to women's rights, gender (in)equality and gender mainstreaming.

[110] UNDP, 'UNDP Turkmenistan earns BRONZE level certification of the Gender Equality Seal.' Last accessed: 9 January 2025. Available at: https://www.undp.org/turkmenistan/press-releases/undp-turkmenistan-earns-bronze-level-certification-gender-equality-seal.

[111] For more information on the Gender Equality Seal (GES), please consult UNDP's page available at: https://www.undp.org/gender-seal-development.

to address gender-related issues.[112] The CO raised additional donor funding for GEWE-related projects. While the gender-components in many implemented projects were visible and led to impactful results, some challenging benchmarks remained. The CO aimed to meet those and apply for 'Silver' level certification in the next CPD cycle. Specifically, the CO planned to enhance tracking of gender expenditures and improve the assessment of outcome-level gender results, for example going beyond male/female participation counts in projects and using this information in the development of new projects. Figure 9 illustrates the distribution of gender markers across the CO's portfolio.[113] Gender components were integrated across all outcomes, although, according to the gender markers, the extent of integration varied significantly. Outcomes 1 (Governance), 3 (Energy and Environment), and 4 (Health and Social Services) demonstrated strong gender mainstreaming efforts, featuring five projects each with a GEN2 marker. In contrast, Outcome 2 included only one project with a GEN2 marker, reflecting a more limited focus on gender in this area. Outcome 1 included the only project with a GEN3 marker. Overall, 57 percent of projects in the portfolio included a gender component (GEN1), 35 percent featured a dedicated gender focus (GEN2).

FIGURE 9. Distribution of gender markers across outcomes



Source: Atlas/ Quantum data.

[112] UNDP, 'Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2025.' Last accessed: 9 January 2025. Available at: https://genderequalitystrategy.undp.org/. Women, 'Gender Equality Marker Implementation in UNDP.' Last accessed: 15 September 2024. Available at: https://genderequalitystrategy.undp.org/#.

[113] Gender marker 0: No gender relevance. Gender marker 1: Contributes in a limited way to gender equality, but not significantly. Gender equality is not consistently mainstreamed and has not been critical in the project design. Gender Marker 2: Gender equality is not the main objective of the expected output, but the output promotes gender equality in a significant and consistent way. Gender marker 3: The achievement of gender equality and/or the empowerment of women are an explicit objective of the output and the main reason that this output was planned. Narrowing gender inequalities or empower women is the main reason this initiative is being undertaken.

The Government adopted the National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAPGE) for 2021-2025.[114,115] NAPGE was under the purview of the Institute of State, Law and Democracy of Turkmenistan, which, together with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Centre in Ashgabat, monitored its progress.[116]

UNDP interventions to promote GEWE were in line with the NAPGE 2021-2025 and supported its implementation with several projects, jointly with other UN agencies. UNDP demonstrated a commitment to advancing GEWE through its policy and institutional mainstreaming, project-level initiatives, and capacity-building efforts. At the policy level, UNDP supported gender-sensitive approaches in areas such as digitalization, sustainable energy and environmental sustainability, governance (especially in the context of digitalization and SDG monitoring/financing) and health. Key achievements included developing a gender-sensitive Civil Registry Roadmap, integrating gender into the Enhanced NDC and NAP frameworks, and embedding GEWE training into civil service curricula,[117] expected to enhance GEWE mainstreaming by the civil servants. While gender responsiveness was mainstreamed in several laws, such as the Law on Community Social Services, challenges persisted, particularly in addressing structural social norms and advancing women's civil and political rights. For instance, longstanding UNTB recommendations to adopt a specific law on domestic violence remained unaddressed, despite growing recognition of GBV as a national issue following a 2022 UNFPA-supported survey.

At the project level, UNDP promoted workplace inclusivity and economic empowerment for women through initiatives such as digital skills boot camps, Turkmenistan's first Women's Hackathon, and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics education campaigns. In rural areas, women farmers and women's groups received grants for climate resilience technologies and sustainable agriculture projects, fostering economic empowerment. However, these grants lacked integration into state financing systems, limiting their sustainability. Structural barriers, including entrenched gender norms and biases in the workplace, posed significant challenges, reinforcing the need for a systematic approach to addressing social norms across all outcomes.

Capacity-building initiatives focused on training female practitioners in various fields, including healthcare, social services, and agriculture. While these efforts enhanced skills and participation, data on career progression or broader impacts were unavailable. Regionally, UNDP facilitated cooperation through the Women Leaders' Caucus, fostering dialogue among female leaders in Central Asia and raising awareness on GEWE issues. This initiative created a valuable platform for sharing best practices, building trust-based cooperation, and promoting women's socio-economic and political participation across the region.[118] It contributed to the first large-scale effort in Turkmenistan to promote GEWE and significantly raised awareness on these issues,[119] while strengthening trust-based cooperation in the region. It became

[114] The document was developed by the Working Group of the Interagency Commission to ensure the implementation of international obligations of Turkmenistan in the areas of human rights and international humanitarian law with support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

[115] The seven strategic areas of NAPGE included: further enhancement of legislation, ensuring gender-responsive healthcare, fostering equal access to education, prevention and response to GBV, economic empowerment of women and girls; and advancing the political and social dimensions of women's participation at all levels.

[116] Altynasyr Newspaper. 'Turkmenistan monitors the implementation of the National Action Plan on Gender Equality.' 28 May 2024. Last accessed: 28 November 2024. Available at: https://turkmenistan.gov.tm/tk/habar/84210/turkmenistan-monitors-implementation-national-action-plan-gender-equality.

[117] UNDP. 'The Specialized Gender Mainstreaming online course for Public Servants in Turkmenistan.' Last accessed: 28 November 2024. Available at: https://www.undp.org/turkmenistan/specialized-gender-mainstreaming-online-course-public-servants-turkmenistan?fbclid=IwY2xjawFtUABleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHYcNVmQ8kGbcgzI_MWjSk7I8pij6acwJzqCnxqquDhUfkIbxJhEwE3lgyA_aem_853vVh61oAaRvcSqf1Tnhw.

[118] The Caucus comprised women leaders from the five Central Asian countries and UN representatives and connected women leaders in Turkmenistan to a broader regional network, establishing a platform for regional dialogue.

[119] Interview with national stakeholders.

an effective platform for the exchange of views and experiences and of international best practice in empowering women and girls and increasing their level of participation in political, socio-economic, cultural and humanitarian life.[120]

2.3.1 Leaving No One Behind

Finding 18. The programme benefitted those at risk of being left behind because of intersecting forms of discrimination and inequalities. The important areas of defending the human rights of vulnerable groups were addressed collectively by UN agencies. Progress registered more recently with more sensitive issues (gender-based violence, forced labour) was an important momentum to build upon. The CO could have benefitted from having a LNOB strategy.

The CO relied on the LNOB assessment for the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (there was also one by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific).[121] There was an enhanced Social and Environmental Screening Procedure for the CO,[122] but no LNOB strategy with mapping of the avenues to pursue. The latter could have been beneficial for the CO.

