



EVALUATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION EXTERNAL ACTION

FINAL REPORT

**EVALUATION OF THE EU COOPERATION WITH THE
UNITED NATIONS IN EXTERNAL ACTION**

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Prepared by:



Consortium composed by

ADE, PEMconsult and IRAM

Consortium Leader: ADE s.a.

Rue de Clairvaux 40, Box 101

1348 Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgium)

+32 10 45 45 10

ade@ade.be

www.ade.eu

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Contact information:

European Commission
Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations – DG NEAR
Unit A.4 - Coordination of financing instruments - performance, results, and evaluation
Email: near-eval-monitoring@ec.europa.eu
B-1049 Brussels, Belgium
European Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations

https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/monitoring-and-evaluation_en

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

€	Euro
€ B	Billion Euro
€ M	Million Euro
ARTF	Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF)
ASG	Assistant Secretary General
AU	African Union
CBRN	Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
COM	Communication from the Commission
Commission	European Commission
COPs	Conferences of the Parties
CRIS	Common RELEX Information System
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	Development cooperation Committee of the OECD
DCI	Development Cooperation Instrument
DG	Directorate General of the European Commission
DG CLIMA	Directorate General Climate Action
DG DEV	Directorate General for Development (now DG INTPA)
DG DEVCO	Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development (now DG INTPA)
DG ECFIN	Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
DG ENV	Directorate-General for Environment
DG INTPA	Directorate-General for International Partnerships (formerly DG DEVCO)
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
DIE	German Development Institute
DIIS	Danish Institute for International Studies
DPPA	UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
EDF	European Defence Fund
EEAS	European External Action Service
EIDHR	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
EQ	Evaluation Question
EU	European Union
EUD	European Union Delegation
FAFA	Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FERDI	Foundation for studies and Research on International Development
FGD	Focus Group Discussion

FPI	Service for Foreign Policy Instruments
FRiT	Facility for Refugees in Türkiye
GCF	Global Climate Fund
GHG	Greenhouse gasses
HoC	Head of Cooperation (in EU Delegation)
HoD	Head of Delegation
HQ	Headquarters
HR	Human Rights
HRC	Human Rights Council
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IcSP	Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFRI	French Institute of International Relations
IL	Intervention Logic
ILO	International Labour Organization
INFF	Integrated National Financing Framework
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
ISSG	Interservice Steering Group
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
JC	Judgement Criteria
LAC	Latin America and Caribbean
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer
MDTF	Multi-Donor Trust Fund
MEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreement
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MS	Member States (of the European Union)
NDCs	Nationally determined contributions
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODA	Official Development Aid
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PAGoDA	Pillar Assessed Grant or Delegation Agreement
PBSO	UN Peacebuilding Support Office
PSC	Peace and Security Committee
PSG	Peace Stability and Governance
RG	Reference Group

ROM	Results Oriented Monitoring
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
TA	Technical assistance
TEU	Treaty on European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UN WOMEN	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNCBD	UN Convention of Biological Diversity
UNCCD	UN Convention to Combat Desertification
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDS	United Nations Development System
UNEA	UN Environment Assembly
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UN-HABITAT	United Nations Human Settlement Programme
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNOCT	United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNOG	United Nations Office in Geneva
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Service
UNRC	United Nations Resident Coordinator
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UNSG	UN Secretary General
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

This is the final report of the evaluation of the “European Union (EU¹) cooperation with the United Nations (UN) in external action.” It was commissioned by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) jointly with the Commission’s Directorate-General for International Partnership (DG INTPA).

The general objective of this evaluation is “to provide an overall independent assessment of the EU-UN cooperation in external action”², over the period 2014-2020, and in all geographic areas. The evaluation has a stock-taking, lessons learning, and forward-looking dimension. It is pitched at a strategic level and focuses on the EU-UN cooperation as an instrument for the EU to achieve its objectives in international cooperation.

BACKGROUND

The official cooperation and mutual recognition between the EU and the UN family dates back long before the period under study in this evaluation. The collaboration was greatly intensified during the 2014-2020 Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF).

The EU-UN cooperation takes place within an overall evolving policy framework laid out in key EU documents. Multilateralism with the UN at its core is defined as a cornerstone of the EU’s external policy. EU interests are defined as “a multilateral system that is rules-and rights based protects the global commons, promotes shared public goods, and delivers benefits for citizens in Europe and across the globe.” Cooperation through effective multilateralism is seen as the best way to advance national as well as collective interests.

In the context of external action, the EU and EU MS further committed in the Council Conclusions 2019 to continue exercising leadership and working with partners on inter alia the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on climate change and continue to promote human rights and support democracy and the rule of law. More recently, the Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council on strengthening the EU’s contribution to rules-based multilateralism (JOIN (2021)) that is based on the 2019 Council Conclusions set out the EU line of thinking about rules-based multilateralism.

EU-UN cooperation in external action involves multiple actors on both sides. On the UN side, there is the UN Secretariat, UN Agencies, Funds, Programmes, and other entities – all with their own mandates, roles, and governing bodies. On the EU side, cooperation with the UN is coordinated by the EEAS and the European Commission, the latter represented by several DGs, each responsible for its own policy area. Most cooperation takes place in direct engagement with UN entities at country level through the EU Delegations.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This theory-based evaluation was conducted in three main phases:

¹ Throughout the report, the term ‘EU’ (European Union) is used to refer to the European Commission (notably DG INTPA and DG NEAR) and the diplomatic service of the EU - the European External Assistance Service (EEAS), including the EU Delegations (EUDs). When the intention is to refer only to a specific EU institution such as the Commission, the name of the institution is used. The term ‘EU funding’ in this report refers to EU financial resources managed by the European Commission. The use of the term ‘EU’ does not cover the actions of individual EU Member States (MS); when EU MS are concerned an explicit reference is made.

² This evaluation does not cover EU-UN cooperation channelled via Commission services other than DG NEAR, DG INTPA, and the FPI.

- The inception phase fine-tuned the approach for the entire evaluation. This consisted among other things in making an inventory and typology of the EU funding provided through the UN; reconstructing the intervention logic of the EU-UN cooperation; refining the evaluation questions proposed in the Terms of Reference; identifying the judgment criteria and sources to be used to address them; and conducting preliminary interviews.
- During the data collection and analysis phase the team consulted more than 375 persons through interviews (including 164 EU and 139 UN staff); surveyed 251 persons at Headquarter and field level; conducted workshops and focus groups discussions (notably a workshop with 22 EU Member States conducted in the EU Delegation in New York); reviewed more than 700 documents; conducted 16 case studies and four comparative analyses; made a quantitative analysis of more than 2,500 Result Oriented Monitoring (ROM) reports (of which 236 on UN-implemented projects); made a qualitative analysis of 20 ROM reports; examined MOPAN assessments of 27 UN entities; and conducted a big data analysis on public attention and perception.
- The final phase was dedicated to triangulating the information collected through different means and from different sources. On that basis the team answered the evaluation questions and formulated conclusions and recommendations, which were also discussed in a specific workshop gathering EU and UN representatives.

The evaluation was monitored by an Interservice Group (ISSG) consisting of members of EU services (gathering representatives of several Commission DGs; of the European External Actions Services, and of the EU Delegation in New York). A Reference Group (RG) composed of the ISSG members and representatives of the UN entities had a consultative and advisory role. Intermediary deliverables were provided at key stages of the evaluation process (inception, interim and draft final report) and discussed with the reference group.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation presents a set of 11 conclusions based on the findings and grouped in four clusters.

On the strategy for EU-UN cooperation

1. The EU and the UN built a partnership of strategic importance, aligned around evolving common policy priorities, which allowed the two organisations to address global issues through multilateral action and to intervene jointly in a wide range of thematic and geographical areas. Over the years, EU-UN cooperation became more structured. It went beyond bilateral exchange between two single entities, and involved collaboration on common policy approaches (e.g., the 2030 Agenda), supporting the UN as the cornerstone of the multilateral system, and advancing strategic priorities and interests multilaterally. EU-UN cooperation became more comprehensive over time, with increasing EU financial contributions to the UN. Specifically for development aid, the EU channelled EUR 12.5 billion to the UN. This funding covered 135 countries, key EU thematic sectors and 43 UN entities. The EU's annual contribution doubled between 2014 and 2020 from EUR 1.2 to 2.5 billion a year.

2. While the EU and the UN established an increasingly strong policy-based engagement at HQ level, this was generally not well translated in the cooperation on the ground, which was mostly driven by a pragmatic rather than a strategic approach. At the global level, the EU and the UN increasingly strengthened the strategic nature of their partnership, as for instance reaffirmed in their 2018 Joint Communique on "A renewed partnership in development". At the country/regional level, cooperation between the EU and the UN often remained however rather grounded in a pragmatic approach than part of a systematic effort to build a longer-term EU-UN partnership in the country/region. The EU generally selected UN entities as implementing partners on a project-by-project basis, given their context-specific added value or the lack of viable alternatives. Overall, there was a lack of direct strategic dialogue and limited information exchange at the country level between the two institutions,

even if cooperation became more strategic in recent years, through the launch of joint initiatives and the potential offered by the introduction of the UN Resident Coordinator system.

3. Although in most cases the EU and its EU MS were largely cohesive in UN central organs, they did not fully capitalise on their joint financial and political leverage, despite being jointly the biggest financial contributor to the UN. Over the 2014-2020 period, the EU was the fourth largest funder of the UN system. It contributed a total of EUR 21.4 billion. When combined with EU MS, the EU accounted for 42% of the total UN funding and was the biggest source of funding to the UN. The EU and EU MS were largely cohesive in UN central organs. In the UN General Assembly, the EU and EU MS cohesion was high as compared to other regional organisations. In a few cases, incoherences with EU MS persisted, mostly in the areas of migration, gender equality, LGBTIQ, and sexual and reproductive health and rights, with negative implications for EU influence. In the governing bodies of UN entities, coordination between the EU and its EU MS was generally limited to information exchange, and EU Member States as donors were keen to highlight their individual contributions and promote their own positions. At the country level, strategic coordination vis-à-vis the UN was limited despite frequent information exchanges between the EU and its EU MS. The EU was not able to fully leverage the potential for influence of its funding, notably because of limited availability of information on what the EU was implementing on the ground, in each country and sector.

4. While at the global level, EU-UN cooperation favoured EU visibility, at country level there was a lack of EU visibility in UN interventions it funded and compliance with EU visibility requirements and guidelines was not systematic. At the global level, the EU was able to increasingly project its values and priorities and get recognition for its inputs to the global development agenda, by being increasingly present in UN bodies, by “speaking as one” with EU Member States, and by reaching out to a broader base of UN MS. The EU had well-articulated guidelines defining requirements to ensure visibility for its funded actions, but UN compliance with these requirements at country level was not systematic, although UN agencies made efforts and although there were notable improvements towards the end of the evaluation period. This concerned both issues related to static visibility that remained problematic in several cases, and the more dynamic or “political” visibility.

On the results achieved and their sustainability

5. Through its engagement with the UN, the EU promoted its values and priorities at the level of the UN system and contributed to shaping the global development agenda. EU influence at the level of UN resolutions was considerable, although the full potential for influence was not used; EU influence at the country level was more limited. In the negotiations of UN resolutions, the EU provided key policy inputs and played an important role in coordinating with EU MS to define common positions and build bridges with other actors. The EU played a key role in the development of the 2030 Agenda. Still, the EU and EU MS did not maximise their full potential for influence at the global/policy level. At country level, the EU exercised influence through the implementation of projects supporting its global agenda and by engaging in dialogue with the UN in the context of donor coordination fora. But for several EU-funded projects the UN did not involve the EU in its dialogue with the national authorities. Also, the lack of strategic bilateral dialogue between the EU and the UN also constrained influence.

6. The EU strengthened the provision of multilateral solutions to address global challenges through its cooperation with the UN. However, building alliances beyond EU Member States was in some cases difficult. The EU offered multilateral solutions to global challenges by contributing to UN resolutions, and by participating in policy dialogue and in international fora; by channelling significant amounts of funding, enabling the EU to intervene in a wide range of areas through a multilateral stance; by jointly supporting with the UN the respect of international norms and agreements; by extending multilateralism to new global realities (e.g. conflict minerals or the circular economy); and by contributing to the UN reforms. The EU also built bridges and formed alliances, but this also posed challenges, whereby the North-South divide within the UN, with the G77 (and China) on one side and traditional donor countries on the other, was a source of tension.

7. The EU contributed to strengthening partner countries' capacities and to improving regulatory frameworks in line with international standards in five Commission's thematic policy areas. From 2014 to 2020, EU financial contributions to the UN covered five key thematic areas defined by the von der Leyen Commission in 2019: economic, social, and human development (41%); peace, security, and governance (28%); migration (21%); the green deal (8%); and transition to a new digital era (2%). Through its collaboration with the UN in each of these areas, the EU contributed to strengthen partner countries' institutional knowledge and capacity for policy development and implementation, and to improved regulatory frameworks in line with international standards. Results in terms of improved service delivery remained modest. Examples of key effects are improved environmental management; setting global agendas and priorities related to digital regulation; strengthening partner capacities for policy formulation and planning in health, education, and social protection or the strengthening of international electoral assistance.

8. There was limited availability of analytical information generated on the EU-UN cooperation at the level of specific sectors, themes, countries, regions, and UN entities. This was a constraint in terms of knowledge on EU-UN cooperation, capacity to leverage on the EU contribution, and development of more strategic approaches at these levels. The EU has different means to generate information about EU-UN cooperation at two ends of the spectrum: at a general level (comprehensive databases on where the funds go) and at the intervention level (reporting by the EU and the EU Results Oriented Monitoring (ROM)). In addition, a periodically conducted strategic evaluation, like the current one, provide a 'bird's eye view' on some of the strategic cooperation issues. But it was very difficult for the EU to obtain comprehensive analytical information on the EU-UN cooperation between those levels, i.e., at agency, sector, country, theme, or priority level, notably despite exceptions such as the EEAS fiches, and the information about UN cooperation by country included sometimes in EAMRs.

On cooperation modalities / implementation

9. The general legal, financial, and administrative framework overall served its purpose of providing a global and harmonised basis for the cooperation between EU and UN entities. It facilitated the collaboration when applied well, while providing mechanisms for ensuring accountability on the use of EU funds. However, there were difficulties and challenges in the application of this framework. EU and UN attempted to find solutions, but key difficulties remained. These created tensions, inefficient use of resources, and delays. The overall framework put in place by the EU for its cooperation with the UN broadly met the challenge of harmonising implementation arrangements and mechanisms for the cooperation between two such large and complex families as the EU and UN. It facilitated the management of EU-funded interventions by UN entities, while offering safeguards to the EU for ensuring it could meet its own obligations on management of EU funds. Nevertheless, concerns and contention remained about the application of the framework, and in relation to the framework itself. The EU reported for instance that it was not receiving the necessary documents it was requesting from UN, or with serious delays. This put the EU in a difficult position vis-à-vis compliance with its own obligations. Other difficulties relate for instance to UN entities facing issues with the EU's pillar assessments, or to determining the level of UN overhead costs that can be charged to the EU. The EU and UN attempted to find solutions, but difficulties remained, and created tensions, inefficient use of resources, and delays. Both sides explained that their expectations and constraints were not well understood

10. The EU backing of the round of UNDS reform efforts launched in January 2019 and still largely underway, contributed to facilitating effective collaboration in several cases. Reform of the UNDS aimed at a more cohesive, outcome-focused, and efficient UN development system. The EU provided significant political, financial, advocacy, and operative support to this reform. As part of this reform, the transition to a reinvigorated Resident Coordinator (RC) system made progress during the period under review, with 131 RCs taking office, which led in some countries to improved coordination between EU and UN entities.

On UN added value

11. Through its cooperation with the UN, the EU benefited from specific assets of the UN family. These related notably to the promotion of shared norms and values of like-minded partners; the credibility and legitimacy of the UN mandate (generally seen by partner governments as an impartial partner and broker), notably but not only in conflict-affected settings; the UN's convening power; the UN presence on the ground (with sometimes no alternative to the UN), and its established relations with national and local counterparts, allowing in some cases the EU to benefit from access; and its technical capacity, with various specialised agencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation presents a set of seven recommendations based on the conclusions reached and grouped in four clusters. They are all addressed to the Commission.

On the overall strategy of EU-UN cooperation

1. The EU should continue developing its cooperation with the UN to provide a multilateral answer to global challenges. The EU has reinforced its cooperation with the UN since the early 2000s and has further intensified the strategic nature of its partnership and massively increased its funding to the UN in the period 2014-2020. This evaluation confirms several benefits of the EU-UN cooperation (the promotion of a multilateral stance; of EU values and priorities; the ability to jointly address global challenges in key areas; and the possibility to benefit from specific advantages of the UN system). It also highlights challenges (insufficient strategic approach at country level; issues with reporting; low EU visibility), acknowledging also that some are inherent to a cooperation of such complexity and magnitude between two major international organisations. The evaluation considers that the benefits outweigh the challenges and recommends to continuing the road taken by the EU in terms of cooperation with the UN.

2. Pursue the efforts to strengthen the strategic focus of the EU partnership with the UN, especially at country level, and build on the ongoing UNDS reform. The EU has made significant efforts to strengthen dialogue with the UN, but there is room for improvement at country level. The latter should be further strengthened. It is recommended that the EU undertakes (or pursues) several actions at HQ and country level: (i) continue organising annual EU-UN high level dialogues; (ii) follow the agency by agency approach in regular policy dialogue with individual UN entities; (iii) consider the possibility of strengthening Joint Initiatives with the UN and contributions to UN pooled, thematic and joint funds on key priority issues; (iv) strengthen the structural engagement with the UN at country level, building on the Resident Coordinator system and UN country teams; (v) strengthen information exchange and establish channels for regular dialogue with individual UN entities at the country level under the coordination and leadership of the UNRC ; and (vi) examine the strategic positioning of the UN in the context of Team Europe Initiatives and the Global Gateway in each country.

On EU visibility and influence

3. The EU should ensure full compliance with its visibility requirement and devote further efforts to improve its strategic communication and visibility at the country level. The UN did not systematically comply with EU visibility requirements and guidelines, despite improvements towards the end of the evaluation period. Taking action to ensure EU visibility is commensurate with EU policy and financial contributions is key for EU diplomacy and accountability. It is recommended that this includes: (i) to continue highlighting the importance of ensuring compliance with visibility requirements in dialogue with the UN; (ii) applying the clauses of non-compliance; (iii) ensuring a common understanding amongst EU and UN staff on the joint communication and visibility requirements; (iv) promoting the identification and sharing of good practices to enhance EU visibility at the country level; (v) pursuing a strategic approach to communication and visibility at the country level; (vi) acknowledging the convening role of the UN and in certain contexts the preferred access to national authorities; and (vii) pursuing joint visibility of the partnership.

4. Favour coordination with EU Member States vis-à-vis the UN to enhance coherence and joint leverage. The EU and the EU MS as key partners to the UN – representing 42% of UN funding over the period considered – did not use their joint leverage to its full potential. While acknowledging that improving coordination and coherence does not depend on the sole efforts of the EU institutions, it is recommended to: (i) continue investing resources for coordination with EU MS at EU Delegations to UN HQs; (ii) strengthen coordination in UN governing bodies; (iii) exploit the combined analytical and knowledge capacities of the EU and its MS for evidenced based policies in support of negotiations; (iv) envisage a Team Europe approach for strategic EU-UN dialogue at the country level; and (v) strengthen coordination and joint programming between the EU and its MS at the country level.

On implementation framework and follow-up

5. Solve with the UN issues of concern regarding the EU-UN cooperation framework. The current legal, financial, and administrative framework was a solid basis for cooperation when applied well. A series of issues with the framework and its application caused problems. Some were solved, others remained, creating delays, inefficient use of resources, and tensions. It is recommended to (i) continue making significant efforts to resolve, as far as possible, longstanding complex issues; (ii) continue monitoring recurrent implementation issues with the framework, notably at intervention level and with field-based staff; (iii) continue with frequent and informal exchanges at HQ level for solving issues of lower complexity or relating to specific cases; (iv) and further reinforce understanding and communication between EU and UN operational-level staff involved in EU-funded UN interventions.

6. Conduct studies or analyses for obtaining a better knowledge on and overview of the EU-UN cooperation to enhance a more strategic cooperation at both HQ and country level and to leverage on support provided. The EU has at its disposal the information required to generate an overview at macro level of its funding flows to the UN, and at intervention level through the UN reporting on interventions and the EU's result-oriented monitoring and EU's annual results reporting exercises. But it had limited analytical information on its cooperation with the UN for a specific sector, theme, region, country or UN entity. This is despite the huge amount of funding that was concerned, and the breadth and complexity of the collaboration. This created difficulties for leveraging support provided or trying to optimise the cooperation in a certain country or sector for instance, but also simply in terms of having a more in-depth knowledge on different aspects of the cooperation. It is therefore suggested that the EU conducts analyses, studies or evaluations more regularly at these levels, to obtain better overviews for informing decision-makers at HQ and in Delegations to the UN HQs and to partner countries. This could be initiated on a need basis and be done by both EU HQs and EU Delegations.

On communication

7. Improve further the communication between EU HQs and Delegations regarding EU cooperation with the UN, in both directions, and ensure the uptake of existing information. Delegations were not always aware of details related to the cooperation between the EU and the UN taking place in the country in which they are based, despite information being available sometimes through several means-, and unclear of the scope of their responsibilities with regards to EU-funded UN interventions. Similarly, EU HQs did not always have a clear idea of the cooperation between the EU and the UN in a specific country. It is hence suggested to, on one side, increase communication from EU HQs to Delegations on these various matters, and on the other side for Delegations to ensure that this information is consulted when required, shared with the corresponding persons in charge and used properly. This includes issues on the objectives of the EU-UN partnership; institutional contexts and expectations on both sides; the EU line of conduct on application of problematic financial and administrative provisions; the objectives in terms of strategic/political visibility. It also involves making sure that EU HQs and EUDs are well informed on EU-UN cooperation taking place in a specific country. This is not only a matter of making available documents, but also ensuring that interlocutors are aware of their existence and use them.

1. INTRODUCTION

This is the final report of the evaluation of the “European Union (EU³) cooperation with the United Nations (UN) in external action.” It was commissioned by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) jointly with the Commission’s Directorate-General for International Partnership (DG INTPA).

1.1 Objectives and scope of the evaluation

This evaluation aims to provide an **overall independent assessment** of the EU-UN cooperation in external action.⁴

This evaluation sought evidence on six main issues: i) the promotion of multilateralism through EU-UN cooperation; ii) EU influence and visibility in the UN system in relation to reaching EU priorities; iii) effectiveness of EU-UN cooperation in the five priority areas targeted; iv) efficiency in implementing and delivering support to partners; v) progress on UNDS reforms (development) and vi) the added value of using the UN system as a channel for EU support compared to other alternatives.

This evaluation further aims to identify lessons on how to improve current and future cooperation between the EU and the UN, considering the priorities set in 2019 by the College of Commissioners led by Ursula von der Leyen and the 2021 Joint Communication on strengthening the EU’s contribution to rules-based multilateralism.

The evaluation is pitched at a strategic level. It focuses on the EU-UN cooperation as an instrument for the EU to achieve its objectives in international cooperation. A major focus of the evaluation is on the EU’s role in strengthening the UN system for delivery on the global agenda (first and foremost the 2030 Agenda).

EU-UN cooperation is wide-ranging: it covers a variety of EU and UN entities, sectors, geographies, and modes of cooperation, including dialogue and funding.

Based on the ToR and the inception phase, the scope of the evaluation can be summarised as follows:



³ Throughout the report, the term ‘EU’ (European Union) is used to refer to the European Commission (notably DG INTPA and DG NEAR) and the diplomatic service of the EU - the European External Assistance Service (EEAS), including the EU Delegations (EUDs). When the intention is to refer only to a specific EU institution such as the Commission, the name of the institution is used. The term ‘EU funding’ in this report refers to EU financial resources managed by the European Commission. The use of the term ‘EU’ does not cover the actions of individual EU Member States (MS); when EU MS are concerned an explicit reference is made.

⁴ EU-UN cooperation channelled via Commission services other than DG NEAR, DG INTPA, and the FPI is not covered by this evaluation. Other Commission services will only be considered if active in external action in the thematic areas covered by the evaluation and for coherence.

The thematic scope covers the five policy areas defined by the Commission in 2019 as key priorities.⁵ These areas are 1) Green Deal: Climate Action, environmental protection, biodiversity, and environmentally sustainable economy; 2) Transition to a digital era: Promotion of digital, innovation and new technology opportunities in EU partner countries; 3) Sustainable economic, human, and social development; 4) Peace, security, and governance, including democracy, rule of law and human rights; and 5) Migration and forced displacement.

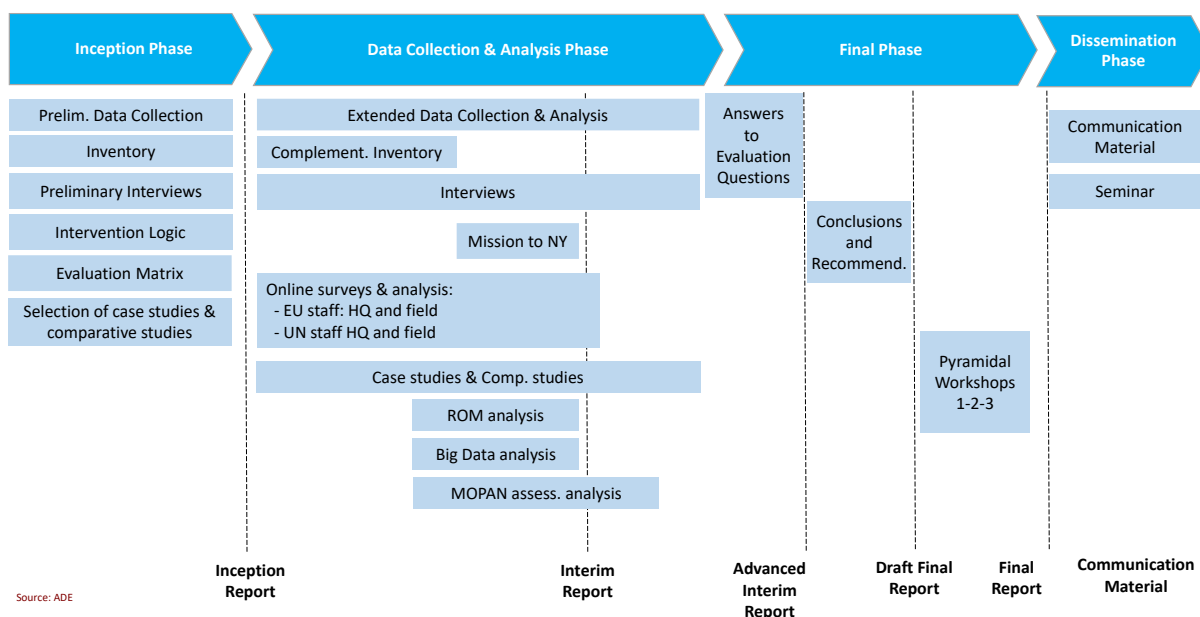
1.2 Structure of this Final Report

Volume I of this report contains the main findings of the evaluation, an overall assessment, the conclusions, key lessons learnt, and the recommendations. Volume II provides detailed evidence per Evaluation questions (EQ), judgement criterion and indicator, to substantiate further the key findings presented in Volume I. Volume III provides the case studies and comparative analyses. Volume IV contains additional data analyses (including a complementary inventory analysis, the survey analysis, the ROM and MOPAN analyses, and the Big Data and policy dialogue analyses).

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: KEY FEATURES

This section gives an outline of the approach and the tools we used in the evaluation process so far. The figure underneath summarises the different phases of the evaluation and the main activities carried out or remaining to be.

Figure 1. Evaluation process with main activities



⁵ Where international cooperation is linked to other forms of cooperation (e.g., humanitarian assistance or security), the evaluation assesses this cooperation as part of assessing the overall contribution to the stated development objectives. For example, the evaluation addressed EU-UN cooperation in the field of humanitarian assistance only where the humanitarian cooperation was part of a wider EU-UN cooperation related to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus where it is the nexus that is the subject of enquiry. Similarly, the evaluation only addressed EU-UN cooperation in the field of security/terrorism/violent extremism where this was specifically linked to a broader development intervention in a country context.

2.1 Overall evaluation approach

The evaluation relies on a theory-based non-experimental design. It uses an intervention logic to link the key elements of EU support through the UN family in a single framework that explains the causality between the EU's political, policy, technical, and financial inputs through the UN system and the overall goals the EU is pursuing – peace, security, human rights, prosperity, and sustainable development for all – at the same time also strengthening the multilateral rules-based order.

An evaluation framework, consisting of six evaluation questions (EQs) grouped in three main themes, structures the analysis. It aims to assess to what extent and how EU policy inputs and financial assistance to the UN contributed to the attainment of the objectives set.

Box 1. Evaluation Questions






Clusters	Evaluation Questions
1. EU political and policy priorities for the EU-UN partnership	EQ1 – EU influence and visibility: what the EU wants from the UN system
	To what extent has the EU-UN cooperation reinforced the EU's influence and visibility – thus advancing its political and strategic positioning (influence) within the UN system at both global policy level and operational/delivery levels in partner countries?
	EQ2 – Reinforced Multilateralism: what the EU wants for the UN
	To what extent has EU-UN cooperation reinforced multilateral solutions and the pursuit of a global universal agenda (Agenda 2030 and Paris Climate Agenda)?
2. EU policy and political priorities in the five thematic priority areas	EQ3 – EU-UN cooperation for effective delivery: results in five thematic priority areas
	To what extent has EU-UN cooperation advanced the achievement of EU policy and political priorities in the five thematic priority areas, thus contributing to tangible results in these areas?
3. The UN system as a channel for delivery of EU external action support	EQ 4 – EU-UN cooperation for efficient delivery
	To what extent have the implementation modalities of the EU-UN cooperation contributed to the efficient delivery of EU support channelled through the UN system?
	EQ 5 – UN Delivering as One
	To what extent have UN working methods as per the 2006 “Delivering as One” and the 2018 UN reforms been conducive to effective and efficient delivery of EU support?
	EQ 6 – Value added
	To what extent has EU support channelled through UN entities added value compared to other forms of EU support?



2.2 Evaluation Tools

Data was collected and analysed using a range of tools and techniques (see Box 2). The combination of tools enabled the team to gather the necessary information at the level of indicators and to triangulate information from several sources to validate and ensure the solidity of the findings.

Overall, the evaluation has consulted more than 375 persons through interviews (including 164 EU and 139 UN staff), surveyed 251 persons (155 EU and 96 UN staff) at HQ and field level, conducted a series of workshops, reviewed 700+ documents, made an inventory and typology covering EUR 21 billion, conducted 16 case studies and four comparative analyses, made a quantitative analysis of 2500+ ROM reports of which 236 on UN-implemented projects and a qualitative analysis of 20 ROM reports, examined MOPAN assessments of 27 UN entities, and conducted a Big Data analysis on public attention and perception.

Box 2. Evaluation Tools

Evaluation Tool	Description
General/strategic level literature and documents review 	A literature review has been carried out. It included for instance EU Communications, Council Conclusions, Internal Notes, Fiches received from the Commission, EU Treaty, EU Financial Regulations, FAFA, EU-UN FAFA Working Group minutes, Common Understanding on Expenditure Verification, EV and PA ToR, PAGoDA and CA templates and manual, IAS and ECA reports, UN Documents and resolutions, synthesis evaluations and evaluations/reviews, web sites of EU and UN entities, etc. It finally included research and reports from the OECD, and grey literature from research institutions and think tanks working on aspects of the cooperation between the EU and the UN. The bibliography details the list of documents consulted (Volume IV, Annex 8).
Inventory analysis 	The inventory provides an overview and analysis of the evolution of the EU-UN cooperation 2014-2020 in terms of funding. It presents key figures on the overall cooperation, its evolution in terms of volume, and priority partners, geographies, and EU-UN cooperation modalities. It also gives an overview of EU-UN cooperation in thematic areas and with priority partners. Volume IV, Annex 2 presents the detailed inventory.
Strategic Interviews & interviews at the level of case studies 	The team interviewed more than 375 stakeholders involved in the EU-UN cooperation (See Volume IV, Annex 9). This includes representatives from Commission services at the Headquarters and in EU Delegations, from the UN Office in Brussels, UN HQs, UNRC offices and representation offices of concerned UN entities, EU MS, intergovernmental organisations, national authorities, think tanks, academia, and additional persons familiar with EU-UN cooperation. Most of the interviews were conducted remotely. Face to face interviews were conducted during a mission to New York where high level officials from the UN secretariat, and UN Funds and Programmes (Assistant Secretary General level) and the EU Delegation in New York were interviewed as well as representatives from other (non-EU) UN member states. Systematic interviews with EUDs and UNRCs in 17 countries across DG NEAR and DG INTPA countries provided valuable information as to EU-UN cooperation at country level.
Surveys 	Two online surveys were conducted respectively to a) EU Commission, European External Action Service and European Delegations staff; b) UN staff in HQs, Brussels and UNCTs. The approach and results of the surveys are described in more detail in Volume IV, Annex 3, results were also incorporated in Volumes I and II.
Case studies and comparative analyses 	Sixteen case studies and four comparative analyses, presented in Volume III, were conducted. The case studies enabled the evaluation team to provide specific examples of the EU-UN cooperation across the five thematic areas, different geographies, a variety of UN entities and EU services in charge, and of different types of activities, of the nature of the funding and the implementation status. They do not aim at being representative of the vast and varied nature of EU-UN cooperation.

Evaluation Tool	Description
	<p>The comparative analyses covered EU-UN cooperation in specific areas and assessed the added value of the EU-UN cooperation in comparison to other non-UN entities operating within the same thematic area.</p> <p>It is important to emphasise that the case studies and comparative analyses are not primarily about providing details on the individual EU-UN cooperation or dialogue effort. Instead, all the details reported on and analysed are meant to speak about the functioning of the EU-UN cooperation in the specific context of the individual case study. As such, case studies and comparative analyses are meant to provide evidence to inform the answers to the evaluation questions on the broader functioning of the EU-UN cooperation. They are aimed at giving insights into dynamics and factors that may occur in specific circumstances or cases, but that are meaningful and relevant for this evaluation, because they influence and shape the functioning of the EU-UN cooperation as a whole.</p>
ROM report analysis & MOPAN assessment analysis	<p>The team conducted an in-depth quantitative analysis of 236 ROM report scorings pertaining to funding channelled through UN-entities to specific projects to find patterns of problematic issues. A complementary qualitative analysis of a random selection of 20 ROM reports was also conducted. This served to identify explanatory factors, good practices and lessons for the future improvement of the cooperation, focusing specifically on effectiveness and efficiency (EQ3 and EQ4).</p> <p>The analysis of ROM reports was complemented by a review of MOPAN assessments that provided information on institutional performance of the UN entities through which the EU channelled funding. Two separate analyses were conducted for MOPAN assessment cycles, before and after the methodological change related to the rating scale introduced in the 2019 Assessment Cycle under MOPAN 3.0*.</p> <p>The detailed findings and methodological approach to the ROM and MOPAN analyses are presented in Volume IV, annexes 4 and 5.</p>
Big-data analysis 	<p>The team conducted a text mining exercise using big data analytics (e.g., natural language processing) to study the public attention to and perception of specific aspects of the EU-UN cooperation. To conduct this assessment, the team made use of the openly available Event Database of the GDELT project⁶, which provides information on news coverage of world events such as data of actors, action location, type of event, average sentiment.⁷ The findings and conclusions from this analysis are presented in Annex 7, Volume IV. In line with the methodology applied for this evaluation, the big data pilot study provided evidence on public perceptions and visibility of the EU-UN cooperation. This served to support the findings of EQ1 on visibility and influence.</p>
Workshop and Focus Group Discussions 	<p>A workshop with the participation of 22 EU Member States was conducted in the EU Delegation in New York with the objective to discuss (i) the EU-UN cooperation, and (ii) the overall cooperation between the EU Delegation and EU MS in New York.</p>
Joint EU-UN Workshop	<p>A workshop gathering representatives of both the EU and the UN was organised to discuss the draft conclusions and recommendations, prior to drafting the final report.</p>

⁶ <https://www.gdelproject.org/>.

⁷ http://data.gdelproject.org/documentation/GDELT-Event_Codebook-V2.0.pdf.

2.3 Challenges and limitations

This evaluation faced several constraints; the measures that were taken to mitigate them are illustrated in the table below.

Limitations encountered	Mitigation measures taken
<p>Large scope: The scope of the evaluation is very broad and complex. It covers five thematic areas encompassing most EU external action; engagement at the global, regional, and country levels; all partner countries; a period of seven years; several Commission DGs; most UN entities, of which 14 in particular (see above); political and policy dialogue; EU funding to various interventions, i.e., more than 3000 contracts.</p>	<p>The evaluation design is pitched at the strategic level, focusing on the big picture and overall trends of the EU-UN partnership. Data collection and analysis were conducted at the global/HQ level and at the country level in the framework of the case studies and the comparative analyses. The overall purpose was to draw findings, conclusions, and recommendations of a general nature. The evaluation was hence not expected to provide an assessment or recommendations by agency, or by country/region. While sampling across a wide scope of the cooperation, the case studies were primarily evaluation tools aiming at informing the big picture with illustrative examples.</p>
<p>Desk-based study: The evaluation was primarily carried out as a remote study, based on document and secondary data review, and remote interviews. This was in accordance with the ToR (issued during the COVID pandemic). Secondary information on EU-UN cooperation at sector, country, regional or agency level was not available.</p>	<p>In-person interviews were conducted in Brussels and New York City; no other country visit was carried out. The team also used surveys and remote interviews to collect the views of many in-country stakeholders (e.g., EUD and UN staff), but these do not fully replace the depth of understanding on EU-UN cooperation at field level which country visits may allow (for instance in terms of results).</p>
<p>Political and policy dialogue: Obtaining data and evidence on the impact of political and policy dialogue was a major challenge, given the lack of tangible evidence in the form of documented results. Moreover, UN interlocutors in particular at the global level often had difficulties disentangling the efforts of the EU from those of individual EU MS.</p>	<p>The team examined the limited documentary information available, complementing it with key informant interviews with EU and UN staff and other stakeholders (representatives from EU MS, Think Tanks, Academia, and other international bodies such as OECD/DAC). Information has been triangulated to address possible biases, but limitations remain.</p>

3. OVERVIEW OF EU COOPERATION WITH THE UN

3.1 EU-UN Overall Cooperation Framework

The official cooperation and mutual recognition between the EU and the UN family dates back long before the period under study in this evaluation. The collaboration was greatly intensified during the 2014-2020 Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF).