LNOB was collectively supported by many UN agencies and UNCT and UNDP efforts were an integral part of this.[123] In particular, UN agencies cooperated on strengthening the LNOB approach in the realm of human rights. For example, the International Organization for Migration focused on the rights of stateless persons and victims of trafficking; the International Labour Organization on issues related to forced labour and child labour; and UNFPA on GBV, as previously discussed. While there were still categories of vulnerable that were not covered by joint UNCT efforts, and the progress was not as fast as hoped for, registered progress on GBV and forced labour was a sign of a growing openness by the Government, indicating a potential to deepen the engagement. There was also support by the UNCT in securing resources in relation to human rights compliance and protection of vulnerable populations based on the COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response Plan and operationalizing the framework of human rights indicators for assessing and monitoring human rights implications of COVID-19 based on the Global Guidance.[124]

UNDP's focus was on PwD, women-headed households, Persons Living with TB and Viral Hepatitis and NCDs, youth at risk of violent extremism, and the elderly. For example, in relation to PwD, UNDP support to the Turkmenistan Blind and Deaf Society resulted not only in higher incomes for the members, but also ensured decent work opportunities for persons living with hearing and visual impairments.[125] UNDP's adherence to the LNOB principle also was reflected in its support for economic policies, aiming to ensure that economic development benefits reached the most vulnerable and marginalized populations, for

---

120 Permanent Mission of Turkmenistan to the UN, 'Outcome document of the Annual meeting of the Central Asia Women Leaders' Caucus published as the United Nations document,' 30 January 2023. Last accessed: 15 September 2024. Available at: https://un.mission.gov.tm/en/news/109676.

121 Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 'Leaving No One Behind (LNOB): Turkmenistan,' 25 October 2022. Last accessed: 15 September 2024. Available at: https://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/leaving-no-one-behind-lnob-turkmenistan.

122 SIDA support catalysed the implementation of the new corporate plan on improving Social and Environmental Standards (SES). SES underpin UNDP's commitment to mainstream gender and link social issues and environmental sustainability in all projects. They include a corporate accountability mechanism (UNDP Stakeholder Response Mechanism and OAI Social and Environmental Compliance Unit) as well as project-level grievance mechanisms that ensure women, youth, indigenous peoples and other stakeholders affected by UNDP projects can access procedures for addressing project-related grievances; and a Review process. SES Capacity Building Action Plans (together with a Toolkit with indicators that can be used to track progress over time), as well as regional plans are now available to COs. SIDA-UNDP, 'Terminal Review of SIDA-UNDP Programme on Environment and Climate Change,' 14 April 2024. Last accessed: 15 September 2024. Available at: https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/15944.

123 Ibid.

124 UNCT not only advocated with the Government on implementing the special measures to protect needs of most vulnerable, but also provided on the ground assistance, e.g., procured food and hygiene items for 5,000 families; it also assessed COVID-19 impact on youth, PwD, as well as made a labour force survey focusing on the impact of the pandemic, thus complementing UNDP-led support under the WB COVID project. UN Turkmenistan, 'Mid-Term Review of the UN-Turkmenistan Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework,' 2023.

125 UNDP Turkmenistan ROAR 2023.

example, addressing the unique needs of women, youth, PwD and marginalized communities, e.g., with training, adaptive strategies such as community engagement, and targeted resource allocation to address challenges related to social norms.

LNOB initiatives also included efforts to narrow the digital divide. Those without access to the internet and/or insufficient digital literacy to use it even if available are by definition at risk of being left behind in the digital transformation. UNDP contributed to addressing issues of those who were at risk of being left behind in both rural and urban areas, also via engagement in the least developed regions of the country. For example, under E&E (Outcome 3), many of the pilot initiatives were in Dashoguz (with cold desert climate) and Lebap (bordering Afghanistan and Uzbekistan along the Amu Darya). Several projects under Outcome 3 benefited those at risk of being left behind, by focusing on more vulnerable farmers, youth and women-headed households, prioritizing them in the small-grants process. UNDP-supported interventions equipped the most vulnerable with water saving technologies (e.g., drip irrigation), seeds for resilient crops, and alternative livelihood options, replacing their previous, environmentally harmful income activities with more sustainable practices. These examples, described in more detail earlier in this report, demonstrate how the UNDP interventions improved the livelihoods of the recipient households, and resulted in demonstration effects.

UNDP balanced its support to national and local development processes and linked the two. For example, under Outcome 4, diagnostic laboratories were supported across the country to ensure access to quality-assured tests. Medicines and lab tests were available in all health facilities across the country, greatly improving Universal Health Coverage and outcomes for many diseases. As mentioned earlier, geographic access to healthcare remained unequal, with lower access in remote regions despite UNDP's focus on these areas. Contributing factors included the limited availability of highly qualified medical staff and trained technicians for the maintenance of medical equipment in rural areas.

UNDP had a special focus on youth under all Outcomes, helping to address their needs in several ways. There were several initiatives targeting youth. These included the #FutureSkills4All under the PVE project; engaging with youth under a digitalization theme, with training and events, (e.g., as part of the 100-Day Global Consultation on Digital Inclusion); and with the #TurkmenYouth4SDGs Educational Sessions series which engaged students in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. While the PVE project helped to enhance the skills of the targeted youth to gain employment or start a business, it did not address the structural challenges and lacked mechanisms to ensure sustainability, as young people faced significant challenges in finding employment. This was corroborated by the ADB's recent Asian Development Outlook (April 2024),[126] which emphasized the limited access of youth to education and employment, which, in turn, limited young people's contribution to the country's economic development.

The programme mostly targeted those at risk of being left behind because of intersecting forms of discrimination and inequalities. This was demonstrated with the examples of vulnerable women, affected both by social norms and lack of employment opportunities; persons living with TB, affected by the societal stigma and opportunities for timely diagnosis and treatment; and unemployed and vulnerable youth, affected by the lack of employment opportunities and effective social service (referral) mechanisms. There were not many documented examples of these, however, except for in the H&S Services Outcome 4, where, by the very nature of the Outcome there was strong documented evidence that UNDP results significantly contributed to support those at risk of being left behind, such as PwD, Persons Living with TB and Viral Hepatitis, youth at risk, and elderly. The CO would benefit from more documentation of examples to facilitate learning.

[126] ADB, 'Asian Development Outlook,' April 2024. Last accessed: 15 September 2024. Available at: https://www.adb.org/publications/asian-development-outlook-april-2024.

Partnerships

Finding 19. UNDP effectively leveraged partnerships with UN agencies, international development partners, civil society organizations, the private sector, and academia to address Turkmenistan's development priorities. These collaborations advanced progress in health, social services, green business practices, and trade facilitation, but their results were constrained by institutional capacities, limited support for multi-agency initiatives, and the absence of a translation of the global UNDP strategy to engage the private sector in Turkmenistan.

UNDP demonstrated a strong ability to collaborate with other UN agencies, contributing to impactful joint initiatives in Turkmenistan, as discussed in Section 2.1. For example, through partnerships with UNICEF, UNFPA, and WHO, UNDP built on the expertise of the UNCT to effectively address health, social services, and human rights issues; the partnership with UNEP strengthened the UNDP response to the Government's Methane Pledge, and under the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, UNDP supported the youth-focused initiative, 'Empowering and Engaging Youth to Mitigate Multi-Dimensional Threats of the Health Pandemic.' UNDP's leadership in SDG monitoring and reporting resulted in the development of a publicly accessible SDG database, facilitating broader use by government agencies and research institutions. However, despite these successes, multi-agency collaboration faced limitations in terms of endorsement by national counterparts.

UNDP also made efforts to engage with the private sector, aimed at fostering sustainable practices and facilitating economic growth. Initiatives were mainly linked to Outcome 3. Key contributions included promoting green business practices, such as pilots for renewable energy use, water-saving technologies, and sustainable SWM. The efforts to facilitate trade, including the development of the Single Window System, aimed to enhance private sector capacities to access international markets and promote transparency. However, direct partnerships with the private sector mostly happened on an ad hoc basis and did not follow a clear strategy, due to a very small private sector in the country and an under-developed financial sector. This limited the scope of activities in areas such as youth employment and innovation. For instance, Youth Training Centres established under the PVE project were underutilized and lacked mechanisms such as internship schemes to create meaningful employment opportunities. The programme could have benefited from a translation of the global UNDP strategy to engage the private sector in Turkmenistan.[127]

UNDP also partnered with civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to strengthen community engagement and service delivery. The collaboration with BDS improved livelihoods for visually and hearing-impaired individuals by providing training and equipment, resulting in better working conditions and increased income. The National Red Crescent Society was another key partner, supporting healthcare and community resilience efforts. While there were examples of collaborating with a few vocal NGOs engaged in environment protection, the scope of engagement with civil society remained narrow, and advocacy efforts through civil society organizations were underdeveloped.