The EU-UN cooperation takes place within an overall evolving policy framework laid out in key EU documents. The overall EU policy and policy commitments regarding multilateralism are laid out in the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (2016) and further outlined in the Council Conclusions on EU Action to strengthen rules-based multilateralism (2019). Multilateralism with the UN at its core is defined as a cornerstone of the EU's external policy.⁸ EU interests are defined as *“a multilateral system that is rules-and rights based protects the global commons, promotes shared public goods, and delivers benefits for citizens in Europe and across the globe.”* Cooperation through effective

⁸ The Global Strategy on EU Foreign and Security Policy 2016.

multilateralism is seen as the best way to advance national as well as collective interests. The EU and its MS consider that addressing major global challenges and opportunities does require a strong multilateral system. *“The EU and its Member States see themselves as important players in setting the international agenda and as the largest collective, financial contributor to the UN system.”*⁹

In the context of external action, in the Council Conclusions 2019 the EU and EU MS further committed to continue exercising leadership and working with partners on inter alia the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on climate change and continue to promote human rights and support democracy and the rule of law. They also committed to working towards better leveraging funding to the multilateral system in support of agreed policy priorities, and towards a more strategic approach to quality voluntary funding by the EU and its MS for key UN entities.

Another important and more recent document setting out the EU line of thinking about rules-based multilateralism is the Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council on strengthening the EU’s contribution to rules-based multilateralism (JOIN (2021)) that is based on the 2019 Council Conclusions. The EU has also signed before the evaluation period Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs)¹⁰ with some UN entities, including UNDP, ILO, UNEP, IOM, UN Women, UNHCR, UNESCO, UNICEF, and FAO, providing a framework for policy dialogue and cooperation. Finally, EU-UN external action takes place in accordance with the New European Consensus for Development (2017) and the thematic Communications and Council Conclusions in the field of external action.

EU-UN cooperation in external action involves multiple actors on both sides. On the UN side, there is the UN Secretariat as well as UN Agencies, Funds, Programmes and other entities – all with their own mandates, roles, and governing bodies. On the EU side, cooperation with UN is coordinated by the EEAS and the European Commission, the latter represented by several DGs, each responsible for its own policy area - DG INTPA, DG NEAR, DG CLIMA, DG ENV, DG AGRI, DG HOME, DG ECHO, and DG JUST. Most cooperation takes place in direct engagement with UN entities, in particular at country level through the EU Delegations. EU MS are active members of UN governing organs, and some of the MS are also large direct funders of the UN system, in addition to what is channelled through the EU.

3.2 The EU-UN cooperation and its evolution over the 2014-2020 period in figures¹¹

Over the 2014-2020 period, the EU was the 4th largest funder of the UN system. It contributed a total of EUR 21.4 billion (including both development and humanitarian aid) and accounted for 6% of total UN funding. When combined with EU MS, the EU accounted for 42% of the total UN funding or EUR 150 billion and was the biggest source of funding to the UN. The second largest contributor was the US with 23%.

The section below provides a summary of the main developments in EU funding channelled through the UN between 2014-2020. It covers EU external action (excluding humanitarian aid, which is outside the scope of this evaluation). A more detailed analysis of funding is presented in Annex 2 of Volume IV.

Over the evaluation period, the EU channelled EUR 12.5 billion to the UN (excluding humanitarian aid). Its annual contribution doubled between 2014 and 2020 from EUR 1.2 to 2.5 billion a year. As

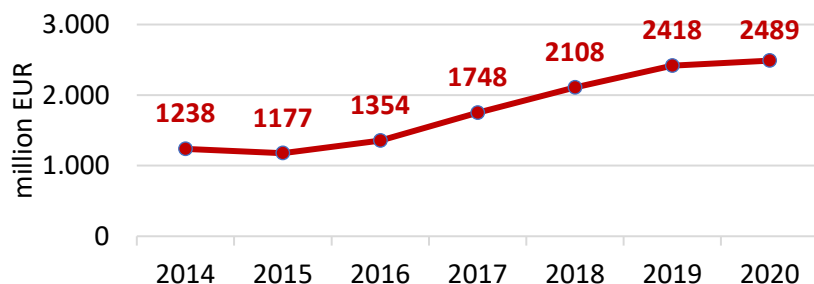
⁹ EU action to strengthen rules-based multilateralism: Council conclusions 10258/19.

¹⁰ See for instance the 2014 Memorandum of Understanding between the European Commission and the United Nations Environment Programme <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/european-commission-and-unep-strengthen-cooperation-renewed>

¹¹ The full inventory analysis is available in Volume IV – it also includes data sources. The inventory analysis related to EU-UN cooperation is based on the portfolio forwarded by the Commission as part of this evaluation.

shown in Figure 2, this represented an increase in the share of EU funding channelled through the UN from about 12% to 17% over the period.¹²

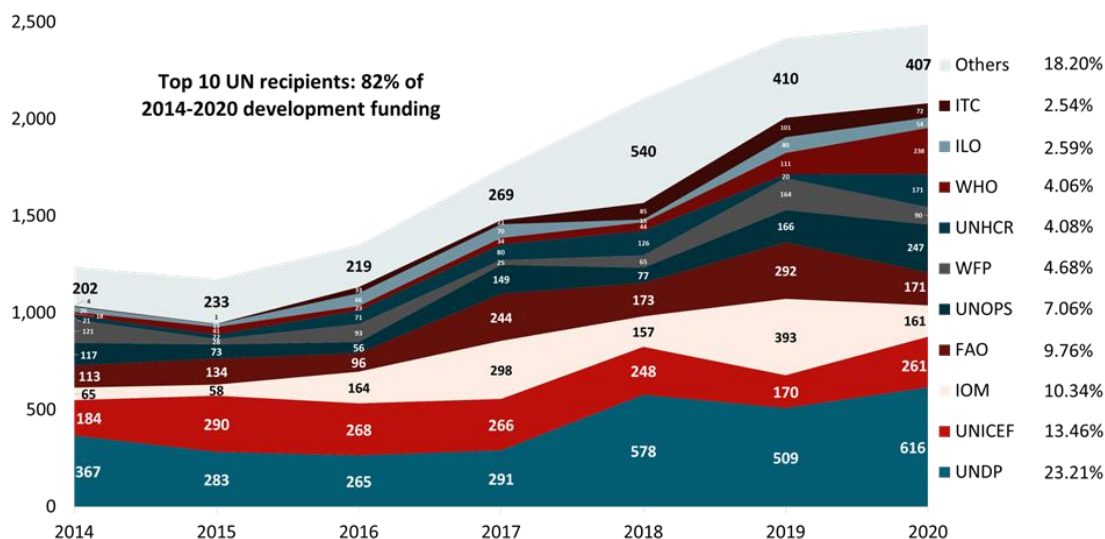
Figure 2. EU funding channelled through the UN 2014-2020 based on contracted amounts¹³



Source: ADE’s calculations based on the Commission extraction from the EU Statistical Dashboard

The biggest recipients of EU aid were UNDP, UNICEF, IOM, and FAO. Figure 3 shows the evolution of funding to the Top-10 UN entities. The overall increase in EU funding was reflected across all UN entities covered by this evaluation. Funding for UNDP, IOM and UNHCR more than doubled, reflecting the increased support in migration and forced displacement.

Figure 3. Top 10 UN recipients of EU aid, 2014-2020¹⁴



Source: ADE’s calculations based on the Commission extraction from the EU Statistical Dashboard

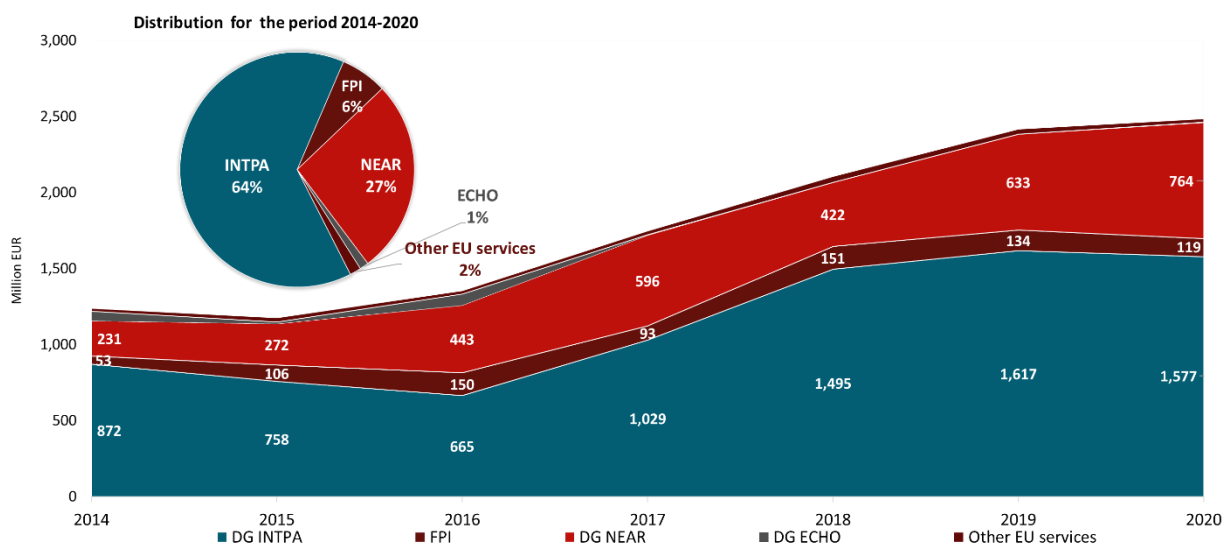
Most EU aid channelled through the UN (64%), was managed by DG INTPA, followed by DG NEAR with 27% and FPI with 6%. Funds managed by DG NEAR, more than tripled over the evaluation period, reflecting an increase in the funds channelled to the Enlargement and Neighbourhood regions in response to the Syrian Crisis.

¹² For a full analysis of the development in EU funding for external action please see the Inventory Mapping in Volume IV, Annex 2.

¹³ This and the following graphs exclude humanitarian aid which falls outside of the scope of this evaluation.

¹⁴ The very large “other” included 28 entities, each receiving a very small share of the funds Amongst them were UNIDO 1.9%, UNEP 1.7%, UN WOMEN 0.9%, and UNFPA 0.9%.

Figure 4. Distribution of EU aid by Commission services (2014-2020)

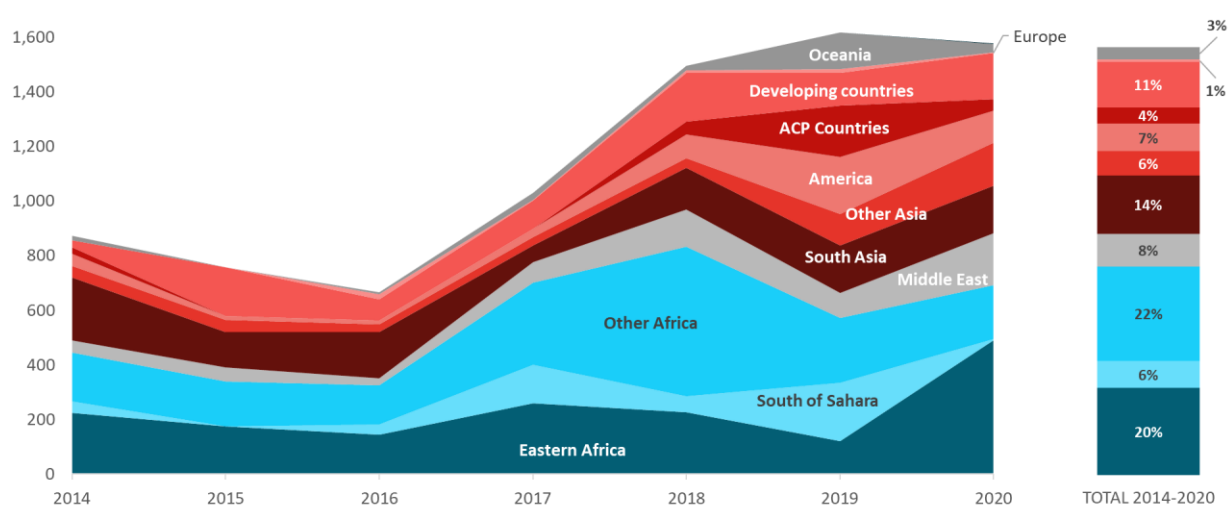


Source: ADE’s calculations based on the Commission extraction from the EU Statistical Dashboard

The funding channelled through the UN benefitted all regions, with Africa being the main benefitting region. Eastern Africa was the biggest recipient of funds with 20%, followed by the Southern neighbourhood (18%), South Asia (13%), Western Africa (11%) and pre-accession countries (10%).¹⁵

For DG INTPA, Africa was the main area of EU-UN cooperation – with East Africa receiving the bulk of the funding, followed by Asia, and global contributions, which - for a large part - represent multi-country allocations. Figure 5 shows that there was an increase in EU-UN cooperation in the case of DG INTPA across all regions. This was especially the case in Africa which from 2015 also benefitted from the EU Africa Trust Fund.

Figure 5. Geographic distribution of DG INTPA funding through the UN over time¹⁶



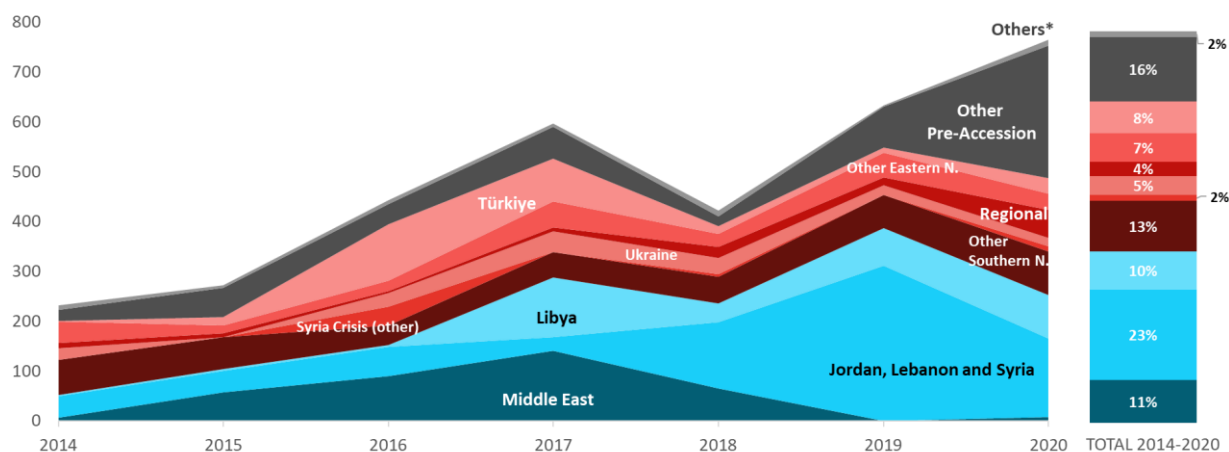
Source: ADE’s calculations based on the Commission extraction from the EU Statistical Dashboard

¹⁵ For more details and a graphic representation, we refer to figure 10 in volume IV.

¹⁶ Please kindly note that ACP countries concern specifically regional funds earmarked for ACP countries. The category “developing countries” captures funds allocated globally to other developing countries without further geographic specification.

The geographical distribution of funding in DG NEAR underscored the increased importance for DG NEAR of working with the UN in the context of crises, with large increases in funding for the crises in and around Syria. Support for pre-accession countries (other than Türkiye) also increased significantly towards the end of the period. These developments also imply that the share of funding channelled to UN entities from DG NEAR increased compared to that of DG INTPA over the period, although DG INTPA remained the main funder.

Figure 6. Geographic distribution of DG NEAR funding through the UN over time



Source: ADE's calculations based on the Commission extraction from the EU Statistical Dashboard

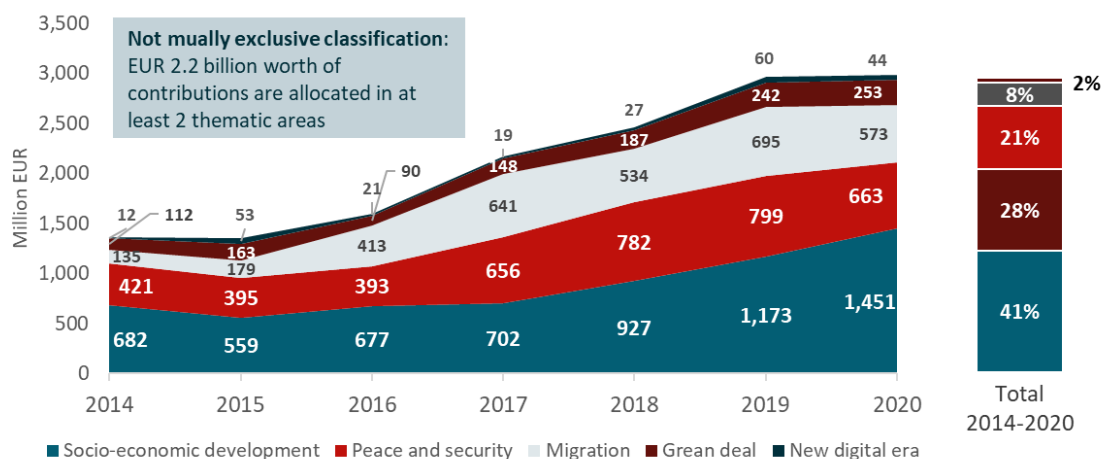
Overall, EU-UN cooperation was predominantly present in fragile countries (63%) – although cooperation in extremely fragile states decreased in terms of volume towards the end of the evaluation period. The most important UN partners for the EU in contexts of fragility were UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, IOM and FAO.

Funding for UN entities primarily took place at the country level in project type interventions. Funds for country specific projects accounted for 77% of total EU funds. Core contributions accounted for only 0.4%.¹⁷ Softly earmarked funds in the form of contributions to UN thematic programmes increased significantly since 2018, but this was almost exclusively driven by the Spotlight Initiative. Overall, contributions to thematic programmes accounted for 18% of EU funds. Pooled/ Basket funds contributions accounted for 1%.

In terms of **thematic distribution**, EU aid channelled through the UN focused on economic, social, and human development (41%), followed by support for peace and security (28%), migration (21%), the green agenda (8%) and digital (2%). **Funding for all thematic areas increased over the evaluation period– with the sharpest increase in EU-UN cooperation for migration** and forced displacement increased the EU Trust Funds for emergency and post-emergency situations including MADAD (for the crises around Syria), and more specifically the Facility for Refugees in Türkiye.

¹⁷ The European Union is constrained in its capacity to provide core funding and regular contributions for operational programmatic activities to UN, as a principle retained in the Commission Communication (COM (2001)231 final) "Building an effective partnership with the United Nations in the fields of Development and Humanitarian Affairs". UNRWA was the biggest recipient of core contributions by the EU with a total of EUR 409,000,000, accounting for 90.5% of the EU's total core contributions. However, all of this is classified as humanitarian according to the OECD DAC sector classification and has thus been excluded from this development focused analysis.

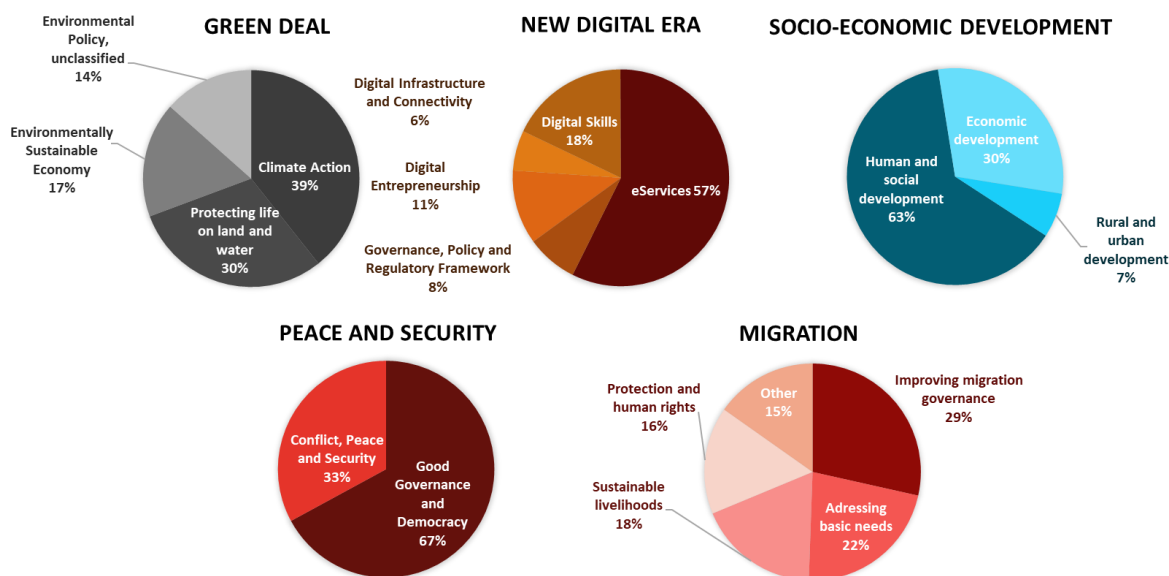
Figure 7. Evolution of the main thematic areas for EU aid channelled through the UN (2014-2020)



Source: ADE’s calculations based on the Commission extraction from the EU Statistical Dashboard

The figures below provide more details on the sectoral breakdown within each thematic area.

Figure 8. Distribution of funding across macro-sectors for each main thematic area (2014-2020)



Source: ADE’s calculations based on the Commission extraction from the EU Statistical Dashboard

4. MAIN FINDINGS OF THE EVALUATION

This chapter presents a summary of the main findings of the evaluation. These are clustered in six sections, with the following main themes:

1. EU contribution to strengthened multilateralism through its cooperation with the UN;
2. Influence and visibility of the EU through its cooperation with the UN;
3. Achievement of EU policy priorities and results in five thematic priority areas;
4. Contribution of EU-UN implementation and cooperation mechanisms on the efficient delivery of support provided;
5. Impact of the 2018 UN reform on delivery of EU support;
6. Specific value added obtained by channelling through the UN.

A more detailed presentation of the findings is presented in Volume II of this report.¹⁸

4.1 Reinforcing multilateralism through EU-UN cooperation in external action

This section examines to what extent the EU-UN cooperation has allowed to enforce multilateral solutions and the pursuit of a universal global agenda. It does this in three steps:

- First, by acknowledging the longstanding commitment of the EU towards multilateralism and the role of its cooperation with the UN in this framework.
- Second, by recognising the presence of the EU in different UN fora, and the (increasing) channelling of funding through the UN as a multilateral stance.
- Third, by examining to what extent channelling enabled the EU to reach its commitments towards multilateralism.

Multilateralism is a cornerstone of the EU's external policy. The EU has repeatedly emphasised the role of the UN at the core of multilateralism.

In an increasingly interconnected and rapidly changing world, the EU has recognised its increased dependency on a rules-based international order. The promotion of an effective multilateralism system capable of facing new global realities has gained momentum over time in successive EU strategy documents. In these documents, the EU recognises that the UN is at the centre of the multilateral order and promotes collaboration with the UN. Major documents since 2014¹⁹ are:

- The Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy (2016) that details the EU's approach to promote a reformed global governance, to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The strategy indicates that *"the EU will promote a rules-based global order with multilateralism as its key principle and the United Nations at its core."* It details seven principles to promote global governance, most of which involve the UN²⁰.
- The new EU Consensus on Development (2017) reaffirms that the key principle of the rules-based global order is multilateralism and the central role of the UN. It underlines the importance of strengthening partnerships within multilateral organisations, including the United Nations system for a successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It underlines that

¹⁸ This section is a summary of the main findings in answer to the set of six evaluation questions that had been defined for this evaluation. The detail of the answers can be found in volume II. They remain close to the set of evaluation questions, except that we have here inverted the subjects of EQ1 (influence) and EQ 2 (multilateralism). This allows us to first discuss the place of the EU-UN cooperation in a multilateral perspective, before moving into the extent to which such perspective allows the EU to keep promoting its values and priorities and be visible.

¹⁹ We focus here on documents produced during the evaluation period (hence as of 2014). Before 2014, the EU's commitment to multilateralism was already very explicit.

²⁰ This includes: i) reforming the UN, including the Security Council; ii) investing in the UN, notably in its peacekeeping, mediation, peacebuilding, and humanitarian functions; iii) deepening rules in areas such as global maritime security; and iv) partnering with the UN as the framework of the multilateral system and a core partner for the EU.

the EU will “promote reform and synergies within the UN, both at Headquarters level and at country level, with the aim of making the UN system ‘deliver as one’”.

- In 2019 and 2021, the EU issued two major policy documents to strengthen EU contribution to rules-based multilateralism: the 2019 Council Conclusions on “EU action to strengthen rules-based multilateralism” and the 2021 joint communication “on strengthening the EU’s contribution to rules-based multilateralism”. The 2021 Communication states that multilateralism “will remain the cardinal principle of the EU as the most effective means to govern global relations in a mutually beneficial way”. It further specifies what the EU wants from multilateralism and how it can achieve what it wants. On the “what”, the EU aims to contribute to i) making the world safer, notably in enhancing its efforts to prevent conflict, promote peace and security; and ii) building back better, in promoting multilateral approaches (e.g., encompassing green growth, digital transformation, human development and tackling poverty and inequality) to build resilient systems. On the “how,” building on the principles presented in the 2016 Global Strategy, the EU proposed to: (i) uphold international norms and agreements; (ii) reform what needs to change to make the UN fit for purpose; and (iii) extend global governance to new areas.

The EU has been engaged in different UN fora where it actively contributed to shaping several UN policies through a multilateral approach. Examples are the Agenda 2030, the UN Resolution on the COVID-19 response or the presence and role of the EU in the UN Environmental Assembly (UNEA) that adopted several environmental resolutions (see section 1.2 for more details).

The EU has been a major financial contributor to the UN system. Channelling funding through the UN is a multilateral stance in itself. As noted in the inventory (see section 3.2), EU funding to UN entities significantly increased over the evaluation period, with a doubling of the annual amount between 2014 and 2020. This enabled the EU to collaborate with the UN as two large multilateral players in a wide range of areas, notably socio-economic development (49% of total EU funding), followed by peace and security (33%) and migration (25%). The Green Deal (9%) and digitalisation (2%) also received support, albeit to a lesser extent. This is in line with the EU’s objectives of the 2016 Global strategy to “partner with the UN as the framework of the multilateral system and a core partner for the EU”.

Through its cooperation with the UN, the EU has been able to contribute to its objectives through multilateralism in terms of the respect and implementation of international norms and agreements; supporting the UN to be more effective as a multilateral actor; and extending multilateralism to new global realities. These objectives are further examined below.

1. **EU-UN cooperation supported compliance with international norms and agreements in various areas of strategic relevance for both the EU and the UN.**
 - **In the area of peace, security and governance, effects were positive at the global level but mixed at the country/regional levels.** At the global level, the cooperation allowed to promote comprehensive or integrated approaches, for instance around the humanitarian, development and peace/security nexus. Electoral assistance is also an area where there was strong alignment between global level multilateral norms and agreements promoted by the EU and UN. EU-OHCHR cooperation and specific EU and UN initiatives promoted the human rights compliance of security actors. At the country/regional levels, the evaluation found both good examples of EU-UN cooperation promoting international norms and agreements (e.g., in Iran’s nuclear agreement, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and in Georgia) and examples of missed opportunities (e.g., in Burundi).²¹

²¹ The EU and EU MS (France, Germany, UK up to Brexit) were largely viewed as having prevented the collapse of the 2015 JCPOA deal between 2018 and 2020. In Georgia, with EU support, UNDP implemented projects on governance and human rights strategy, allowing UNDP to link human rights to democratic governance considerations in the country, which have been

- Regarding **human rights-based approaches**, EU support for UN Women, UNFPA, ILO and others contributed to the promotion of gender equality and the fight against gender-based violence. Similarly, EU support for UNICEF and UNESCO for education of children and the rights of the child, and support for WHO on universal health care, illustrate the promotion of human rights-based approaches.
- With respect to **international migration and environmental migration**, EU-UN cooperation contributed to advance the establishment of non-binding norms for international cooperation for the governance of international migration. It helped to forge a large consensus among UN Member States towards the adoption of the Global Compact for Migration in 2018. The latter is the first inter-governmentally negotiated agreement, prepared under the auspices of the UN, covering all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner. It is to be noted that seven EU MS and some non-EU countries withdrew towards the end of the process. EU-UN cooperation also contributed to advance the protection of the rights of people displaced by natural disasters. It supported – through the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) launched in 2016 – the implementation of international norms for protection of cross-border displaced persons in the context of disasters and climate change (Protection Agenda, endorsed in 2015 by 109 countries).
- Through its policy engagement and financial support to a range of UN projects the EU contributed to **strengthening global climate and environmental governance processes**.

Since 2016, the EU and the UN, through the UN Global Pact for the Environment, have given increased priority to environmental issues, particularly vis-à-vis biodiversity, circular economy, but not to the same level as for climate change. The Green Deal is a key element of the EU's priority of "building back better" in its multilateral agenda and the 2021 COPs for the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The EU provided financial support to UN projects that informed global Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs) processes. EU support also played a role in improving synergies between the different chemicals and waste conventions. This includes the establishment of a single joint secretariat for the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions. The EU also provided financial support promoting international and regional cooperation agreements and tools on the sustainable management of natural resources²².

- The EU contributed to advancing the **global digital agenda**, for instance through its contribution to and participation in the development of the UN SG's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation, UNESCO's recommendations on the ethics of artificial intelligence and the recommendations for a Programme of Action (PoA) for advancing responsible state behaviour in the cyberspace. The EU also contributed to strengthening the multilateral agenda in funding dedicated projects: e.g., the Policy and Regulation Initiative for Digital Africa (PRIDA) programme, which aims to promote universally accessible and affordable broadband across the continent.

traditionally compartmentalised. In Burundi, missed opportunities resulted from the lack of synergies between the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)'s decades-long support to local civil society and the AU's Human Rights Observation Mission, funded by the EU, which did not work with civil society and the UN Commission of Enquiry.

²² For example, the EU was a major donor of FAO-hosted fisheries commissions (General Fisheries Commissions of the Mediterranean and the International Tuna Commission) and of FAO's global programme supporting the implementation of the 2016 Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA) to eliminate illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. Moreover, EU-UN cooperation provided support to countries to enable them to implement global environment and climate change agendas. This includes the environment and climate change-related SDGs (e.g., Poverty Environment Initiative (PEI) / Poverty Environment Action (PEA)) and the commitments of the UNFCCC, including the REDD+ agenda for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation (UN-REDD).

- Survey respondents agreed that overall, the EU financial support to the UN contributed to strengthening multilateral actions, including the upholding of international norms and standards. This was the case for 80% of EU and 84% of UN respondents.

2. The EU was at the forefront of support for UN reforms, which aim to reinforce the effectiveness and efficiency of the UN system to deliver on the global agenda.

The EU already supported previous reforms to strengthen UN cooperation at country level – known as “UN delivering as One.” It also backed the new round of efforts launched in 2017 by the UNSG. This round comprised three pillars: the UN development system (UNDS), the management system and the peace and security architecture (see Impact of the 2018 UN reform on delivery of EU support; for more details).

3. EU-UN cooperation contributed to extending multilateralism to new global issues.

This is acknowledged by EU and UN survey respondents, with more positive views on the UN side. 80% of UN survey respondents and 68% of EU survey respondents considered that EU-UN cooperation contributed to addressing new global issues.

EU and UN cooperated on global security and governance threats taking new forms or a new intensity, such as chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) weapons, peace in space, piracy, or conflict minerals. On minerals from conflict-affected areas for instance, the EU and UN worked within the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR)-OECD-UN initiative on responsible supply chains of minerals.

EU-UN cooperation contributed to identifying and addressing a wide range of emerging Green Deal-related issues. This encompassed the Minamata Convention on Mercury; the promotion, with UNEP, of a circular economy; collaboration on food safety and food quality infrastructure (with UNIDO); and global action on the biodiversity crisis²³.

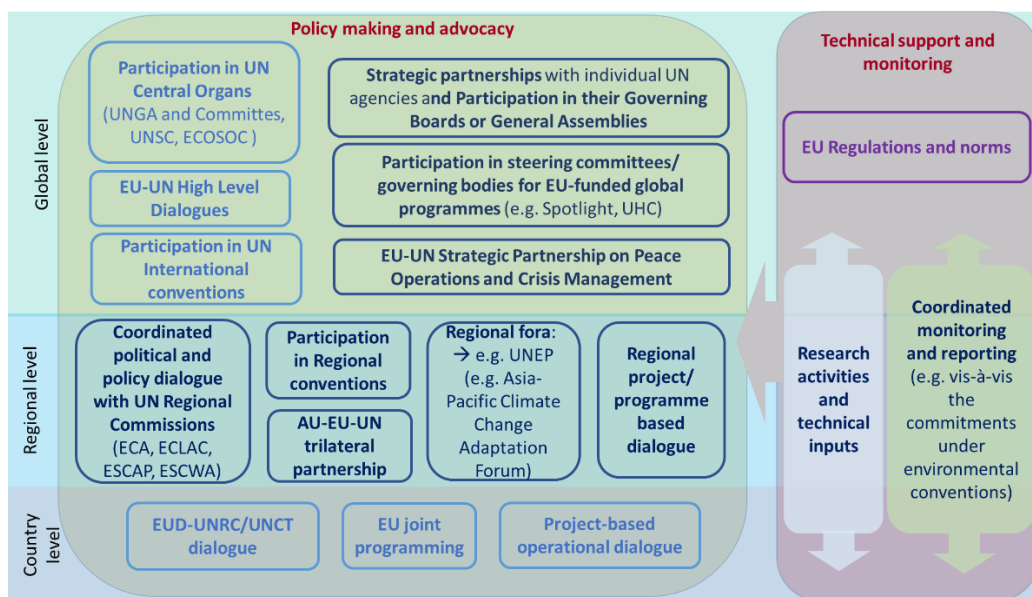
EU-UN cooperation contributed to the development of new norms and tools in digital-related areas. For instance, the EU supported the joint development by UNICRI and INTERPOL of a practical guide for law enforcement entities on the use of artificial intelligence in a responsible manner.

4.2 Advancing EU strategic positioning (influence)

This section examines the extent to which the EU could advance its strategic positioning and promote its values on global issues through its cooperation with the UN. The EU influence is first discussed at the global/policy level; and then on the country/operational level. The figure below provides an overview of the non-spending channels of EU influence at the UN.

²³ UN-REDD and Poverty Environment Initiative (PEI) were first movers in their respective areas. UN-REDD played a significant role in pushing the international agenda on forest and climate change. It also created confidence in results-based payments for preserving forest carbon and emission reductions. This paved the way for commitments made at the UNFCCC COP in 2021 for large-scale funding for forest conservation-related climate action, e.g., the LEAF Coalition. EU’s contribution to UN-REDD was mostly financial. PEI was a first mover and global leader on integrating poverty-environment considerations into national, sub-national and sector policy, planning and budgeting. The EU had significant influence on PEI at the global level: the EU was the biggest donor, one of only two donors that supported PEI throughout the initiative’s entire lifetime, and proactively engaged in the PEI donor steering group.

Figure 9. Mapping of Non-spending Channels of EU Influence at the country, regional and global levels



Source: ADE

4.2.1 Influence at the Global/Policy level

Through its engagement in different UN central organs, governing bodies and fora, the EU contributed to the shaping of a plethora of UN policies. It provided technical and policy inputs and played an important role in the negotiation of resolutions. The three policy-focused case studies²⁴ conducted in the context of this evaluation provide illustrative examples of such influence:²⁵

- **2030 Agenda:**²⁶ The final 2030 Agenda reflected the EU vision as set out in the Commission Communication “A decent life for all” (2013) and highlighted most EU priorities. The EU inputs in terms of achieving a balance between environmental and economic sustainability in the SDGs, and the focus on issues related to equality, and the specific SDG5 on gender equality were widely appreciated. Stakeholders recognised the EU for its capacity to “build bridges” on controversial issues, and to represent Member States as a united actor.
- **Global Compact for Migration (GCM):**²⁷ The EU showed a continuous commitment to the process leading to the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) and played a key role in its development. This included financial support to IOM, UNHCR and the UN Secretariat, among other things to facilitate consultation with and participation of developing countries, civil society and affected communities. It also engaged in extensive EU-EU MS consultations and preparatory work to ensure the inclusion of key EU priorities in the document and provided direct inputs to the UN Secretariat that were eventually integrated in the text.

²⁴ 16 case studies were conducted in the context of this evaluation. The remaining 13 were project-based.

²⁵ Several additional examples of influence were identified across thematic areas through interviews and documentary review. For instance, in the UN Environmental Assembly (UNEA), the governing body of UNEP, the EU, albeit not a full member, proposed, with the support of EU MS, several environmental resolutions on sustainable consumption and production, circular economy, chemicals and waste, a coherent approach to the 2030 agenda, marine litter, and plastics. For more examples, see Volume II JC 1.1.

²⁶ The topic of the 2030 Agenda is the focus of case study 7.

²⁷ The topic of the GCM is the focus of case study 15. The GCM is the first inter-governmentally negotiated agreement prepared under the auspices of the United Nations, covering all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner.

- **A global and open cyberspace²⁸**: The EU took a leadership role in cybersecurity debates across UN fora and governing bodies. This was evident in the work of the UN Group of Governmental Experts (UNGGE) on Advancing responsible State behaviour in cyberspace and the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security. The EU played an important role in the development of the OEWG First Substantive Report and the recognition of the applicability of international law on cybersecurity issues. Notably, it led the introduction of a recommendation on a Program of Action to advance responsible state behaviour, that was, in the end, cosponsored by more than 50 states.

Such EU influence was also confirmed in interviews and by survey respondents. Indeed, among survey respondents, 91%²⁹ of EU staff and 95% of UN staff agreed that the EU influenced the UN global policy agenda, including the 2030 Agenda, Paris Agreement on Climate Change, etc. This influence was acknowledged across the five thematic priority areas, but agreement was lower in the areas of migration and forced displacement, and in digitalisation.³⁰

Several factors played a key role in the EU's capacity to exert influence, notably: (i) the convergence of positions within the EU and its Members States; (ii) the EU's capacity to build bridges with non-EU players; (iii) the bilateral dialogues between the EU and the UN; (iv) the funding provided.