UNDP leveraged international and multilateral partnerships to support Turkmenistan's development goals, working with organizations such as the IsDB, the ADB and the EBRD. These collaborations advanced trade facilitation (e.g., with ITC), economic diversification, and environmental initiatives, including regional environmental diplomacy through the IFAS. Despite these achievements, institutional inefficiencies and bureaucratic barriers often limited the depth of these partnerships. For example, while trade facilitation efforts were initiated, integrating them into broader policy frameworks required greater coordination

[127] There is a UN global strategy on Private Sector Partnerships, available at: https://popp.undp.org/policy-page/private-sector-partnerships. No evidence for the adaptation of the strategy to the national context was found.

and efficiency on the side of the national counterparts. Together, these partnerships underscore UNDP's ability to align global expertise with Turkmenistan's development priorities, while also highlighting areas for further improvement.

Management Arrangements/Operational Efficiency

Finding 20. The UNDP Turkmenistan Country Office demonstrated operational efficiency through robust management and risk assessment processes, successfully mitigating challenges such as bureaucratic hurdles, procurement delays, and global disruptions. While approximately two-thirds of the projects were implemented under the supported National Implementation Modality (NIM), UNDP allocated substantial resources to institutional strengthening, joint steering of the projects to ensure the Government's buy-in and ownership, and addressing systemic barriers to contribute to a transition to NIM.

The CO demonstrated operational efficiency, with strong adaptive management and processes to assess risks pertaining to the operating environment to navigate various challenges in project implementation. These processes, integrated into the CPD, project documents, and strategy notes, allowed, inter alia, for systematic recording and monitoring of risks. However, while mandatory risk assessments were carried out during project design, with updates throughout implementation, the quality of these assessments varied. For example, in the SLM-Aral project, risks associated with engaging a private company with a Responsible Party Agreement were underestimated, resulting in continuous challenges during implementation.

The CO faced delays in several projects due to bureaucratic hurdles, complex procurement procedures, and external challenges (e.g., COVID-19, the conflict in Ukraine), among other reasons. The NAP project experienced prolonged approval processes and data access issues, while local procurement under the Health and Social (H&S) Outcome was hindered by high inflation, dual exchange rates, and delays in obtaining quality assurance documents from manufacturers. Regional and global factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine, also disrupted logistics. The CO effectively mitigated these challenges through adaptive strategies, including proactive planning, continuous monitoring of logistic routes, consolidating goods across projects for cost-efficiency, and seeking support from the UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub and UNDP Headquarters when necessary. For instance, under the H&S Outcome, consolidated health procurement activities and close monitoring ensured there were no critical disruptions in service delivery.

The CO implemented innovative practices to address operational challenges. These included planning health procurement activities well in advance, maintaining budget buffers to account for inflation and exchange rate fluctuations, and securing additional funding from the GF to cover increased costs. As a result, all projects progressed without significant disruptions.

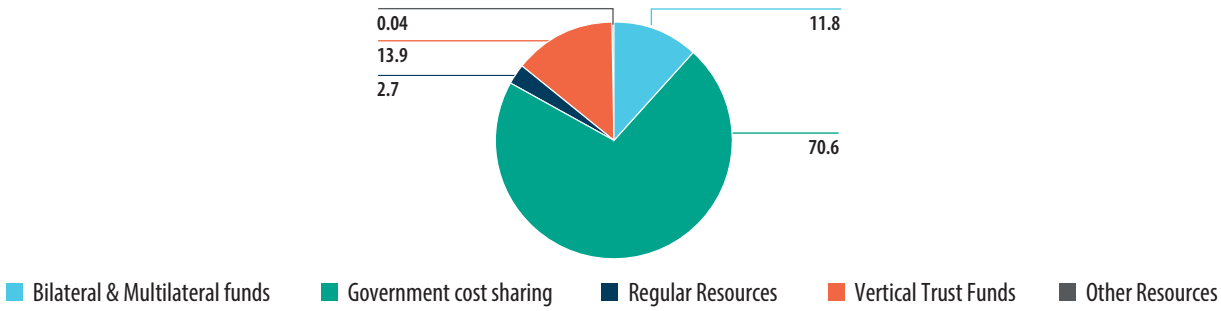
Across the portfolio, approximately two-thirds of the projects were implemented under the supported NIM, while one-third were implemented under the Direct Implementation Modality. The CO heavily invested in institutional strengthening and joint steering of projects to foster national ownership and build capacities. However, systemic barriers hindered progress toward full NIM implementation.

Resource Mobilization

Finding 21. The CO was overall successful in mobilizing and gradually diversifying programme resources, but challenges persisted, notably for the Human Rights and Rule of Law thematic areas (Outcome 1). The CO recognized the need to engage more with the International Financing Institutions (IFI) and Multilateral Development Banks (MDB). The CO team structure enabled joint programme efforts to some extent, but optimizing financial resources through synergies across outputs and outcomes was a work in progress.

The CO successfully mobilized resources from diverse funding sources, including the Global Environment Facility (GEF), Green Climate Fund (GCF), the Government of Turkmenistan, the Governments of Canada, China, Finland and Japan, the British Embassy in Ashgabat, and the Joint SDG Fund. Through successful fundraising efforts, the CO significantly exceeded the initially planned budget for this CPD cycle of $50.1 million, demonstrating strong resource mobilization capacities. Figure 10 illustrates the funding sources for the implementation of the CPD.

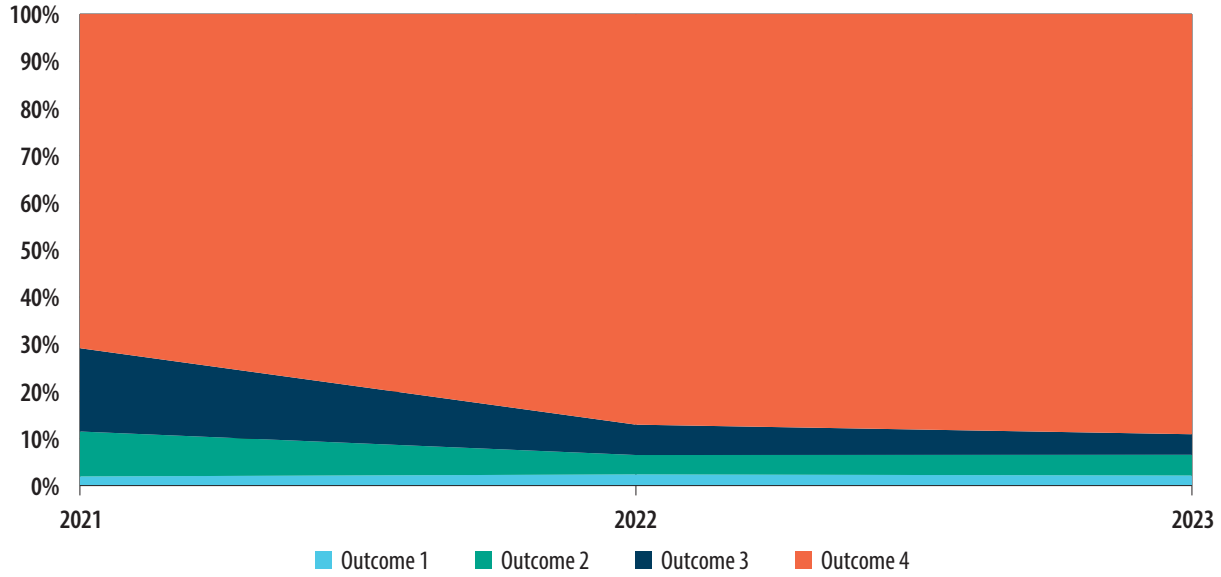
FIGURE 10. Funding sources of CPD implementation 2021-2023 (US$ million)



Source: Based on Atlas/ Quantum data.