(i) The EU devoted much attention to favouring convergence² of EU and EU MS positions. Such convergence was reached in most cases. EUD staff in UN HQ cities, and especially in New York, coordinated extensively EU and EU MS positions, to allow for the drafting of joint EU statements and the adoption of common EU positions on resolutions and other texts. The process was supported by EU MS negotiators. In New York alone, some 1,000 EU meetings took place annually for the coordination with EU MS.³¹ Council Conclusions were published on an annual basis to define EU priorities at the United Nations and the UNGA, as well as in preparation of other UN governing assemblies and meetings. Subsequently, the EU and MS can be said to be largely cohesive within the UN. In 2018 for instance, the EU was able to deliver about 20 joint statements in the UN Security Council and 70 in other UN fora. In the UNGA, while there was no perfect voting coherency between EU member states, EU cohesion was high as compared to other regional organisations. With the exception of the first and fourth committees, voting coherence was consistent over 90% of voting procedures.³²

In some cases, however EU MS did not reach a common position. While the EU helped forging a broad consensus among UN Member States towards the adoption of the Global Compact on Migration, and though 152 countries voted in favour of the Compact in the UNGA, eight EU MS did not. In total nine EU MS withdrew from the Compact, with important implications for its implementation. Another

²⁸ EU-UN cooperation for a global and open cyberspace is the topic of case study 4.

²⁹ Unless otherwise specified, survey results presented in this section do not include respondents who stated, "Do not know". "Agree" refers to respondents that indicated that they agreed at least to a certain extent. Annex 3, Volume IV, provides a detailed presentation of the survey results.

³⁰ Indeed, for policies related to (i) Climate change and environment; (ii) sustainable economic, social, and human development, and (iii) peace security and governance, the percentages of respondents that agreed varied between 79 and 87% and were very similar for the EU and the UN. For migration and forced displacement they were of 62% for EU respondents and 64% for those from the UN: for digitalization they were of respectively 69 and 65%. The "I do not know" answers are not included, so that only the answers of people who expressed an opinion are counted. "Agreed" includes those that responded either agree or strongly agree.

³¹ Coordination was also supported by the activities of the United Nations Working Party (CONUN), although in some cases its inputs were described as insufficiently strategic or as too detached from the negotiations in New York.

³² Galariotis, I. & Gianniou, M. 2017. Evidence from the EU Presence at UNGA: In Pursuit of Effective Performance. In: Blavoukos, S. & Bourantonis, D. (Eds.). 2017. The EU in UN politics: Actors, processes, and performances. Palgrave Studies in European Union Politics.

example relates to gender equality, LGBTIQ+, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).³³ Diverging EU MS positions limited the EU capacity to push for policy change in this area. In the 2019 UNSC resolution 2467 on sexual violence in conflict, all references to sexual and reproductive health services and LGBTIQ+ communities had been removed. Across the UN, where it was not possible to reach a common EU position, there were instances where European views were entirely absent from the debate according to interviewed EU MS.

Coordination entailed some issues. First, it was time and resource intensive. In some cases, EU coherence also implied acceptance of the “lowest common denominator.” EU MS with more constraining standards could not push for the norms they had already adopted and viewed as needed.³⁴ This was a source of contention in UN governing bodies, where the EU MS, as donors, relied on their status to push for their own agenda.³⁵

(ii) The capacity to build bridges beyond EU MS played a key role, but faced also challenges. With EU MS being a minority at the UN, the EU de facto needed to rely on other actors to pass resolutions. While there were examples, where the EU was proactive in building bridges,³⁶ this also remained a challenge in several cases. As a regional bloc, the EU aims at promoting cross-regional cooperation within the UN, particularly with Africa and the African Union, as for instance reiterated in the 2019 Council conclusions on multilateral affairs. The Global North-South divide within the UN, with the G77 on one side and traditional donor countries on the other, was however a source of tensions. The increasing presence of the EU in the UN reinforced these tensions in some contexts. For instance, 2017 study states that the previous version of resolution 65/276 on the enhanced observer status of the EU was voted down by a narrow margin because often smaller UN member states saw the EU’s proposal as a threat to the intergovernmental nature of the UNGA.³⁷ Overall, there was no clear strategy for building alliances beyond EU MS over the evaluation period,³⁸ and human resources in multilateral EUDs to focus on coordination beyond EU MS were limited.³⁹

(iii) The influence of the EU in the UN system was further supported by bilateral dialogues between the EU and the UN. Such dialogues allowed to reaffirm the strategic importance of the cooperation and provided opportunities for mutual policy influencing and for strengthening policy cooperation.

The EU increasingly emphasised a more policy-based approach vis-a-vis the UN, in a context where EU funding channelled to the UN was increasing. As stated by several interlocutors, the EU “wanted to be seen as a player and not just a payer.” These efforts were echoed on the UN side, which appreciated the important financial contribution of the EU and recognised the EU as an important ally in the pursuit

³³ For more details also refer to Thijssen S., Bossuyt, J., Desmidt, S. 2019. Sexual and reproductive health and rights: Opportunities in EU external action beyond 2020. Discussion Paper 254; Davies, S.E. & True, J. 2019. Pitfalls, Policy, and Promise of the UN’s approach to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and the New Resolution 2467.

³⁴ This was a recurrent concern amongst interviewed EU MS but was also highlighted by consulted think tanks and academia as a shortcoming.

³⁵ This has resulted in calls to push for the possibility for the EU to speak in Board meetings of UN entities, including by upgrading the legal status of the EU in UN governing bodies. However, in FAO, where the EU already has full membership status, EU’s visibility, influence, and EU collective leverage were limited, as shown in the election of the last FAO Director General.

³⁶ This was the case for instance in the World Health Assembly (WHA), the governing body of WHO. In the WHA, there was a growing number of EU-sponsored and co-sponsored Decisions and Resolutions as well as Joint Statements on behalf of the EU and its MS. The 72nd WHA of 2019 saw a historical first joint statement with the Africa group for instance. In 2020, the EU tabled the Resolution on COVID-19 response, which was adopted by consensus at the 73rd WHA with a record number of 145 co-sponsors. Building bridges was also key in the context of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the Global Compact for Migration. For more examples, please refer to Volume II, JC 1.4.

³⁷ Blavoukos, S. & Bourantonis, D. (Eds.). 2017. The EU in UN politics: Actors, processes, and performances. Palgrave Studies in European Union Politics.

³⁸ The 2021 Joint Communication on strengthening the EU’s contribution to rules-based multilateralism provides strategic guidelines for action in this area but it remains to be seen how these will be operationalised.

³⁹ According to interviews with multilateral EUDs.

of its agenda given the high degree of convergence of development policies and priorities at the global level.

In this context, the EU made significant efforts to strengthen policy and political dialogue. Starting in 2020, it took steps to enhance the strategic dialogue with individual UN entities where such dialogue was not regular, such as in the case of UNICEF, UNDP, and FAO.⁴⁰ The EU also gave increased attention to political dialogue not only from an agency angle but from the whole of the UN. This led notably to the organisation of an EU-UN retreat involving the President of the Commission and the UN Secretary General in 2022.

(iv) The fact that the EU was an important funder also leveraged its capacity to influence, although not to its full potential. As mentioned in section 3.2, the EU was over the period 2014-2020 the fourth largest funder to the UN (accounting for 6%), and when including EU MS, the largest funder (accounting for 42%). This financial weight provided the EU with visibility and strategic leverage, setting the ground for increased dialogue and engagement with the UN. The link between influence and funding as one factor of influence – within the limits of the mandate and the neutrality of the UN – was regularly underlined by EU and UN representatives during interviews. Also, most survey respondents (90%) that expressed themselves on the matter indicated that at least to some extent, the EU's financial capacity enhanced the EU's influence on the UN policy agenda. Similarly, 88% of UN respondents agreed that EU financial support leveraged policy influence. The EU Council Conclusions of July 2021 noted in this respect that “the EU and its MS are important players in setting the multilateral agenda and as the largest financial contributor to the UN system.”

The EU was however not always able to strategically leverage this magnitude of funding in the context of its dialogue and negotiations in the UN. The lack of aggregate information from the field was an obstacle in this sense. EU representatives at UN HQs explained they had limited knowledge of EU funding and cooperation with the UN in the field, and that there was no system to aggregate analytical information from Delegations in partner countries on EU-funded projects.⁴¹ According to them, such information would be an asset to reflect commitments in the field, and to facilitate leveraging on EU funding in diplomacy efforts. The fragmentation of funding across services and the project-by-project approach of the Commission also constrained the capacity for strategic leveraging of funding.

4.2.2 *Influence at the country/ operational level*

The influence of the EU at country level took place primarily through the projects it financed and the related dialogues, within the respective mandates of the two organisations. By providing specific funding, the EU promoted projects that underpinned its global agenda and engaged in dialogue with the UN in donor coordination fora. This concerned a wide range of fields and policies.

Despite exceptions, the EU strategic influence at the UN country programming level was more limited. There was little strategic engagement with the UN at this level. Mutual consultations on EU and UN strategic documents and plans (including MIP/NIPs, the UNSDCF, and EU MS programmes), to promote alignment, as well as joint analyses only took place in a few countries, mostly towards the end of the evaluation period. Interviewees highlighted that most in-country dialogue with the UN remained linked to operational rather than strategic aspects. This was reflected in what interviewees described as the tendency of the UN staff at country level to describe the EU as a donor first, and of EU staff to consider the UN as an implementer, rather than a strategic partner. As highlighted by

⁴⁰ For instance, the last strategic dialogue.

⁴¹ Usage of the EU Statistical Dashboard amongst EU staff at EUDs in UN HQs was limited. Concurrently, while the EU Statistical Dashboard could provide a financial overview of the cooperation, a qualitative analysis of the cooperation and of its linkages to EU priorities was lacking. Some relevant analysis was conducted in the context of the EAMRs and since 2019 with the introduction of the EXCO fiches.

interviewees there was a certain disconnect between the EU-UN engagement at policy / HQ level and on the ground.⁴²

The UN development system reform and notably the presence of the UNRCs offered opportunities in terms of a more strategic collaboration. Towards the end of the evaluation period, there were examples of countries where the EU and UN started collaborating more strategically, under the leadership of the UNRC.⁴³ For instance, in Kenya a retreat was organised with the participation of the UNRC, EUD, representatives from EU MS, and the government of Kenya to explore ways to combine efforts to best support the country's actions to implement the SDGs. In the Western Balkans and Neighbourhood countries, where the EU accession and association agreement demands drove the national reform agendas, thereby also setting the policy framework for the UN, some UNRCs were working with EUDs to establish strategic partnerships to define their joint support for the reform processes. However, in most cases during the evaluation period,⁴⁴ dialogues between the EUDs and UNRC, notably at country programming stage, remained limited (see also section 4.5). The potential for such strategic dialogue depended on a series of factors, such as the ability of the UN to address the fragmentation and internal competition between its different entities.

The joint leveraging between the EU and the EU MS at country level remained limited. Indeed, cooperation and coordination with EU MS at the country level remained a challenge. While the EU and EU MS met regularly at Head of Mission level and there was joint programming in some countries, Kenya was the only example during the evaluation period, of a separate EU and EU MS dialogue with the UN. EU and EU MS coordination with UN generally took place within the overall aid coordination structure and in contexts of Multi-Partner Trust Funds. The evaluation did not find examples of a Team Europe approach to cooperating with the UN.

4.2.3 *Visibility*

Visibility is important for the EU. The EU indeed considers that ensuring proper visibility of its operations “helps raise awareness of the external policies and actions of the Union in its role as a global player and provides accountability and transparency on the use of EU funds to taxpayers and the citizens of partner countries”⁴⁵. The EU legal requirements in terms of visibility are defined in the FAFA. During the evaluation period, additional requirements and good practices were presented in the Commission-UN Joint Action Plan on Visibility, the subsequent 2014 Visibility Guidelines for EU-UN action in the field, and the 2018 Communication and Visibility Requirements for EU External Actions.⁴⁶

We address visibility here first at the country/operational level of the EU-UN cooperation; then at the global/policy level.

Visibility of the EU-UN cooperation at country/ operational level

At the operational level, the question of visibility was a matter of concern and contention between the EU and the UN over the evaluation period. **The UN did not systematically comply with EU visibility**

⁴² EU survey respondents agreed in general that the EU influenced the UN agenda both at a global and at country level, but agreement was lower at the country level (with 91% as compared to 70% of the respondents, respectively).

⁴³ In this context, there were efforts to strengthen coordination through the political initiative for “A Renewed partnership in Development” between the EU and UN. This initiative was initiated by the Commission and aimed at fostering common policy approaches in support for the SDG implementation, joint policy dialogues and consultations with partner countries to identify opportunities for collaboration and possible areas of support including synergies between EU programming and UNDAFs. There were examples of follow-up, but these were limited, with Kenya being a notable exception.

⁴⁴ After the evaluation period, the EU and the UN co-organised several regional seminars gathering staff from EUDs and the UN to exchange on good practices and challenges in their cooperation. These led to joint guidance to strengthen the EU-UN country cooperation for the realisation of the SDGs, shared with UN teams and EU delegations on the ground on 13 July 2023.

⁴⁵ European Commission (2018). Communication and Visibility Requirements for EU External Actions –2018.

⁴⁶ The Joint EU-UN visibility guidelines are being revised, to consider the strategic approaches to communication in the UN and the EU, and the EU's communication and visibility guidelines of July 2022.

requirements and guidelines, despite notable improvements towards the end of the evaluation period:

- Compliance with the legal requirements of the FAFA: The FAFA has clear requirements in terms of so-called static visibility (emblem, funding statement). As an example, publicity material, reports, and similar document should acknowledge that the action was carried out “with funding by the European Union” and display the European Union logo at an appropriate size. Interviewees from EUDs explained that such compliance was often problematic but acknowledged that this had improved over the years. The case studies revealed that in most cases compliance was partial and varied across countries.⁴⁷ As an example, for UHC-P⁴⁸, the EU logo could not be found in several publications on the internet. In Latin America and the Eastern Mediterranean, the training packages used also did not include the logo, but there was good compliance in other regions. 10 of the 29 EU survey respondents having specifically commented on visibility issues referred to the lack of compliance with FAFA requirements.⁴⁹
- Compliance with EU visibility guidelines: The EU guidelines for visibility in external action⁵⁰ provided instructions for a more dynamic approach to communication beyond static visibility requirements. They covered elements such as the organisation of events, information campaigns, press conferences, and visits. They required EU project officers to be involved in all communication activities related to EU funded projects. EU staff identified this dynamic approach as key for promoting a wider visibility for the EU and the EU-UN partnership. In fact, several of them acknowledged during interviews that while compliance with logos was crucial, it was not sufficient to promote EU visibility. Overall, most EUDs expressed dissatisfaction with the level of UN compliance with these visibility guidelines. The issue was also highlighted at High-level meetings between the EU and the UN. EUD staff stressed the need for the UN side to increase information-sharing, regular check-ins, and invitations to events organised by the RC and UN entities concerning EU-funded projects. Some interviewees, but also EU respondents to the survey explained that the EU tended to be presented in UN communication activities solely as a donor and that its role in the design and launch of projects was not duly acknowledged. They also mentioned that EU initiated projects or joint projects were in some cases presented as UN projects.⁵¹ Some evidence of improvement was observed towards the end of the evaluation period: an analysis of monitoring reports (ROM) completed over the period 2019-2020 showed that 92% of 86 projects reviewed received a green light in terms of compliance with visibility requirements.⁵²

EUDs played an important role in terms of visibility. The case studies showed that high-levels of prioritisation of visibility by EUDs and availability of staff for visibility-related tasks (for instance for press conferences, presence in the field, etc.) contributed to visibility. EUD staff encouraged the UN to comply with visibility requirements and were in several cases proactive in ensuring the EU Head of Delegation (HoD) was invited to speak at events and for project visits. However, they explained that such efforts should not be required to ensure compliance and were challenging to undertake, especially in contexts of limited human resources.

⁴⁷ Partial compliance was observed in eight of the 12 project-based case studies conducted in the context of this evaluation.

⁴⁸ The UHC-P (Universal Health Coverage Partnership) was created in 2011 by WHO, the EU, and Luxembourg. It aimed at strengthening countries' health systems, by supporting the health systems building blocks and building countries' capacities for the development and implementation of National Health Policies, Strategies and Plans.

⁴⁹ COVAX was the most cited example. COVAX was co-led by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Gavi and the World Health Organization (WHO), alongside key delivery partner UNICEF. It aimed to accelerate the development and manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines, and to guarantee fair and equitable access for every country in the world.

⁵⁰ This is the case for both the 2014 Joint Visibility Guidelines for EC-UN Actions in the field, and the 2018 Communication and Visibility Requirements for EU External Actions.

⁵¹ In the case of multi-donor projects some interviewees also mentioned they did not receive visibility commensurate to their level of funding. They were provided with the same level of visibility as other donors even when they contributed most of the funding.

⁵² This type of ROM analysis is only available as of 2019, not for the period before, so that there is no basis for comparison.

On the UN side, some challenges were reported in ensuring compliance:

- Visibility in the case of multi-donor actions was described as challenging. This included practical problems, such as the number of logos to be displayed on a single document. Beyond practical challenges, issues arose where visibility demands from the EU led to increased visibility demands from other donors. On such occasions, the UN tried to treat all contributors equally, which however resulted in dissatisfaction for the EU which was often the biggest donor. Interviewees also highlighted that EU visibility requirements were not always compatible with the desire for a common approach across EU MS, resulting in competition. UN as well as some EU interlocutors provided examples where EU MS were not satisfied that only the EUD was invited for policy meetings or launching of initiatives, whereas both the EU and one or more EU MS were donors.
- Some UN staff stated that EU guidelines on visibility were not sufficiently clear. In this context, they stressed the need to negotiate new joint guidelines on visibility and communication activities with the Commission.⁵³
- In specific contexts, some concerns were raised about the fact that EU visibility requirements challenged UN legitimacy and impact. In the surveys conducted, 29% of UN staff found EU visibility requirements to challenge UN legitimacy, while only 5% of EU respondents did so⁵⁴. Overall, the EU recognised that certain context-specific situations required less EU visibility to respect the legitimacy of the UN as a neutral stakeholder and protect stakeholders. This recognition was embedded in the 2018 revision of the FAFA.

Notwithstanding these issues, the EU also received good visibility through its cooperation with the UN, benefitting from the legitimacy of UN entities, their convening power, and specifically strong access to political authorities. In the survey, 70% of EU staff agreed that EU-UN cooperation at country and regional level enhanced the EU political visibility and clout vis-à-vis its partners (including host governments)⁵⁵. The case studies and interviews with beneficiary national authorities also confirmed this.⁵⁶ Agreement was lower in terms of visibility vis-à-vis the general public (58%)⁵⁷.

Visibility of the EU-UN cooperation at the global/policy level

At a global level, the EU cooperation with the UN favoured the visibility of the EU. This was underlined by different sources. Amongst EU staff responding to the survey, 74% agreed that EU-UN cooperation at the global level (e.g., COPs, UNGA, etc.) enhanced EU political visibility and clout vis-à-vis its partners, and 61% that it increased visibility vis-à-vis the general public⁵⁸. Interviews with UN staff and UN MS representatives in NY also confirmed this. They reported being increasingly aware of the contribution of the EU through the UN, on several issues including the Digital Agenda, the 2030 Agenda, and on biodiversity issues. This was associated with a more proactive EU role in the different UN bodies, organs, and conventions as well as with strengthened bilateral political and policy dialogue with the UN. The big data analysis⁵⁹ demonstrated high-levels of media coverage of the EU-UN cooperation, with most reporting focusing on the cooperation at the global level. It also revealed that

⁵³ At the time of the publication of this report negotiations on updated guidelines were ongoing.

⁵⁴ Among EU staff 95% disagreed that EU visibility requirements undermine the UN legitimacy and credibility, half of them strongly disagreed. Among UN staff, 71% disagreed, including 10% that strongly disagreed with the statement.

⁵⁵ The remaining 30% disagreed, with 9% strongly disagreeing.

⁵⁶ This was the case for five of the 12 project-based case studies conducted in the context of this evaluation. For instance, EU support to the Cambodia Climate Change Alliance enabled the EU to engage in policy dialogue with the national authorities and provided it with visibility among them. Similarly, the EU contribution to WeEmpower Asia was well known by national stakeholders which facilitated policy dialogue. In Indonesia, for instance, the Minister of Finance publicly acknowledged the contribution of the EU to the advancement of Women Empowerment Principles in the country.

⁵⁷ The remaining 42% disagreed, with 14% strongly disagreeing.

⁵⁸ For EU visibility and clout vis-à-vis its partners, the remaining 26% disagreed, with nearly 8% strongly disagreeing. For the EU visibility vis-à-vis the general public, the remaining 39% disagreed, with 12% strongly disagreeing.

⁵⁹ The detailed findings of the big data analysis are presented in Volume IV, Annex 7.

the EU was increasingly acknowledged as the decision-maker in EU-UN interactions.⁶⁰ However, the sentiment analysis⁶¹ revealed there was a growing polarisation in the way the cooperation was perceived: while positive reporting of the partnership increased over the evaluation period, the increase in negative reporting was even larger. The cooperation on refugee crises and asylum-seeking issues concentrated the largest media attention and was also the most negatively perceived.

The pursuit of joint communication activities and of joint policy initiatives were identified as good practices by both EU and UN interviewed staff for strengthening EU visibility at the global level. Also, the surveys underlined the importance of joint activities in this respect: 81% of EU staff agreed that joint EU-UN communication activities contributed to EU-UN cooperation being perceived positively by stakeholders globally, and 79% agreed that joint EU-UN policy initiatives were important for EU visibility⁶².

4.3 Key results of the EU-UN cooperation in five thematic priority areas

This section examines results obtained through the EU-UN cooperation. It first provides an overview of the overall appreciation of effectiveness, and then provides an overview of the type of results obtained in the five thematic priority areas.

4.3.1 Overall effectiveness of EU-UN cooperation

Overall, several sources indicate a rather positive appreciation of the results of the EU-UN cooperation, notably in terms of partner country policy and strategy developments.

- The majority of EU and UN **survey respondents** were rather positive about EU-UN cooperation contribution to overall results, even if a non-negligible number of respondents were also less positive (see Figure 10). They highlighted the strengthening of partner countries' institutional knowledge and capacity and their policy and strategy development. On improved service delivery, views were more negative.
- The **ROM analysis**⁶³ shows that EU-funded UN interventions scored overall well for the achievement of outputs and very well for influencing partners' policies and interventions:
- The quantitative analysis of scores from 2586 EU ROM reports, of which 236 relate to interventions implemented by UN entities, shows that 70% of UN-related reports received a score ("green") on the criterion of "outputs being achieved with the expected quality". This is higher than the 59% obtained overall by interventions implemented by non-UN international organisations partners.⁶⁴
- For the criterion "intervention influencing effectively the partners' relevant policy and intervention," green scores amounted to 83% for interventions implemented by UN entities, which is also higher than the 75% for those by non-UN partners.
- For outcomes, the results were lower (44% of green scores), even if still slightly better than for non-UN partners. A more qualitative analysis on a random selection of 20 ROM reports

⁶⁰ Between 2015 and 2016, most of the reports covering EU-UN interactions presented the UN as the main decision-maker. This trend was reversed starting from 2017. In recent years, the share of reports presenting the EU as a decision-maker systematically increased and the gap with reports presenting the UN as a decision maker widened.

⁶¹ The sentiment analysis was conducted in the context of the big data analysis. Its findings are also presented in detail in Volume IV, Annex 7.

⁶² Regarding the contribution of communication activities to the positive perception of the cooperation, the remaining 29% disagreed, with more than 7% strongly disagreeing. Regarding the contribution of policy initiatives to EU visibility, the remaining 21% disagreed, with almost 7% strongly disagreeing.

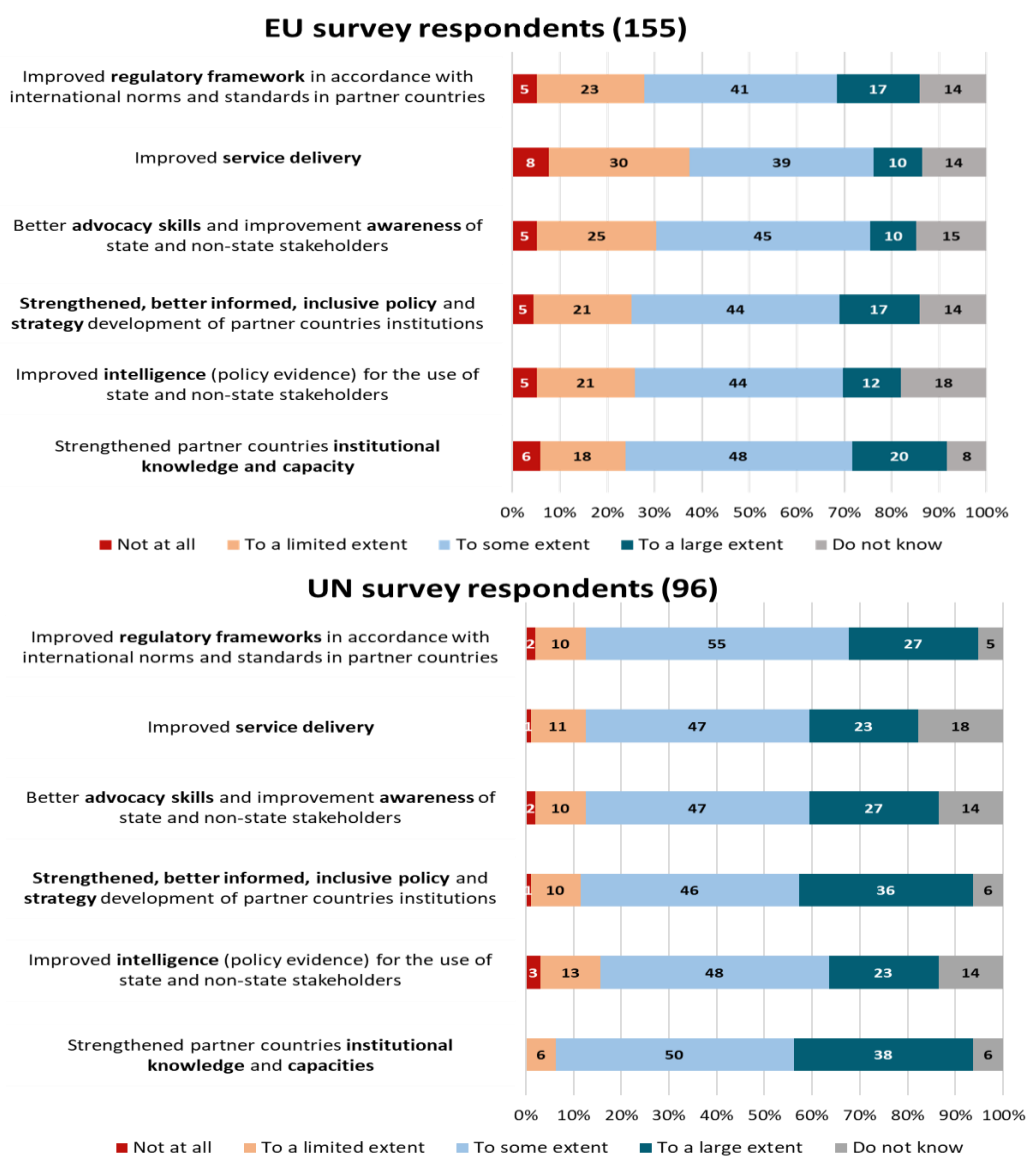
⁶³ For details see the full ROM analysis provided in Annex 11 in Volume III.

⁶⁴ This relates to implementing partners other than UN entities, which are classified under code 27 "International Organisations" by the European Commission under the Contract Type of Implementing Partner. In this category belong for instance: the WB, IMF, IFC, Asia Development Bank, EBRD, African Union, Organization of American States, IFRC, etc. International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) are included in this category. Local NGOs are not included in this category, nor other types of implementing partners such as public bodies.

identifies notably design issues, in several interventions, with for instance unrealistic assumptions or expectations on outcomes (levels). Another factor identified, in a few instances, was the difficulty faced by the UN in coordinating partners.

- The **case studies** show that EU-UN cooperation advanced the achievement of EU policy and political priorities in each of the five thematic priority areas. They illustrate results achieved in each of them (see details in Figure 10.).

Figure 10. Surveys responses on effectiveness by types of results



4.3.2 Results by priority area

Analysis on results is presented in the following order for the five thematic priority areas: (i) Green Deal; (ii) Transition to a new digital era; (iii) Sustainable economic, human and social development; (iv) Peace, security, and governance, including democracy, rule of law, human rights; and (v) Migration and forced displacement.

4.3.2.1 Green Deal

The 2018 joint EU-UN communique (27 September 2018) outlined the following Green Deal **priorities** for the EU-UN partnership under the heading “*Promoting climate action and implementation through development cooperation*”: low-carbon and circular economy, disaster risk reduction, resilience,

gender-responsive transformation and adaptation, climate-smart agriculture, renewable energy, water, nature-based solutions, natural resource management, biodiversity, and ecosystems.

Green Deal-related EU **funding** through the UN represented EUR 1.2 billion over the evaluation period (8% of the total).

The EU supported a range of UN entities that have a role and mandate related to the Green Deal (environment and climate change), such as the UNEP, UNDP, FAO, and UNIDO. It also supported secretariats for various multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) such as those for the three Rio Conventions: the UN Framework Convention on Climate change (UNFCCC); the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD); and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and for other global and regional agreements, in relation to biodiversity, chemicals, and waste. The EU was a party to several MEAs.

UN partners were effective in delivering capacity development and policy improvements. According to ROM analysis and evaluations of cases reviewed outputs were mostly in line with expectations. Moreover, 80 to 90% of EU survey respondents expressing an opinion⁶⁵ agreed, or strongly agreed, that the EU-UN cooperation contributed to strengthening capacities, process and coordinated actions promoting environmental sustainability, reduced greenhouse gas emission and enhanced climate resilience. This was the case for the regional and country level, but agreement was the strongest for the contribution at the global level (90%). EU-UN cooperation contributed to the development and implementation of policies, strategies and programmes, technical and institutional capacity development and cross-sectoral coordination and cooperation. This included for instance the development of national plans and the setting up of appropriate institutional frameworks for climate action.⁶⁶ Results were also achieved vis-à-vis increasing capacities for engagement at the global policy level, including multilateral environmental agreement negotiations. The interventions examined focused on policy and institutional capacity. Hence, impacts, for example, in terms of reduced emissions or environmental conservation, were primarily indirect and expected to be derived from improved policy frameworks, governance and service delivery.

The EU support strengthened UN engagement and delivery vis-à-vis the Green Deal, with a high degree of continuity and reliability in the support, a proactive engagement in technical discussions, and facilitation of donor coordination. The EU also facilitated donor coordination, including in a lead role with EU MS, both at the level of UN agency governance and at intervention level, thereby contributing to ensuring consistent messaging to UN entities on the overall direction.

4.3.2.2 Transition to a new digital era

Digitalisation has been a **key component of the EU agenda** for many years. The explosion of ICTs in the last two decades led the Commission to focus on the opportunities of digital technologies and data to foster economic development, decrease inequalities and transform the provision of services. The EU issued several documents on its approach to digitalisation, such as the Commission 2017 Staff Working Document “Digital4Development: mainstreaming digital technologies and services into EU Development Policy”⁶⁷ and in 2020 the Commission’s strategy “Shaping Europe’s digital future”. This

⁶⁵ A non negligible share of respondents (30 to 43%) stated they did not know whether such contributions took place.

⁶⁶ As an example, the “Poverty & Environment Initiative (PEI) / Poverty & Environment Action (PEA) provided partner countries (in Asia, Africa, and Latin America) with TA to integrate poverty/environment concerns into policies and strategies. Most supported countries integrated poverty/environment-related objectives into policies and strategic plans. The EU was one of the biggest donors, contributing to 8% of the budget. Other EU MS also contributed. Similarly, the United Nations Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (UN-REDD) contributed to the integration of forest conservation and reduced emissions of greenhouse gases from deforestation in national policy frameworks and policies of half the benefitting countries. It also helped establishing data collection and monitoring systems and helped countries to comply with international standards. The EU provided 15% of the budget between 2013 and 2020.

⁶⁷ SWD (2017) 157 final. The strategic reorientation of the EU’s foreign relations builds on the following four priority areas: (i) access to open, affordable, and secure broadband connectivity and digital infrastructure, including the necessary regulatory

aims to put Europe in a ‘position of trendsetter in the global debate’ while ensuring that digital transition is anchored in a human-centred approach.

The EU’s expectations for its **partnership with the UN with respect to digitalisation** should be seen in this context. EU (Different DGs) and EEAS have been active members of the process of the UN Secretary-General Roadmap for Digital Cooperation, and regularly take part in thematic roundtables that follow up the publication of the report to implement its recommendations. The UN Tech Envoy Office acts as Secretariat for these roundtables. In December 2020, the EU launched the Digital for Development (D4D) Hub aimed at shaping a new era for global digital cooperation. Specifically, the D4D Hub is designed to be a multi-stakeholder platform to promote human-centric digital transformation in partner countries and will therefore play a key role in how the EU partnership with the UN evolves in the years to come.

The FAO, UNDP, UNICEF and ILO received the largest amount of **EU funding** for digital-related projects between 2014-2020, mainly focused on e-services. Most projects implemented by these entities have digitalisation as a feature but not as their primary objective.

At a global level, evidence collected shows that the EU was particularly influential in global agendas and priorities related to digital regulation. Indeed, the EU:

- Was a key agent in the development of the Secretary-General’s Roadmap on Digital Cooperation, currently the most relevant UN global policy document in the field of digitalisation;
- Played a significant role in the development of UNESCO’s Recommendations on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence;
- Did set a benchmark for the development of data protection policies and guidelines through its General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR);
- Made significant policy and political efforts to advance principles and standards for cybersecurity.

Evidence on the extent to which this trickled down to countries and regions is limited. Moreover, available data on project funding related to ‘governance, policy and regulatory frameworks’ shows that this area only received a limited part out of external aid between 2014-2020⁶⁸.

Overall, the EU had a proactive presence and participation driven by a human-centred approach to digitalisation at the level of UN governing bodies and strengthened the European positioning on key topics. Additionally, it acted as advisor and consolidated joint approaches to strengthen the European positioning on key topics. Overall, the EU is reported to have coordinated well with EU Member States, following a coherent approach to strategic digital topics and having similar priorities for D4D projects in partner countries.

4.3.2.3 Sustainable economic, human and social development

This ‘thematic priority area’ covers a vast span of areas, activities and UN entities with which the EU is cooperating. Overall, the largest UN entity recipients of EU funding in this area are UNICEF for children’s rights, health and education, FAO for productive sectors, UNDP for human, social and economic development, ITC for trade and private sector development, UNOPS for social infrastructure,

framework, (ii) digital literacy and digital skills, (iii) digital for growth, entrepreneurship, and job creation; and (iv) digital technologies as an enabler. It is believed that this will contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while maximising the uptake of digitalisation and decreasing the digital divide both between and within countries.

⁶⁸ Nonetheless, the case studies suggest that the Policy and Regulation Initiative for Digital Africa (PRIDA) project has the potential of laying the foundations for developing policies, standards, and technical agreements of spectrum management across Africa. On the other hand, the Social Media 4 Peace (SM4P) project is expected to result in evidence for the formulation of policy related to digital tools, disinformation, and hate-speech in the future.

and WHO for health, followed by WFP and ILO. Total funding for ‘economic, human, and social development’ amounts to EUR 3.8 billion over 2014-2020, i.e., 41% of EU-UN funding.⁶⁹

Evidence collected in this evaluation shows the following examples of EU-UN cooperation contributions to achievements in this area:

- **There is evidence of EU-UN cooperation contributing to systems development with improved policy formulation** and, in some instances, changes to regulatory frameworks and improved planning in this area. The Joint SDG Fund supported innovative approaches to social protection, and changes to policy frameworks that aimed at strengthening the enabling environment for private sector funding for the SDGs at country level. The support channelled through WHO, UNESCO, and UNICEF contributed to systems development through strengthened capacity for policy formulation and planning capacity within the respective sectors.
- The EU financial support to UN entities with clear mandates and strong technical expertise in the areas of **health and education** systems was important for strengthening these in low-income countries. The ROM analysis found that most projects in these areas performed well in terms of the ability to influence the partners’ policies and interventions, with 85% receiving a positive score. As an example, the EU and WHO developed the Universal Health Coverage Partnership (UHC-P), a major programme supporting about 119 countries in strengthening domestic universal health coverage, which is reported to produce good results overall and is promoting international cooperation on health systems. An example at country level concerns EU-UNICEF support to the education sector in Cambodia, which contributed to developing policies and actions of the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport’ (MoEYS), including a Capacity Development Master Plan (CDMP) 2020-2024; a Joint Education Needs Assessment; the Cambodia Education Response Plan to COVID-19; and a Human Resources Management Information System (HRMIS) Master Plan 2020-2023, and other elements.
- In terms of **social protection**, the EU collaborated with several UN entities providing cash to refugees from the Syrian crisis. In so doing, the EU supported almost half a million refugees, meeting urgent and short-term needs (see also the thematic section below on Migration).
- The EU-UN cooperation was, to a certain extent, conducive to strengthening gender equality and female empowerment across the board. The majority of EU and UN staff surveyed (85% to 95%) had positive views on EU-UN cooperation strengthening gender equality as a cross-cutting issue. The ROM analysis mitigates, to a certain extent, this view as it revealed that 25% of projects had difficulties in this respect. This is, however, still better than the rate of 35% reached by non-UN international organisations (35%).

4.3.2.4 Peace, security, and governance, including democracy, rule of law, human rights

The EU has a long and dynamic relationship with the UN on peace, security, and governance. This includes the promotion of multilateral norms and policies; support to political and peace processes; and the implementation of programmes and projects in these areas. This relationship is reflected in a series of key EU-UN partnership documents.⁷⁰

Although the EU-UN operational partnership on peace and security began earlier, the EU-UN

⁶⁹ Human development is the priority area receiving nearly 60% of this funding with nearly 30% for education, 11% for health, and social protection, population, and water and sanitation receiving the rest. The remaining 40% of the funding for this area goes primarily to FAO and IFAD for strengthening the productive sectors (nearly 25% of EU funding) whereas ILO and ITC receive funding from the EU for improved economic governance.