Resource mobilization was complicated by several factors, including Turkmenistan's UMIC status, donor preferences for regional projects, and UNDP's re-accreditation process with the Adaptation Fund. The availability of the funding for specific thematic areas, notably human rights and the rule of law, was limited. Figure 11 illustrates the distribution of funding across all outcomes.

FIGURE 11. Resource allocation across Outcomes



Source: Based on Atlas/ Quantum data.

The Government was the largest contributor to UNDP programming, covering 65.1 percent of the total programme budget, with much of this funding directed toward health, social services, and digitalization initiatives.

The collaboration with IFIs and MDBs remained limited, with the IsDB being the only MDB to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with UNDP. This partnership focused on developing a digital governance ecosystem and exploring additional areas such as health, agriculture, and value chains. Despite challenges, UNDP successfully engaged bilateral donors such as the Governments of China and Japan for specific initiatives, including urban resilience and youth-focused projects.

The GF and other vertical funds such as GEF and GCF also provided critical support, although limited opportunities for substantial government cost-sharing affected opportunities for securing large grants from the GCF.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Finding 22. UNDP's Results-Based Management (RBM) and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) frameworks played an important role in enhancing programme results. However, there was room for improvement in conducting more thematic evaluations and regular assessments of pilot initiatives to support evidence-based decision-making and inform scaling-up efforts. Strengthening the system for capturing, documenting and utilizing lessons learned would further enhance the CO's ability to adapt and refine its programming for greater impact.

UNDP's RBM and M&E frameworks played an important role in ensuring programme effectiveness, efficiency and accountability. The ROARs established clear linkages with UNDP's Signature Solutions, CPD indicators, and Moonshots[128] aligning with national development plans and the SDGs. The strong RBM enabled the CO to set measurable objectives and indicators, facilitating progress tracking, outcome assessments, and evidence-based decision-making.

Independent midterm and terminal evaluations were conducted for vertical fund-funded projects, as required by their policies (GEF, GCF). These evaluations were complemented by the donors' own M&E mechanisms. However, independent evaluations for projects funded by other donors, particularly the Government, were historically lacking. Recognizing this gap, the CO recently launched an independent evaluation of its health portfolio, signalling its commitment to expanding such evaluations across other thematic areas.

While the programme included numerous pilot initiatives, particularly in climate change adaptation, the CO would benefit from a more systematic approach in evaluating the scalability of pilots and capturing lessons learned, rather than doing it sporadically, which limits the ability to make informed decisions regarding their expansion. Similarly, the CO lacked a comprehensive system for documenting results related to GEWE and LNOB. A more systematic approach to capturing lessons learned was also needed to feed into project design and to ensure these insights were widely shared with government and development partners, thereby maximizing their utility for future programming.

[128] The objectives of the UNDP 2022-2025 Strategic Plan were: 1) Helping 100 million people to escape out of multidimensional poverty, 2) Supporting 500 million people to gain access to clean energy, 3) Supporting 800 million people to participate in elections, many for the first time, and 4) Promoting over $1 trillion of public expenditure and private capital investment in the SDGs Source: UNDP, 'Strategic Plan 2022-2025.' Last accessed: 15 September 2024. Available at: https://strategicplan.undp.org/.

CHAPTER 3
CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

This chapter presents the conclusions of the evaluation on the performance and contributions of UNDP to development results in Turkmenistan, the recommendations and the management response.

3.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1. UNDP positioned itself as a long-standing and trusted partner of the Government of Turkmenistan and SDG integrator. UNDP support contributed to strengthening national policy and legal frameworks in a variety of policy areas, including through the drafting of laws, the promotion of innovative approaches, and the strengthening of institutional capacities. UNDP also supported the country in key transformation processes such as digitalization.

UNDP maintained a strong relationship with the Government in all areas of engagement identified in the CPD, building on a long history of cooperation in most of areas of engagement. UNDP's global network, strong implementation capacity, experience working both at policy level and on the ground, neutrality and ability to support innovation were comparative advantages on which the CO built. They laid the foundation for this strong relationship with the Government. A testament to this strong relationship was the large government allocation of funds for health and digitalization (see also Conclusion 2).

Overall, UNDP support, including new interventions launched in response to the COVID-19 crisis, aligned well with the country's development needs, the country's policies at the onset of the CPD, and the vision/strategic directions outlined in the CPD. UNDP support also reflected well the country's UMIC status.

UNDP support to improved SDG monitoring, including with the public access to the SDG platform, started facilitating better policy making, aligned with SDGs, and laid the groundwork for initial support for the INFF. UNDP was recognized for its role in facilitating dialogue between development partners and alignment efforts to advance SDG monitoring and integrated SDG financing. UNDP's SDG integrator role was especially strong in the thematic areas of Energy and Environment (Outcome 3), Health (Outcome 4) and digitalization, with the latter chosen as the theme for the portfolio approach. However, the evaluation found that the process of facilitating cross-fertilization and linkages between thematic areas remained at an early stage and that there was room for more synergies between outcomes. While health projects were effectively clustered into a coherent portfolio to maximize resources and results, other support would have benefitted from integrated programming.

Another constraint to fully implementing the vision underlying the CPD was the challenge with scaling-up and rollout of promising pilot interventions to support broader policy reforms in a few areas, especially Social Services (as further discussed in Conclusion 2). It was strong in health and climate change adaptation, especially water saving technologies.

Conclusion 2. UNDP support contributed to positive results in all areas of its engagement. The Programme also revealed a key opportunity to further support national counterparts in deepening their understanding and application of good governance principles.

UNDP contributed to both the development and implementation of the National Human Rights Action Plan (NHRAP), including key initiatives such as the development and submission of a human rights educational course for universities; conducting a mid-term assessment of the NHRAP; a capacity assessment of the Ombudsperson's Office; and the Draft Law on acts of civil status. Notably, the Ombudsperson's Office achieved accreditation with status 'B,' primarily due to UNDP's support in addressing basic compliance issues. UNDP also reinforced national reporting mechanisms under UN human rights frameworks and provided broader support to the Ombudsperson's Office. Nevertheless, the results in the areas of human rights and rule of law remained modest.

UNDP's support for trade promotion and private sector development contributed to positive digital-driven changes in areas such as business registration and trade and customs procedures. UNDP also supported the county's WTO accession. However, the lack of broader economic reforms limited the impact of these initiatives on broader economic diversification.

In the area of energy and environment, UNDP contributed to progress towards climate change mitigation, notably by supporting the Government to develop and adopt enhanced NDCs, which paved the way for the country joining the Global Methane Pledge. However, progress in promoting renewable energy and energy efficiency faced an uphill battle due to country's energy subsidies. In climate change adaptation, UNDP was in the process of supporting the development of the National Action Plan, expected to lay the structural foundations for adaptation-related support in the future. UNDP supported pilot projects in the application of water saving technologies, climate resilient agriculture, biodiversity and sustainable SWM. Some of these (particularly in water) were subsequently expanded and scaled up by the Government. UNDP support to improved seismic assessment in the country reinforced the Government effort on seismic risk reduction and contributed to laying the groundwork for potential future support to the development of a modern Multi-hazard Early Warning System.