⁷⁰ Joint Action Plan to enhance EU CSDP support to UN peacekeeping (2012-2014); Priorities to strengthen UN-EU strategic partnership on peacekeeping and crisis management (2015-2018); Council Conclusions on UN-EU strategic partnership on peace operations and crisis management priorities for 2019-2021 (2018); Joint UN-EU Press Statement on reinforcing the UN-EU strategic partnership on peace operations and crisis management (2018); Priorities to reinforce the UN-EU strategic partnership on peace operations and crisis management (2019-2021); EU-UN Framework Agreement on Mutual Support (2020); Annual Council Conclusions on EU priorities in UN human rights for 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021.

strategic partnership started around 2012. Its focus was on crisis management and exploring complementarities between EU CSDP missions and operations and UN peacekeeping operations, by maintaining a regular high-level dialogue through the EU-UN steering committee on crisis management. The EU-UN strategic partnership was further deepened with a Joint Action Plan to enhance EU CSDP support to UN peacekeeping (2012-2014), and priorities to strengthen UN-EU strategic partnership on peacekeeping and crisis management (2015-2018). In 2018, the EU and UN agreed to strengthen the use of conflict prevention, transitions and the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda within the context of cooperation between EU and UN missions and operations. The EU's role in the Peacebuilding Commission and the close Partnership with the UNPBF that started in 2019 grew further in 2020, following the 2020 Peacebuilding Architecture Review, as the EU works to enhance the advisory role of the UN Peacebuilding Commission to the United Nations Security Council as well as its own engagement with this body.

The EU-UN strategic partnership on governance (democracy, human rights, and justice and the rule of law) is not as clearly defined as for peace and security, although EU priorities for human rights in UN fora are clearly defined on an annual basis. On these issues, UNDP is a key partner, particularly in the field of international electoral assistance with the signature of the Electoral Assistance Guidelines in 2006. They established the EC-UNDP Joint Task Force on Electoral Assistance to provide technical assistance in the field of elections.

The EU works with the UN Secretariat and with a range of UN entities having a mandate related to governance (democracy, human rights, and justice and the rule of law) and peace and security, including notably women, peace and security.⁷¹

Several sources indicate that the EU-UN cooperation generated results in this field.

Overall, EU survey respondents agreed, or strongly agreed, that the EU-UN cooperation: Strengthened human rights and/or human rights-based approaches at the global (87%) or at the country level (86%); improved democratisation and inclusive decision-making at the global level (73%) or the country level (75%); and Strengthened capacities for peaceful resolution of conflicts at the global (75%) or the country level (76%).

The case studies exemplify how EU-UN external action materialised on the ground and with which effects.

- The integrity of **elections**, as measured by the Ibrahim Index on African Governance (IIAG), improved in most of the 25 countries where the Joint Task Force intervened during the period 2010-2019. The EU was the main donor in electoral assistance in many of these countries, and EU-UN cooperation was the main conduit for electoral assistance.
- On **access to justice**, positive effects have often been recorded for minors. However, the linkages between access to justice and more systemic justice/security system reform remained insufficient in most projects reviewed. Furthermore, limited government ownership of these projects often constituted the main hurdle to achieving results.

⁷¹ Firstly, in terms of dialogue, the Council is in charge of defining the strategic priorities for the EU at the UNGA and UN human rights fora. To this end, it adopts conclusions once a year setting the main lines of action for the EU. The EU-UN Steering Committee on Crisis Management meets twice per year, with ongoing working-level interactions between missions and operations, and from headquarters to headquarters. There is also a regular EU-UN conflict prevention and mediation dialogue and an EU-UN Leaders' Dialogue on Counterterrorism, as well as a recently established EU-UN exchange on climate-security. Secondly, there are several joint assessments (e.g., Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessments); coordinated political and policy dialogues at headquarters and country level; coordinated political and policy dialogues with regional organisations; coordinated monitoring and reporting initiatives e.g., on human rights; coordination of advocacy; and sometimes joint guidelines. Thirdly, in terms of funding for programmes and projects in peace, security and governance, the main UN entities with which the EU works are, in decreasing order of funding received: UNDP, IOM, UNOPS (all three above EUR 300 million for 2014-2020); UNODC and UNICEF (both above EUR 100 million); OHCHR, UNDCF, UN Women and UNO (all four above EUR 50 million); Other entities, departments, and offices, receiving less than EUR 50 million, are ILO, UN Habitat, UNHCR, UNICRI, UNESCO, UN DPPA, UNFPA, UNOCT, UNOG, OPCW, WFP, FAO, UNODA and ECLAC.

- In **conflict-affected situations**, there are several examples of results. In Mali, the temporary HQ in Bamako and the G5 Sahel Defence College became operational, and the G5 Sahel Joint Force conducted 11 major operations between 2017 and early 2021. In Afghanistan, LOTFA played a key role in paying the salaries of 99% of all police and corrections staff between 2002 and 2021. However, the EU-UN cooperation projects did not impact the overall stabilisation goal. In Mali, the peace process stalled for reasons outside the reach of cooperation projects. The 2014-2020 period was one of continued deterioration, with fatalities from political violence increasing and two coups in 2020 and 2021.

4.3.2.5 Migration and forced displacement

The **EU Agenda on Migration** from 2015 guided the EU's approach in this field. It aimed to address immediate challenges and equip the EU with the tools to better manage migration in the medium- and long-term in the areas of irregular migration, borders, asylum and legal migration. The Commission proposed a **New Pact on Migration and Asylum** in September 2020. The New Pact foresees a fresh start on migration issues while consolidating the EU's comprehensive and partnership-based approach. In particular, the Pact foresees strengthened partnerships with third countries, as well as at regional level and with international organisations.

EU-UN cooperation in the field of migration and forced displacement is **funded** by development aid (EUR 3.2 billion), and humanitarian aid (EUR 5.5 billion). Figures concern the period 2014-2020 (see inventory). The biggest recipients of development funding are IOM (EUR 1 billion); UNHCR (EUR 500 million) and UNDP (EUR 300 million).

The EU collaborates in this field with the **IOM**⁷², **UNHCR**, and other entities such as **UNDP**, **UNODC**, **UNICEF**, and **UNFPA**. Examples of such cooperation are the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migration Protection and Reintegration or the EU and UNHCR partnership for the development and implementation of policies on forced displacement, and for people in need of international protection.

EU-UN cooperation contributed to the protection of forcibly displaced persons and migrants worldwide, to the promotion of well-managed migration and forced displacement and support to solidarity and responsibility sharing at global level. The EU did so primarily by contributing to the establishment of international agreements and platforms, which in turn led to policy developments but also contributed to, for instance, the delivery in response to basic urgent needs.

For example, the EU supported the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD), a small secretariat shared between UNHCR and IOM, which had a significant role in policy development and awareness-raising on the rights of people displaced by disasters across borders.

The EU also supported actively, financially and politically, the UN Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). This intergovernmental agreement acts as the basis for a more integrated cooperation on migration management. While the EU actively supported it, it could not align all EU MS, with nine of them not endorsing it.

The EU also actively collaborated with UN entities in the context of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries, notably for the implementation of the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis (EUTF Madad) and of the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRiT), and in supporting UNRWA for Palestinian refugees from Syria (through Madad). This resulted in the delivery in response to basic urgent needs and services, and completing support provided by hosting countries, albeit with

⁷² The IOM serves as Coordinator and Secretariat of the UN Migration Network established by the Global Compact on Migration in 2018. It has been a close institutional partner of the Global Forum on Migration and Development established by the UN High Dialogue on Migration and Development in 2006. IOM is also a key partner for the EU in multilateral cooperation on migration and works to link the migration agenda to other relevant areas, including health, education, employment, peacebuilding and the broader 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

limitations. The EU was strongly involved in high-level policy dialogue and had a significant leverage thanks to its significant funding contribution (both from EU and from EU MS).

4.4 EU-UN cooperation for efficient delivery

This section presents the evaluation's main findings on the adequacy of the EU-UN cooperation's overall legal, financial, administrative, and contractual framework, for contributing to efficient delivery of EU support.

Over the years the Commission has put in place implementation arrangements and cooperation mechanisms providing an overall legal, financial, administrative, and contractual framework for its cooperation with the UN. These aimed at facilitating the management of EU-funded interventions by UN entities, while offering safeguards to the EU for ensuring it could meet its own obligations on management of EU funds set out notably in the EU Treaty and EU Financial Regulations. The framework consisted primarily of the following:

- **FAFA:** The EU signed with the UN in 2003 a 'Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement' (FAFA), as a framework to enhance their cooperation, which determines the operational working arrangements for the cooperation of the two organisations. It concerns UN entities which have adhered to it, and have chosen to work under the 'indirect management mode' (more below). It provides for principles, and safeguards aiming at ensuring compliance notably with (i) the Treaty on EU and the successive EU budget's Financial Regulations, and (ii) the constituent frameworks of UN System Organisations, including the UN Charter, and entities' respective regulatory frameworks. It was amended in 2014 and 2018, together with relating guidelines, for reflecting changes in regulatory frameworks and for improving a few provisions.
- **Pillar assessments:** The EU encouraged UN entities to pass '**pillar assessments**' (PAs), which assess compliance of international organisations (IOs) with international standards, and the Commission's requirements for using the 'indirect management mode.' PAs check whether the IOs' policies, processes and controls ensure a level of protection of EU financial interests equivalent to that existing when the Commission implements the budget itself. Provided that an IO passed the pillar assessment successfully, the Commission's 'indirect management mode' may apply, which enables the Commission to entrust the implementation of actions in accordance with the IO's own rules and regulations. Three additional pillars were introduced in 2019 following the EU Financial Regulation 2018, on exclusion from access to funding (pillar 7), ex-post publication of information on recipients of funds (pillar 8), and protection of personal data (pillar 9).
- **Contract templates:** Three main successive types of contracts were used during the evaluation period for providing EU funding to specific actions by pillar-assessed entities. In 2015, the EU introduced a template for all pillar-assessed IOs that may act under indirect and direct management, the 'Pillar Assessed Grant or Delegation Agreement' (PAGoDA). The EU withdrew it and replaced it in 2016, by a new contractual model PAGoDA 2. These were replaced by a single template for all pillar-assessed organisations in 2018, following the entry into force of the EU's Financial Regulation 2018, the 'Contribution Agreement'.

The **EU's overall framework** also contains other blocks of assurance with relation to EU funding, relating notably to Expenditure Verification (EV), Residual Error Rate (RER) studies, the Commission's Internal Audit Service (IAS) and the European Court of Auditors (ECA). These different blocks all apply also to EU funding to UN entities.

The existence of the overall framework was a solid basis for cooperation when applied well. Overall, this framework broadly met the challenge of harmonizing legal, contractual, financial, and administrative matters of cooperation between the EU and pillar-assessed entities, and notably the

FAFA regarding cooperation with the UN. FAFA specified and clarified a series of matters relating to cooperation between two such large and complex families as the EU and UN, both consisting of multiple entities, active in numerous countries, and having their own institutional set-up and constraints. The texts also included necessary safeguards for the EU for ensuring it can meet its own obligations (set out notably in the Treaty and Financial Regulations). Many EU and UN staff consulted at HQ and field level shared a view that FAFA proved overall useful for supporting delivery of EU aid through the UN system. Several of them mentioned for instance that “if FAFA did not exist, it would be necessary to invent it.”

However, important concerns and contention remained about the application of the framework, and in relation to the framework itself. Without entering technicalities, this relates in particular to the following:

- *Pillar assessments:* UN entities faced issues with the EU’s pillar assessments, required for working under the indirect management mode. Completion of pillar assessments was (and still is) ongoing for several UN entities, for instance to be in line with critical EU audit recommendations and with the additional three pillars introduced following FR 2018. These delays and issues led the Commission to “suspend the signature of contribution agreements” of concerned entities.⁷³ Interviewees mention that such suspension occurred (after the evaluation period). Moreover, as the Commission did not consider that policies, processes and controls of some UN entities ensured a level of protection of EU financial interests equivalent to that existing when the Commission implements the budget itself, it requested in such cases ad-hoc measures into the Contribution Agreements.
- *Access to information:* The EU reported on many occasions (e.g., ECA⁷⁴, FAFA Working Group meetings) and for a long time that it was not always receiving the necessary documents it was requesting from UN, or that it was but with serious delays and time-consuming interaction. The EU regularly had to use the safeguards on access to information included in the FAFA and other agreements for requiring information. Moreover, almost half of EU survey respondents disagreed on whether EU-UN contractual arrangements ensured accountability (41%) and transparency (50%) in the management of EU financial support, compared to 99% of UN respondents agreeing on accountability and on transparency.
- *Overhead costs:* Determining the level of UN overheads that can be charged to the EU remained an issue. This related notably to the percentage of indirect costs but also to the possibility of including costs that could fall under the category of direct eligible costs and meet the eligibility requirements described in the General Conditions, and ways to do so. There were different views, expectations and practices across EU and UN services and entities. Such issues were highlighted by a substantial share of survey respondents from both the EU and the UN. Indeed, about three quarters of EU (74%) and half of UN (56%) staff surveyed agreed that “issues related to UN overhead costs often complicated cooperation with UN partners”.

The UN invoked several reasons for these difficulties, stating for instance that EU demands were excessive or impractical, vis-à-vis agreements in the EU-UN framework or their spirit, UN System or entities’ frameworks (including for instance the single audit principle) or requirements from other donors.

⁷³ SWD (2021) 132 final, Commission Staff Working Document, accompanying the Document Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the Court of Auditors, Annual report to the Discharge Authority on internal audits carried out in 2020, 8.6.2021.

⁷⁴ The European Court of Auditors reports in its 2018 EU Audit in Brief “the uncooperativeness shown by international organisations in not forwarding essential supporting documents”, “which seriously delayed our audit work”. The EU Court of Auditors further recommends that the Commission should “take all the necessary steps to reinforce the obligation on international organisations to provide us with any document or information we need for our work”. Source: European Court of Auditors, EU audit in brief, Introducing the 2018 annual reports of the European Court of Auditors, 2018.

The EU and UN attempted to find solutions, but difficulties remained. The EU and UN exchanged regularly on matters of concern. They did so through the EU-UN FAFA Working Group, Commission contacts with the UN/UNDP Office in Brussels, and other channels. They issued clarifications, such as the 2020 EU-UN Common Understanding on Expenditure Verification. Still, documents and interviews show that there remained lack of clarity or open doors on several provisions, leading to different interpretations. These originate partly in the difficulty to find or agree on one-size-fits-all provisions (e.g., on overhead costs) or the need to have safeguards for ensuring compliance with the EU Treaty and Financial Regulations (e.g., on pillar assessments and access to information for expenditure verifications and RER studies, and ECA audits).

These points of contention created tensions, inefficient use of resources, and delays. Access to information issues put the EU in a difficult position vis-à-vis compliance with its own obligations, notably the Commission towards IAS and ECA, and ECA towards the European Parliament and the Council. EU and UN staff report that dealing with these issues took them significant time and energy. Both sides explained that their expectations and constraints were not well understood. It also resulted in delays sometimes, for instance, with problems on pillar assessments, which reportedly led to the suspension of signing off new contracts.

4.5 UN Delivering as One

This section examines the evolution of the UN working methods further to the 2018 UN reforms, with particular focus on the UN Development System (UNDS) Reform⁷⁵.

The 2018 UNDS Reform objectives were well-aligned with EU objectives in terms of addressing global challenges and multilateralism. The Reform is expected to lead to higher efficiency in aid delivery and administration, to advance the 2030 Agenda, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The 2018 UNDS Reform was largely based on the vision set by the 2006 “Delivering as One” report, which called for increased coherence and coordination within the UN and a stronger focus on outcomes and impacts rather than activities, with a view to increasing effectiveness and efficiency in contributing to global development. The fragmented structure of the UN was perceived as an obstacle in this respect.⁷⁶ Gains were expected by reducing duplication of activities among UN Entities; offering more comprehensive, coherent, versatile, and integrated funding options to donors; general consolidation/simplification of relationships and administration processes with both donors and beneficiaries; and other UN internal operational upgrades.⁷⁷

Such a reformed UN system was expected to be better aligned with the EU vision for multilateralism, and to provide stronger support to EU operations on the ground.

Reforms towards “Delivering as One” within the UN were attempted before, but the 2018 reform has a broader scope and is grounded in the Agenda 2030 framework.

Since the launch of the UNDS Reform in January 2019 and until the end of 2020 (temporal scope of this evaluation), some operational progress was achieved, most notably, the designation of all Resident Coordinators (RCs). There is evidence that in some countries this contributed to better coordination amongst UN Entities and with the EU; however, this was not consistent everywhere and evidence remained limited.

⁷⁵ At the beginning of his term, UN Secretary-General António Guterres made proposals for reform the UN, in three different areas: Development (UNDS reform); Management; and Peace and Security. These were launched in 2018 and are known as the “2018 UN reforms”. The analysis focuses on the UNDS reform, as the most relevant to the scope of the evaluation (i.e., development action).

⁷⁶ UNGA, Review of the functioning of the resident coordinator system: rising to the challenge and keeping the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Report of the Secretary-General (June 2021), interviews. (n021, n004).

⁷⁷ <https://unsdg.un.org/2020-unsdg-chair-report> (accessed on 22 September 2022).

The implementation of the UNDS Reform started in 2019. Thus, there was relatively little time to produce effects during the period covered by this evaluation, which ended in December 2020.

In this timeframe, the UN achieved a first important operational milestone, namely the rolling-out of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and the designation and taking office of the 131 foreseen RCs, whose role is at the very centre of the UNDS Reform.⁷⁸ When interviewed, several EU Delegation staff provided positive comments on the introduction of the RCs. They explained that this facilitated cooperation and lessened rivalry among UN Entities. It also facilitated dialogue between the EU and the UN (as a whole) at the country level. However, weaknesses and roadblocks to the Reform also emerged. Some of the appointed RCs proved not able to perform the assigned tasks. Also, resistance was observed on the part of some individual UN entities to collaborate at the country level, as well as to focus on overall policies and outcomes rather than individual projects. This was possibly due to a lack of clear incentives to do so, and the inadequacy of the existing structures to support it.⁷⁹ In-country collaboration among UN entities was often limited to sharing information and mapping activities (rather than being focused on developing coherent country-level UN strategies).⁸⁰ There is evidence of progress being subsequently made by the UN on overcoming those roadblocks.⁸¹

Evidence does not point to other significant impacts of the UN reforms, so far, on the delivery of EU support through the UN. Indeed, several EU staff interviewed reported no significant change in the way the UN worked within the country. Similarly, 50% of EU survey respondents stated, “I do not know”, when asked whether UN reforms had brought changes. Most of EU respondents (two thirds) stated that they disagreed that UN reforms contributed to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of EU support.

The EU provided significant financial, advocacy and operative support to the 2018 UNDS Reform.

The EU has always been a steadfast supporter of UN reform towards “Delivering as ONE.”⁸² Beyond the international dialogue and policy level, concrete efforts were also made through:

- Concrete instructions issued to EU Delegations by all relevant EU Commission services and the EEAS to support the UNDS Reform; in particular, by engaging and cooperating with the newly designed RCs.

⁷⁸ RCs are the highest-ranking development representatives of the UN system at the country level; their responsibility is to coordinate the delivery of collective responses to national needs and ensure system-wide accountability on the ground. They report directly to UN Secretary-General. Previously, the RC role was typically performed by the resident representative of UNDP; in 2019 the role was officially delinked from the UNDP and given a stronger profile and empowerment.

⁷⁹ Reforms do not contemplate interventions targeted at changing structures and incentives at the individual UN Agencies’ level. (IN – 59, 36 – also ECDPM report ES pt4) On RCs: IN 21, 54 On resistance: 20, 21, 26, 39, 52, 54 Superficial: 21.