UNDP support helped the country to achieve a number of important results in health, including those related to the declining rates of TB and elimination of Hepatitis B. Its implementation of the World Bank emergency COVID-19 loan made a major contribution to dealing with the pandemic, while laying the foundation for longer-term pandemic preparedness through joint work with WHO and UNICEF. By procuring, with government and GF funds, pharmaceuticals, reagents (for testing), and diagnostic equipment, UNDP contributed to improvements in both communicable and NCD rates and progress towards UHC. Sustainability challenges remained relating to maintenance of the new state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment, and the high cost of NCD medication in the country.

While there was a Law on Social Services, and social services were mainstreamed in policies through the joint efforts of UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA, such services were available only in some districts.

UNDP's support advanced digitalization across all areas of engagement, positioning it as a critical enabler for achieving development outcomes. Digital governance initiatives were streamlined across the public administration, while digital tools were leveraged to enhance efficiency and inclusivity in the area of trade facilitation and economic transformation. In the health sector, although it is too early to observe the effects of these improvements, the digitalization of health services and management of health infrastructure introduced innovative solutions for diagnostics and service delivery, aligning with national health priorities. Overall, although some progress was made, significant accessibility challenges persisted due to inadequate IT infrastructure and limited digital literacy. As a result, the digital divide, though reduced, remained very large. The lack of overall openness of the online environment and the lack of a national digitalization strategy were also important challenges. Nonetheless, initiatives supported to date laid a solid foundation for further promoting digitalization as an enabler of sustainable and inclusive development under the next CPD.

Conclusion 3. UNDP made valuable contributions to promoting GEWE, but these efforts were limited by a lack of focus on transformational change. Its support for vulnerable populations also showed important benefits at the level of the specific initiatives supported, especially in the health, social and environmental thematic areas, but would have benefitted from a comprehensive LNOB strategy to systematically identify gaps and address the root causes of exclusion.

UNDP strengthened its internal gender mainstreaming mechanisms, which translated to enhanced efforts related to GEWE. UNDP-supported initiatives directly benefitted women (including women entrepreneurs, farmers, students) through training and skills enhancement, and contributed to strengthening the Government's capacity on GEWE. UNDP support also helped mainstream GEWE into policies and laws, such as the Enhanced NDC in the area of climate change and the Law on Social Services. For instance, in the Environment portfolio, UNDP made strong progress in advancing GEWE within its current projects, particularly in rural communities and remote settlements, where the entrenched gender stereotypes have evolved over centuries. However, across the whole of the programme, the initiatives fell short of supporting gender-transformative actions addressing deep-seated socio-cultural norms, e.g., in the health sector. UNDP's use of the 'grants' mechanism for supporting women's groups was not part of the country's state financing system, reducing the potential for sustainability.

Many of UNDP's actions, especially pilots, addressed the needs of particularly vulnerable members of the population (PWD, Persons Living with HIV and/or TB, farmers in areas vulnerable to climate change, youth, the elderly). Efforts to identify gaps remained non-systematic, as did identifying the root causes of exclusion and the most effective entry points to address them.

Conclusion 4. The potential for sustainability of most UNDP-supported outcomes appeared promising, given the Government's strong ownership and the robust partnerships cultivated by UNDP. However, it was not always realized. Key constraints included challenges in mobilizing financial resources beyond government funding, partly due to the country's UMIC status.

There was potential for sustainability of most UNDP-supported results. The Government, as the main funder, demonstrated strong ownership of the UNDP CPD, especially projects relating to health and digitalization. This ownership could have been stronger in relation to community social services, support to vulnerable youth and sustainable transport. Partnerships within the UN system and with the development partners, while they could be strengthened, were functional. Trust in UNDP extended to the major development partners, as evidenced by UNDP's implementing of the World Bank COVID-19 loan and Global Fund-financed projects in the area of infectious disease control, as well as UNDP's long track record of funding from the vertical funds (e.g., GEF in the Energy and Environment Outcome).

In all areas of engagement, there were several examples of exchanges with other international organizations, including UN agencies (e.g., FAO, UNEP, UNICEF), as well as with EU-funded projects. With the exception of initiatives under the Health and Social Services Outcome, however, there was only one other joint project (with UNCTAD). This partly resulted from the Government's preferences. While having more joint projects was desirable, UNDP contributed to sectoral approaches to development priorities, also through strong coordination and synergies and hence to sustainability.

The Government displayed national ownership by the adoption of laws and policies developed with UNDP support, the scaling up of (some, not all) promising UNDP pilot initiatives and allocating major funding for health and digitalization. However, many thematic areas needed further support, with funding from the development community. Effective resource mobilization was key for sustainability. Challenges in that regard were mostly related to the country's UMIC status (in the case of bilateral donors) and the Government's preferences for self-financing funding modalities, as manifested in the limited cooperation with IFIs.

It could be expected that in a UMIC like Turkmenistan, the Government would fund many of the SDG priorities. Having a robust national development financing framework was paramount. The INFF, once adopted, could help with sustainable SDG financing, but, as highlighted in Conclusions 5, further improvements in SDG monitoring, target-setting and reporting are needed.

Conclusion 5. UNDP demonstrated good adaptive capacity, most visibly in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also in responding to ongoing institutional challenges related to frequent institutional restructuring and personnel turnover, as well as to emerging priorities. Weaknesses in risk assessment as part of project development and M&E were also observed, especially in rigorously analysing pilot projects to ensure that lessons learned were incorporated into national policy frameworks and new initiatives.

UNDP adapted well to changes in the operating environment, including COVID-19 (with a separate Health Outcome in the CPD and strong contingency plans), emerging priorities (e.g., on youth), new national commitments (such as the Methane Pledge calling for enhanced work in renewable energy and energy efficiency), and procurement (with the new Quantum system requiring training for the partners). UNDP had adequate operating procedures in place, which ensured effective management of the CO and the projects, even at times of crises.

Overall, the UNDP country programme had the necessary technical capacity to achieve programme results and resources were strategically allocated. While there were robust systems of risk management, the quality of the risk assessments in the project documents could be better; in a few cases these were underestimated. Limited independent evaluations, particularly for government-funded projects, along with insufficient assessments of the pilots, weakened learning and accountability.

3.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1. UNDP should reinforce its role in SDG integration and financing, while placing greater emphasis on the sustainability aspects of supported initiatives. This can be achieved through: i) improved project designs; ii) the development of clearer strategies to identify, advocate for and support opportunities for the Government's scaling up of successful initiatives; iii) stronger partnerships and more joint programming, facilitating sector-wide approaches.

UNDP should continue to build on its strong standing as a long-term trusted partner of the Government. Following the good example of digitalization, UNDP should identify and develop themes that cut across sectors – good governance, including human rights and rule of law, would be strong candidates (see Recommendation 2). In these areas, support should encompass not only short-term responses to urgent needs, but transformational change as well.

Relevant to its SDG integrator role, UNDP should provide further support to improve statistics and SDG progress monitoring by enhancing support for more reliable, accessible and transparent data, along with assistance for effective implementation of the Integrated National Financing Framework Strategy (e.g., focusing on capacity building, enhanced coordination and commitments around the roadmap).

Joint programming with other UN agencies can and should be used more to strengthen UNDP's cross-sector SDG integrator role and promote sector-wide approaches aligned with national development priorities and geared towards maximizing contributions and resource efficiency.

UNDP should ensure that its strong partnership with the Government on shared priorities goes along with pursuing a more diversified funding base so that the strategic directions followed by UNDP in implementing the CPD are not overly determined by constraints related to the funding sources used.

While providing further support to actors such as NRCS and BDS, UNDP should seek to diversify its NGO partnerships beyond large, nationally institutionalized organizations to smaller, local NGOs, recognizing that they require capacity building along with small grants.

UNDP should employ a more consistent approach to ensuring sustainability, replication, and institutionalized upscaling of successful initiatives. UNDP should work on this more consistently from the design phase, including approaches such as training of trainers, embedded institutional capacity building modules, and realistic measures to guarantee the programmatic, human resource and financial sustainability of supported initiatives. UNDP should ensure that pilots feed into policy-related work through rigorous assessments.

While recognizing constraints related to donor funding, UNDP should continue its efforts to enhance resource mobilization and partnership strategies. Many of the needed reforms, including in the area of climate change mitigation and adaptation, require structured project finance and expertise that may be best found in partnership with International Financial Institutions (IFIs)/Multilateral Development Banks. Partnership with the private sector is also crucial to achieve such goals. UNDP can foster such partnerships, leveraging its own resources and expertise on the social and governance sides of development.

Recommendation 2. Good governance, human rights, and the rule of law should be more comprehensively integrated across all areas of UNDP support, including economic diversification, energy and environment, health and social services. GEWE and the LNOB principle should also be approached, inter alia, through the lens of good governance, human rights, and the rule of law. Achieving greater effectiveness in these interconnected areas will require UNDP to leverage broader engagement as a platform for more robust advocacy and influence. To strengthen its role, UNDP should capitalize on its comparative advantage as a trusted, neutral partner of the Government, its global credibility in all areas of good governance, and its status as a guardian of the UN human rights treaties and conventions.

UNDP should continue capacity building support in the area of human rights and the rule of law, e.g., to the Ombudsperson's Office. UNDP should also intensify its efforts to engage in joint advocacy on human rights issues in collaboration with the UNCT and other relevant national and international stakeholders. UNDP, together with other stakeholders, should continue fostering action-focused consultations with diverse groups to ensure the effective implementation of the National Human Rights Action Plan. This should include the promotion of a broader range of critical issues and the incorporation of UN Treaty Body recommendations on human rights matters.

UNDP should continue promoting and advancing the Government's digitalization efforts and the adoption of a good governance lens in this area of work, to address the evolving needs of the population and target groups, especially in rural areas. This could involve supporting the development of new or expansion of existing e-governance solutions to foster transparency, accountability and citizen participation, as well as digital legal aid platforms and mobile applications for greater accessibility and coverage of services.

Recommendation 3. UNDP should continue supporting the Government in the area of climate change adaptation and sustainable energy and environment, with an emphasis on the development of an integrated portfolio and strengthening the links between Energy and Environment and other sectors while further integrating opportunities related to digitalization.

UNDP support should further the implementation of the enhanced NDC with a focus on green energy transitions. This includes fostering the use of renewable energy and improving energy efficiency, providing institutional and policy guidance to support these efforts. UNDP should also continue advocating for and supporting the NAP formulation and implementation, including the development of sectoral NAPs in critical areas such as agriculture (including sustainable pasture management), water, health and infrastructure. UNDP should strengthen its support to the use of Nature-Based Solutions. It should also advocate for the adoption and implementation of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, paying attention to

ensuring that its approval is accompanied by adequate national financial allocations and the establishment of sustainable financing mechanisms, in line with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. This must be accompanied by substantial capacity building support and may include the development of national biodiversity finance plans.

To reduce the environmental impacts from inadequate waste management practices, UNDP should support policies for sustainable waste management, including for solid, electronic, and medical waste, as well as promote resource efficiency by helping the Government adopt circular economy principles.

If funding is available, UNDP should assist in establishing a modern, impact-based MHEWS, building on existing support to hydrometeorological services and seismic resilience. This should include early warning systems for climate-induced hazards, with linkages to the upcoming regional Urban Resilience project.

Potential areas of cross-thematic priorities between Energy and Environment and other sectors should be mapped out. Opportunities for cross sectoral work include:

- Climate and Governance: Focus on improving the transparency and accessibility of government programmes, particularly regarding environmental data. Adopt a comprehensive approach by integrating environmental justice principles, prioritizing the inclusion of vulnerable groups, promoting sustainable mediation, and raising awareness of environmental rights and justice. This would contribute to equitable distribution of environmental resources and strengthen governance frameworks.
- Ecosystems, Biodiversity, Climate, and Green Growth (Nature Pledge): Support to the Government in mainstreaming biodiversity and ecosystem services into policies and plans, advocating for the full recognition that ecosystem restoration and agroforestry contribute both to biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation/adaptation.
- Climate risks and Health: Integrate climate change considerations into health planning to mitigate risks such as food and water insecurity, heat-related health issues, and water- and vector-borne diseases. Potentially with WHO support, strengthen health sector resilience through the development of a Disaster Risk Management perspective covering health infrastructure, service delivery, and supply chain issues in health-sector planning.

Recommendation 4. In health, if government funding becomes available, UNDP should advocate for sustained efforts across all levels, with a focus on advancing universal health coverage, promoting the digitalization of health services, and strengthening capacity building to enhance the resilience and effectiveness of the health sector. Building on recent progress against NCDs, UNDP should also further support the strengthening of primary health care facilities with improved diagnostics and treatments, and continue fostering community engagement and the fight against stigma.

Building on the registered successes, UNDP should maintain efforts to prevent and control infectious diseases such as TB, HIV, and viral hepatitis and advocate for sustained government funding for these programmes, as they remain critical health issues in the country. Government support is particularly essential during the transition from the Global Fund, which is planned to exit the country under the next CPD, and UNDP should continue collaborating closely with the Global Fund to implement the Transition Action Plan.

Building on the achievements of the World Bank COVID-19 response project, UNDP should further strengthen pandemic preparedness and expand efforts to prepare for future health threats, linking these efforts to Turkmenistan's National Intersectoral Coordination Committee for a 'One Health' approach that addresses human, animal, and ecosystem health in integrated fashion. Ideally, this support should also align with the global priority of combating antimicrobial resistance.

UNDP should support further: i) digitalization of health services such as telemedicine, Artificial Intelligence based diagnostics; and ii) the better management of health infrastructure and supply chain to improve healthcare efficiency and accessibility, particularly in remote areas.

UNDP should continue supporting community engagement in healthcare by offering adherence support for patients with chronic diseases and promoting health awareness. UNDP also should strengthen its support for community sensitization to promote the reduction of stigma around infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, fostering more inclusive and effective health interventions.

In collaboration with WHO and other international partners such as IFIs, MDBs, and bilateral donors, UNDP should focus on health governance, financing mechanisms, innovative solutions and workforce capacity to ensure better health services. UNDP should encourage multisectoral approaches to address social determinants of health, including education, gender equality, and socio-economic factors. Awareness programmes could help reduce stigma around certain health conditions and promote a more inclusive attitude toward health services.

Recommendation 5. UNDP should continue to assist the Government in formulating and implementing policies and initiatives to promote digitalization and the expansion of e-services for citizens and businesses, ensuring that efforts focus on narrowing the digital divide, boosting SME competitiveness, and expanding the scope of digital banking services, while also supporting the strengthening of trade strategies and policies.

UNDP should continue to use digitalization as an enabler across all areas of intervention, fostering transparency, accountability and citizen participation, ensuring that digital transformation supports broader economic progress. Among the priority areas, UNDP should consider:

- Supporting the development of a National Digital Strategy aligned with the SDGs, emphasising governance, data privacy, and digital rights. This strategy should focus, inter alia, on narrowing the digital divide to expand digitalization in a sustainable manner, with connectivity and access points in remote rural areas and targeted digital literacy training for the elderly and PwD, thereby more comprehensively integrating the LNOB principle.
- Awareness raising and advocacy around openness of the online environment for business development, knowledge sharing and overall economic growth.
- Development of robust privacy and data protection frameworks within national legislation, ensuring safer online transactions, fostering consumer trust, to boost confidence in the digital marketplace. Improved laws on online sales and purchases could be supported, addressing issues such as data protection, transaction security, and legal rights.

UNDP should support expanding the scope of digital banking services, continue supporting enhanced SME competitiveness, along with assistance in strengthening trade strategies and policies, including potentially further support for WTO accession, in cooperation with UNCTAD and ITC. UNDP support should also continue covering SMEs' access to financial services, including insurance.

Recommendation 6. UNDP should continue collaborating with other UN agencies to advocate for the full implementation of Community Social Services reforms, including dedicated support to capacity building to enhance the resilience and effectiveness of social protection. It should also explore, jointly with UNICEF, opportunities to support the Government in implementing targeted social assistance and support youth NEET. UNDP should deepen efforts to promote GEWE by supporting its mainstreaming into policies and ensuring that successful local initiatives are institutionalized and societal barriers to GEWE are addressed. The LNOB principle should form the basis for all activities related to the implementation of the recommendations in particular and the SDGs in general, through the development of a clear strategy with a thematic mapping and supporting the mainstreaming of LNOB across policies and legislation in all areas of UNDP's work.

Community Social Services: Specific opportunities to further support in this area include:

- In collaboration with other UN agencies, UNDP should advocate with the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan for the full rollout of community social services reforms. This includes ensuring social workers are placed in all districts and that the process of developing and adopting an expanded list of vulnerable populations is completed. UNDP also should support capacity building to enhance the resilience and effectiveness of social protection and, together with UNICEF, explore the possibility of assisting the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare in the development of a targeted social assistance system, starting with the implementation of a pilot programme followed by a comprehensive evaluation.
- UNDP should engage in further collaboration and partnerships with UN agencies and the private sector to support youth NEET through sustainable employability models, such as vocational education and internship programmes, to reduce vulnerabilities and marginalization.
- UNDP should continue strengthening NGO capacities to assist PwD and other vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, through social contracting and capacity-building initiatives.

Gender: UNDP should further promote the mainstreaming of GEWE into policies and advocate for incorporating small grants for women entrepreneurs, successfully used in several UNDP projects, into the intergovernmental state financing system. UNDP also should continue addressing societal barriers to GEWE to drive meaningful change through assessments, evidence generation, awareness raising and advocacy. Together with UNFPA, UNDP should build on the Government's willingness to tackle the problem of GBV, with, for instance, proposals for community awareness raising, justice system capacity building, shelters and livelihoods for women in crisis, etc.

LNOB: In addition to developing a clear strategy (which would complement its Gender Equality Strategy) and conducting thematic mapping, UNDP should support the mainstreaming of LNOB across policies and legislation in all areas of UNDP's work. It should expand support for PwD beyond the hearing- and vision - impaired. UNDP should explore cooperation with UNICEF in the context of reforms to implement targeted social assistance. Also prominent in the LNOB strategy should be anti-discrimination policies developed in the context of UNDP support to good governance, human rights, and rule of law.

3.3 Key Recommendations and management response

RECOMMENDATION 1.

UNDP should reinforce its role in SDG integration and financing, while placing greater emphasis on the sustainability aspects of supported initiatives. This can be achieved through: i) improved project designs; ii) the development of clearer strategies to identify, advocate for and support opportunities for the Government's scaling up of successful initiatives; iii) stronger partnerships and more joint programming, facilitating sector-wide approaches.

Management response: Accepted.

UNDP will remain at the forefront of SDG integration, fostering the collaboration among civil society, the private sector, and development partners to strengthen their engagement in the SDG implementation process. The three enablers, digitalization, innovation and SDG financing, will underpin all areas of the CPD. Implementation of the CPD will be aligned to the UNSDCF and to the work of the National Working Group for the Sustainable Development Goals Implementation, chaired by the Minister of Finance and Economy of Turkmenistan, to ensure UNDP's effective and coherent contribution. UNDP will also build on its work of promoting an Integrated National Financing Framework to direct development financing toward national development priorities, strengthened through continued government co-financing.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
1.1 New CPD to reflect on UNDP's integrator role, contributing to all three priority areas and four outcomes of the UNSDCF; to recognize continued support to the work of the National Working Group for the SDGs Implementation and to national statistics to improve SDG monitoring; and to reflect on the joint programming and partnerships to promote sector-wide approaches.	Sep 2025	RR, DRR		Initiated
1.2 Enhance resource mobilization and partnership strategies with the Government, IFI's and other development partners.	Continuous	RR, DRR, Programme Team		Initiated, no due date

RECOMMENDATION 2.

Good governance, human rights, and the rule of law should be more comprehensively integrated across all areas of UNDP support, including economic diversification, energy and environment, health and social services. GEWE and the LNOB principle should also be approached, inter alia, through the lens of good governance, human rights, and the rule of law. Achieving greater effectiveness in these interconnected areas will require UNDP to leverage broader engagement as a platform for more robust advocacy and influence. UNDP should capitalize on its comparative advantage as a trusted, neutral partner of the Government, its global credibility in all areas of good governance, and its status as a guardian of the UN human rights treaties and conventions to strengthen its role.

Management response: Accepted.

Together with other UN agencies, UNDP will work to increase the effectiveness of and access to the Ombudsperson's Office, to increase transparency in its work, strengthen its capacity to identify human rights issues, improve engagement with civil society and media, and build capacities to address women's rights and promote business and human rights. UNDP will also provide support to the national Interministerial Commission on Human Rights to implement the National Human Rights Action Plan as well as Universal Periodic Review and UN Treaty Body recommendations.

UNDP will continue with its comprehensive support to the country's digital transformation policy, including building the foundations of a digital public infrastructure and Electronic Data Interchange system.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
2.1 Initiate the continuation of the project to deliver technical support for strengthening the institutional capacity of Ombudsperson's office	Dec 2026	Good Governance and Economic Growth Programme Team		Initiated
2.2 Promote the implementation of the NHRAP and assist the Government in preparing for upcoming UPR cycles and other national reports on the implementation of human rights conventions	Dec 2030	Good Governance and Economic Growth Programme Team		Initiated
2.3 Support the development of the National Digital Economy Programme	Dec 2025	Good Governance and Economic Growth Programme Team		Initiated

RECOMMENDATION 3.

UNDP should continue supporting the Government in the areas of climate change adaptation and sustainable energy and environment, with an emphasis on the development of an integrated portfolio and strengthening the links between Energy and Environment and other sectors while further integrating opportunities related to digitalization.

Management response: Accepted.

CO will maintain a technical leadership role at the UNCT level for the development of the Nationally Determined Contribution 3.0 (NDC) and will support the Government to fulfil other national reporting obligations under the UNFCCC framework, including the Fourth National Communication and the first Biennial Transparency Report (BTR). The CO will collaborate with the Ministry of Environmental Protection to strengthen national adaptation efforts (NAP) by designing initiatives that enhance adaptive capacity at both national and sectoral levels. The CO will sustain its successful collaboration with the Government to strengthen key strategic frameworks such as the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) and will advocate for the integration of biodiversity conservation efforts into the forthcoming NDC. The CO also will continue partnering with the Government, other national and international stakeholders to identify opportunities for cross-thematic and cross-sectoral interventions. This includes the development of targeted initiatives to strengthen disaster risk reduction (DRR) preparedness—such as improving early warning systems—and to advance sustainable, resource-efficient development through the promotion of economic circularity principles.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
3.1 Formulate the next NDC 3.0 in collaboration with relevant UN agencies and national ministries.	Dec 2025	Environment Programme Team		Initiated
3.2 Initiate the development of the next stage of the NAP process with sectoral NAPs.	Oct 2026	Environment Programme Team		Initiated
3.3 Collaborate with the Government to develop a project aimed at strengthening seismic risk preparedness across seismic prone areas, promoting the establishment of an inclusive early warning system, and enhancing urban resilience.	Dec 2026	Environment Programme Team		Initiated

RECOMMENDATION 4.

In health, if government funding becomes available, UNDP should advocate for sustained efforts across all levels, with a focus on advancing universal health coverage, promoting the digitalization of health services, and strengthening capacity building to enhance the resilience and effectiveness of the health sector. Building on recent progress against NCDs, UNDP should also further support the strengthening of primary health care facilities with improved diagnostics and treatments, and continue fostering community engagement and the fight against stigma.

Management response: Accepted.

UNDP will build on its partnership with the Government and other United Nations agencies to improve and expand access to health services to ensure the universal health care system can reach all population groups. UNDP plans support to the healthcare system in the next programme cycle 2026-2030 by contributing to UNSDCF's health outcome. This will ensure a structured, systemic approach to sustainable and tangible impacts aligned with the national priorities. It includes infectious, non-infectious diseases, pandemic preparedness, UHC, climate, and digitalization among the priorities. UNDP will continue to support the healthcare system to address TB and other infectious diseases in 2025-2027 and to advocate for further government support to ensure sustainability and transition from the Global Fund funding by 2027. Digital and other innovative technologies will be integrated to upgrade lab technology, artificial intelligence-assisted technologies, medical waste management, patient registries, and e-learning while maintaining data security and privacy.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
4.1 Within the new TB grant UNDP will support the National TB Programme with development and implementation of Transition and Sustainability Plan for phase out from the Global Fund support in 2024-2027.	31 Dec 2025	Health Portfolio		Initiated
4.2 Initiate the project on prevention and control of infectious diseases for 2026-2027 with the Government funding. This project will include an antimicrobial resistance component.	31 Dec 2025	Health Portfolio		Initiated

4.3 UNDP will continue introducing and scale up the digital solutions for health, such as video-supported treatment, AI for TB screening, and a mobile app for national TB protocols. UNDP will introduce small-scale digital solutions for NCDs: mobile app for medicines, mobile app for NCD protocols.	31 Dec 2025	Health Portfolio		Initiated
4.4 UNDP will enhance health awareness through educational initiatives, collaborating with communities, civil organizations and academic institutions to strengthen public health literacy, promote a health-conscious society, and diminish societal barriers, stigma and discrimination.	Continuous	Health Portfolio		Initiated
4.5 UNDP, along with other UN agencies, will advocate for increased government spending on health, through introducing the CF and CPD Outcome indicator: Budget spending on education, health and social protection programmes as % of GDP, with specific expenditures on health.	31 Dec 2025	Health Portfolio		Initiated

RECOMMENDATION 5.

UNDP should continue to assist the Government in formulating and implementing policies and initiatives to promote digitalization and the expansion of e-services for citizens and businesses, ensuring that efforts focus on narrowing the digital divide and boosting SME competitiveness, expanding the scope of digital banking services, while also supporting the strengthening of trade strategies and policies.

◀ Recommendation 5 (cont'd)

Management response: Accepted.

UNDP's support to national digital transformation efforts will underpin all areas of the CPD, in designing digital services and solutions across different sectors. UNDP will also help to strengthen the digital data governance framework to ensure data collection and management across sectors, to improve the statistical information systems to collect reliable disaggregated data while strengthening the capacities of government partners for evidence-based policymaking. UNDP will also contribute to sectoral restructuring and private sector competitiveness by promoting the concepts for the development of a digital, innovative and creative economy.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
5.1 Initiate the next phase of the Project on Electronic Data Interchange system	Dec 2025	Good Governance and Economic Growth Programme Team		Initiated
5.2 As part of the next phase of the Electronic Data Interchange system, provide legislative support to the Government for strengthening digital data framework	Dec 2027	Good Governance and Economic Growth Programme Team		Initiated
5.3 Initiate the project on further support to WTO accession		Good Governance and Economic Growth Programme Team		Initiated
5.4 Initiate the JP 'Accelerating Improved Digital Governance to Deliver People-Centric Digital Services and Population Policies'	Dec 2026	Good Governance and Economic Growth Programme Team		Initiated
5.5 Initiate support to IT Park establishment to enhance competitiveness	Dec 2025	Good Governance and Economic Growth Programme Team		Initiated

RECOMMENDATION 6.

UNDP should continue collaborating with other UN agencies to advocate for the full implementation of Community Social Services reforms, including support to capacity building to enhance the resilience and effectiveness of social protection. It should also explore, jointly with UNICEF, opportunities to support the Government in implementing targeted social assistance and support youth NEET. UNDP should deepen efforts to promote GEWE by supporting its mainstreaming into policies and ensuring that successful local initiatives are institutionalized and societal barriers to GEWE are addressed. The LNOB principle should form the basis for all activities related to the implementation of the recommendations in particular and the SDGs in general, through the development of a clear strategy with a thematic mapping and supporting the mainstreaming of LNOB across policies and legislation in all areas of UNDP's work.

◀ Recommendation 6 (cont'd)

Management response: Accepted.

UNDP will address LNOB and GEWE across all areas of work, and through the joint programming with other UN agencies. UNDP, together with other UN agencies, will strengthen the capacities of national/local entities to effectively implement social assistance programmes and community-based services for women, youth and families. To enhance decent employment opportunities for women, youth and vulnerable groups, UNDP, with other UN agencies, will collaborate in strengthening the capacity of public institutions to design and implement innovative active labour market measures.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
6.1 Initiate with other involved Country Offices the Multi Country Program on Economic Empowerment of Women	Dec 2026	Good Governance and Economic Growth Programme Team in collaboration with other agencies		Initiated
6.2 Initiate with other UN agencies the JP 'Youth Peace and Security' to enhance youth knowledge and skills; inclusive and responsive social protection, health, education and employment services	Dec 2026	Good Governance and Economic Growth Programme Team		Initiated
6.3 Advocate for GEWE as part of the new project on Empowering Women in STEM	Dec 2026	Good Governance and Economic Growth Programme Team		Initiated
6.4 Building on the LNOB analysis done in collaboration with UNCT, UNDP will mainstream the LNOB approach into all areas of work, and through appraisals of the projects	Dec 2026	RR, DRR, Programme Team		Initiated

* Status of implementation is tracked electronically in the Evaluation Resource Centre database (ERC).

ANNEXES

Annexes to the report (listed below) are available on the Evaluation Resource Centre website of the Independent Evaluation Office at: https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/24590.

Annex 1. Terms of reference

Annex 2. Project list

Annex 3. Documents consulted

Annex 4. In-country data collection site visits

Annex 5. Status of country programme outcome and output indicators

Independent Evaluation Office
United Nations Development Programme

Independent Evaluation Office
United Nations Development Programme
One UN Plaza, DC1-20th Floor
New York, NY 10017, USA
Tel. +1 (646) 781 4200

/www.undp.org/evaluation
/UNDP_Evaluation
/evaluationoffice
/company/undp-ieo

Evaluations for a #strongerUNDP