⁸⁰ The list of issues presented is not comprehensive, as an assessment of the progress of UN reforms is outside the scope of this evaluation. Rather, it reflects commentaries that emerged from interviews conducted as part of this study. However, the issues mentioned were cross-checked and found consistent with other sources, such as the Report of the UN Secretary general on the “Review of the functioning of the resident coordinator system: rising to the challenge and keeping the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (2021); the MOPAN report “Lessons in Multilateral Effectiveness: Is this time different? UNDS Reform: Progress, challenges, and opportunities” (2021); and the ECDPM discussion paper “EU-UN cooperation: confronting change in the multilateral system” (2019).

⁸¹ In particular, the UN Secretary General’s 2021 report notes that “Compared with before 1 January 2019, when the new resident coordinator system was put in place, programme country Governments have indicated that resident coordinators have displayed strengthened leadership (81 per cent), impartiality (67 per cent), coordination capacity (73 per cent) and more of a focus on common results (78 per cent). Some 78 per cent of the programme country Governments see the resident coordinator as a genuine access point to the United Nations system at the country level.” Similar commentaries are made in the 2021 Report of the Chair of the UN Sustainable Development Group to ECOSOC, which notes that “RCs are enabling more coordinated development cooperation, including as co-chairs of donors’ and national Governments’ aid platforms – a role many perform, at the request of national counterparts.” (Page 22, paragraph 63)

⁸² As appears from different EU internal notes and communication documents (such as the Joint Communiqué between the EU and the UN: A renewed partnership in development (2018)); notes from the 2018 UNGA.

- A total EUR 27.1 million contribution to the 1% levy designed to support the Resident Coordinator system in the 2019-21 period.⁸³ This EU levy was provided on top of existing Contribution Agreements.
- A EUR 30 million contribution to the Joint SDG Fund for the 2018-2021 period. The fund supports common, cross-country UN approaches at the country level while at the same time empowering RCs and, more broadly, supporting the implementation of the UNDS Reform.

The EU also supported the Global Spotlight Initiative launched in 2017, which aimed at eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls. The Spotlight Initiative is a partnership between the EU and the UN. The EU has been, to date, the almost sole funder of the initiative, contributing EUR 500 million. Whilst its launch pre-dates the UN reforms, it was often mentioned in documents and interviews as having served as a sort of pilot of the UN's new and more unified way of working; it served to foster collaboration both between participating UN Entities, and the UN and the EU.²⁶

At the country level, EU Delegations made efforts to adapt the cooperation approach to the new UN working methods and philosophy. However, this neither happened optimally nor everywhere. As appears from survey results, only 24% of EU respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the EU adapted its approach in the direction of the UN reforms, while 60% stated they did not know and 16% disagreed. UN personnel respondents were more positive, with 50% agreeing or strongly agreeing, 33% stating that they did not know and 17% disagreeing.

Interviewees explained that the main challenge was to change the EU-UN relationship, at the country level, from a mainly “contractual” (i.e., donor-implementer, project-focused) to a strategic one (i.e., partnership oriented, outcome and policy-focused).⁸⁴

Some confusion/weaknesses/opportunities also emerged as to the practical organisation of the in-country collaboration between the EU and the UN:

- Regular information exchanges and shared planning between the UN and the EU were not institutionalised, nor was there guidance in this sense. An EUD interviewee underlined in this respect that the exchange of information with UN political affaires colleagues improved over the last years, but that much more could be done in this respect. Also, highlighting that when they had organised exchanges between the country desks this generated added value, even if there was not much institutional pressure to do so.
- There appeared to be some confusion/lack of guidance as to how to balance the support for the Reforms (which call for interacting with the RC to support the “one UN” approach) and maintaining and nurturing existing (productive) relationships with individual UN Entities.

Allocating funds to UN Agencies in dialogue with a single interlocutor (the RC) and relying on her/his role in facilitating coordination, and coherence with the overall UN programmatic offer, implies, in itself, different types of (potential) value added. These include: the capacity to reach a critical mass; more weight for political clout; the capacity to manage larger packages (for the EU instead of implementing support itself); the reduction of transaction costs for beneficiaries that only must deal with one interlocutor. These were mentioned by some interlocutors, but the evaluation cannot fully establish to what extent these fully materialised.

In a nutshell, there are indications that the new UN working methods are more adequate to addressing global challenges within the current multilateral context and they promise to bring

⁸³ The Special Purpose Trust Fund (SPTF), a specific fund housed within the UN Secretariat, has been established to receive, consolidate, manage, and account for all contributions and financial transactions of the RC system. For the period under review, funding sources included three streams: voluntary contributions from Member States, cost-sharing from UN entities who are members of the United Nations development system, and a 1% levy applied to contributions for UN development-related activities earmarked to a single agency, single programme, or project. The EU contributes to the 1% levy.

⁸⁴ Interviewees explained that EU-UN interaction tended to be very project and activity/contract-oriented (vs. strategic and policy-oriented). At times, this was also attributed to behaviour from the UN (i.e., UN Entities to independently seek funding for individual projects, rather than consolidating dialogue).

advantages in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. However, until the end of 2020, such promise was only delivered in limited part. Delivering the full extent of the Reforms' potential will depend on the capacity of the UN and its partners, including the EU, to concretely operationalise the new framework, particularly at the country level, by more thoroughly adapting their internal and external relationships, instruments and the way of working to it.

4.6 Value added

This section examines the value added that was obtained by channelling EU support through UN entities. As part of the analysis is based on issues dealt with in the previous sections, it refers to these for a more detailed discussion.

A first value added of channelling EU funds through the UN is that it allowed the EU to strengthen its position as a multilateral actor and to implement multilateral agendas, including the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement (see EQ1).

Moreover, **channelling funds through the UN allowed the EU to benefit from some of the specific characteristics that are usually attributed to the UN.** This relates notably to UN norms and values (shared by the EU, given that all the EU Member States are UN members), the credibility and legitimacy of the UN mandate, the UN's convening capacity, its technical capacity, and its strong presence in the field.

Channelling funds through the UN enabled the EU to promote shared norms and values, beyond what it could have done on its own. Indeed, the UN was a natural partner for the EU because they share largely the same values. The EU and the UN both stand strongly behind the international rule of law and universal agendas, as set out in the UN Charter, the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, the global biodiversity framework, and the Paris Agreement on climate change. Survey respondents often agreed that there was overall alignment between EU and UN policy objectives.⁸⁵ This also included human rights-based approaches. According to ROM reports, UN funded projects by the EU adhered to the working principles of the human rights-based approach. Survey respondents confirmed this, with respectively 88% (EU) and 95% (UN) of those expressing an opinion agreeing, or strongly agreeing, that EU-UN cooperation strengthened this dimension, both at country and global level.

In the area of peace and security, both the EU and the UN have broad mandates, working across diplomacy, development, security, humanitarian aid, and human rights. This gives them the opportunity to promote policy coherence, both in UN integrated mission settings such as Afghanistan, the DRC and Mali, where the UN system was already geared towards working across policy communities, and in non-integrated mission settings such as Chad, Mozambique, and Cameroon. Moreover, the EU used the cooperation with the UN as an opportunity to advance a digital agenda based on the protection of human-rights. The alignment of values and principles of digitalisation has facilitated the creation of synergies because of EU-UN dialogue, bringing awareness to existing issues and fostering the development of international norms and standard setting.

There was also policy alignment between the EU and UN on gender. The UN is the main forum for international normative work related to gender equality, and EU policies are based on this international framework.⁸⁶ Individual UN entities have resolutions and policies mandating them to

⁸⁵ Indeed, 88% of EU respondents expressing a position stated they agreed or strongly agreed that the choice of UN partners was well justified and based on EU values. Similarly, 75% of EU respondents who expressed a position stated there was strong alignment between the UN and EU policy priorities. However, 25% stated this was the case to a limited extent or not at all.

⁸⁶ More specifically, the EU is committed to full and effective implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and CEDAW's Optional Protocol on women's rights, the Beijing Platform for Action, the International Conference on Population and Development and the outcomes of their review conferences, as well as United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security (WPS) and its follow-up resolutions.

promote gender equality in line with these UN frameworks, and all Funds and Programmes have gender equality policy guidelines, which outline their role in gender equality based on their mandate.

The EU also benefited from the credibility and/or the legitimacy of the UN mandate. Nearly all nations are members of the UN, and UN entities are generally viewed by governments as impartial partners and honest brokers. This neutrality enables the UN to take risks that bilateral partners could not take, especially in terms of reputation risks. UN entities can hence promote and facilitate the adoption of more ambitious norms and actions on sensitive issues. No other multilateral, regional and bilateral partner can provide this type of added value. For instance, due to their mandate and impartiality, the UN, and its agencies were uniquely positioned to provide a global space for multilateral action on the Green Deal. The global environment and climate governance and most multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), including the SDGs and the Rio conventions (UNFCCC, CBD, UNCCD) are framed within the UN system. UN entities provided a multilateral space for global dialogue and the tackling of global and transboundary environmental issues that are not governed by MEAs.

Interviewees and survey respondents confirmed this point, with 78% of EU respondents agreeing, or strongly agreeing, that the choice of UN partners was well justified based on the mandate. Results are very similar on UN legitimacy, with 71% of EU respondents stating such legitimacy had, to some, or to a large extent, an added value for the channelling of EU support, while 21% only to a limited extent or not at all.

At country level, working closely with UN entities promoting the implementation of globally agreed norms and standards also enhanced the credibility and legitimacy of EU policy dialogue, notably in peace and security (see also EQ1). Working with the UN in conflict-affected settings based on the UN mandate gave the EU a more “multilateral” profile. For instance, working with the UN in Mali gave the EU a more neutral space to support the peace process. It also provided better access to the north of the country, which would not have been possible without the presence of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Also on gender issues, the legitimacy / credibility of the UN was recognised. As an example, stakeholders in some countries considered that “foreign” standards were not entirely replicable in their context but recognised UN Women’s normative role. The cooperation with UN Women supported the legitimacy of the action and was crucial for advancing the EU-UN common agenda.⁸⁷ Also, to work on the humanitarian-development nexus, the UN mandate was an asset. As shown in the comparative analysis on education, UN agencies like UNICEF and UNESCO have a double mandate and were sometimes using different specialised teams for humanitarian and development interventions.

In addition, the evaluation shows that UN entities demonstrated convening power. The UN brought global issues to the forefront through the convening of summits gathering stakeholders, including governments, civil society, the private sector, and academia for discussion and action (see EQ1). Furthermore, the UN had convening power at country level, including in aid coordination mechanisms, where UN entities often co-chaired working groups, using these platforms to promote dialogue between recipient governments and development partners. On education UNESCO was a strong convener. It had a leading role in the coordination and monitoring of SDG4, acknowledged by interviewees and stressed in the MOPAN assessment.

The technical capacity of the UN was another value added offered. The UN, along with its specialised agencies, has technical expertise in several fields, covering the thematic priority areas of the EU. Interviewees regularly confirmed this technical expertise and 76% of EU survey respondents agreed, or strongly agreed, that the choice of UN partners was well justified based on technical expertise. In several cases this was, however, also contested.⁸⁸ Green Deal-related areas, are an example where the

⁸⁷ See Volume III, case study 10 on promoting gender equality.

⁸⁸ While 66% of EU survey respondents underlined technical expertise as a dimension that contributed to the added value of channelling EU support to the UN, 31% disagree or strongly disagreed.

EU used the UN technical capacities as a channel to provide high-quality technical support, policy advice and capacity development to partner countries. Another example is the EU-UNDP Joint Task Force on Electoral Assistance (see case study 12) that benefitted from the UNDP's long track record in electoral assistance. Also, for the Global Compact for Migration (case study 14), the UN was a natural partner for several reasons among which its technical expertise and the pre-existing initiatives of its agencies on the topic and notably IOM and UNHCR for migrants, refugees, and displaced people. As mentioned by a think tank representative, such UN credibility is in some cases difficult to question by other stakeholders (for instance on conflict analysis, or data provided by the UN on humanitarian crises).

The field presence and capacity to conduct dialogue with the national authorities were also key benefits of the collaboration with the UN. The UN has a wide and often **longstanding field presence**: both in terms of countries covered and regions or locations within countries. In some cases, this meant that there were no, or few, alternatives to working with the UN. In Iraq, for instance, the EU worked nearly exclusively through the UN for this reason (among others such as the technical capacity, and the UN's close relationship with authorities). In Mali (see case study 11), the EU cooperation on peace, security and governance could benefit from the UN's decentralised presence, with offices throughout the country. This was considered a key advantage given the security and logistical challenges to access many of Mali's northern and central regions. Also, for the EU joint support on countries affected by the Syrian crisis, the presence on the ground was identified as one of the benefits of working with the UN. As a think tank representative explained *"the UN is present in many countries, including in places where there are big issues in terms of capacity; in some countries there is just no equivalent."*

Due to this wide and longstanding field presence, UN entities usually have trusted relationships with their government counterparts and are well positioned to conduct dialogue with national and regional or local authorities. They are well placed to provide policy advice and institutional capacity-building support. Through its cooperation with WFP and the Mercy Corps in Iraq, the EU could benefit, for instance, from WFP's ability to mobilise its network in the country and to liaise directly with national counterparts. More generally, the choice to work with the UN in Iraq was also motivated by the need to engage with government, which was easier through the UN than through, for instance, NGOs. In Cambodia, one of the reasons for selecting UNICEF as an implementing partner was its close partnership at central level with the MoEYS.

This point was confirmed by survey results where 69% of EU respondents stated that UN presence and relationships with recipient governments added value for the EU to some, or a large extent. The presence and activities of the UN in fragile and/or conflict-affected areas provides the EC with the opportunity to channel its aid in difficult circumstances. More precisely, the UN's presence outside of capitals and its direct work with communities has been an added value in fragile contexts. This was the reason why a substantial amount of EU support in the interface between humanitarian and external action for social protection, WASH, health, and education was channelled through UN organisations. Examples from the case studies include support to Syrian refugees and the host communities in Lebanon and Jordan, and support provided in Yemen, Somalia, and Afghanistan. This being said, the UN was not always seen as a "policy pusher" or "reform advocate," with often also a strong humanitarian imprint.

Finally, another benefit was the absorption capacity. Channelling through the UN allowed, in some cases, the EU to manage larger packages than if it only had to work with other implementing partners. Under the EU FRiT for instance (see case study 16), UN entities were selected for their absorption capacity and relative ease of contracting, allowing them to implement large scale projects.

5. OVERALL ASSESSMENT

The European Union and the United Nations have a long history of cooperation. The basis was already laid down in Article 302 of the Treaty establishing the European Community.

During the 2014-2020 period covered by this evaluation, the EU and the UN further developed and structured their cooperation. The EU (including individual contributions of EU Member States) was the largest funder to the UN system, accounting for 42% of the total UN funding. The contribution provided by the European Commission alone amounted to EUR 21.4 billion, making it the fourth largest funder. This included EUR 12.5 billion for external action. The annual amounts for the latter doubled between 2014 and 2020. This cooperation concerned more than 135 countries, most sectors of external aid, and involved 43 UN entities. It was increasingly driven by a policy-based approach, structured around bilateral dialogue.

The evaluation found that the cooperation allowed the EU to take a multilateral stance with the UN to address global challenges, a key objective of this partnership. It also benefited from specific assets of the UN, notably its presence on the ground (especially but not only in conflict-affected countries); its credibility and the legitimacy of its mandate; the trusted relation with government counterparts facilitating access to government; the technical capacity of the UN in different fields; and its implementation capacity.

On the ground, the cooperation was mostly driven by a pragmatic rather than a strategic approach aimed at building a longer-term EU-UN partnership at the country level, even if this was structurally strengthened in recent years. The EU felt that it was too often considered a 'payer' not a 'player,' and the UN a mere 'implementing agency' rather than a 'partner.'

As a result of its engagement with the UN, the EU contributed to shaping key advancements on the EU's policy and political priorities in five thematic priority areas, notably by developing international agreements, fora, and platforms, and in delivering capacity development and policy improvements. It played a key role in the negotiation of UN resolutions that shape the global development agenda. Doing so, it was able to promote its values and priorities. This was often done in close coordination with the EU Member States, even if there were fields where such cohesive approaches were not reached, such as migration, gender equality LGBTIQ, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The cooperation was structured and governed by a legal, financial, and administrative framework that when applied well constituted a solid basis for the cooperation between these two big and complex organisations/systems, while providing mechanisms for ensuring accountability on the use of EU funds. But important concerns and contention remained about the application of the framework, and in relation to the framework itself. The related notably to the difficulty for the EU to obtain from the UN the required documents, for instance for expenditure verification, and to visibility. Even if the cooperation was also an important avenue of the visibility of the EU, notably at global level, the EU's contributions at country level lacked visibility in several cases. This concerned static visibility ('flags and stickers,' indication that projects were 'co-financed by the EU'), but also a lack of involvement of the EU in the dialogue with national authorities, a key element of cooperation and visibility.

Finally, the EU had a system to gather information on its cooperation with the UN at global level in terms of the funding provided and at project level through UN monitoring and EU result-oriented monitoring. But with some exceptions the EU - such as the EEAS fiches on UN entities, and INTPA country fiches - did not generate enough comprehensive information in a systematic way in-between at the level of specific sectors or themes, countries or regions, or UN entities. This made it difficult for EU services at headquarter and delegation level to have helpful views and insights on EU-UN cooperation in their areas of action.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This section presents the set of conclusions emerging from the findings highlighted in chapter 4. They are presented in four clusters: conclusions (i) at the strategic level; (ii) on results; (iii) on cooperation modalities / implementation; and (iv) on specific benefits of the cooperation. The figure below provides an overview of the set of conclusions.

Figure 11. Conclusions

Strategic Approach	Results	Cooperation Modalities	Specific Benefits
C1 – Strategic Partnership	C5 – Influence on Global Agenda	C9 – Legal, Financial, and Admin. Framework	C11 – UN comparative advantages
C2 – Cooperation at Country Level	C6 – Multilateral Solutions	C10 – UN Reform	
C3 – EU + EU MS	C7 – Results in Priority Areas		
C4 – Visibility	C8 – Information Systems		

6.1 Strategic approach

C1. The EU and the UN built a partnership of strategic importance, aligned around evolving common policy priorities. EU-UN cooperation became more comprehensive over time, with increasing EU financial contributions to the UN. This allowed the two organisations to address global issues through multilateral action and to intervene jointly in a wide range of thematic and geographical areas.

The official cooperation and mutual recognition between the EU and the UN family dates back long before the 2014-2020 period covered by this evaluation. Prior to the signature of the Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force on 1 December 2009, Article 302 of the Treaty establishing the European Community provided the basis for the cooperation between the EU and the UN. The FAFA, which governs the cooperation between the UN and the Commission, was first signed in 2003.

The EU aimed to support a rules-based international order with the UN at its core. In a multipolar world marked by increasingly complex global challenges (e.g., financial crises, irregular migration and forced displacement, global warming, COVID-19), the EU increasingly promoted an effective multilateralism system capable of facing new global realities. This is reflected in a series of policy documents, such as the Council conclusions on EU action to strengthen rules-based multilateralism (2019) or more recently the Joint Communication on strengthening the EU’s contribution to rules-based multilateralism (2021)⁸⁹. The ultimate EU objective has been to ensure peace, security, human rights prosperity, and sustainable development for all. The EU systematically placed the UN at the core of the multilateral order⁹⁰.

Over the years, EU-UN cooperation became more structured. This cooperation went beyond bilateral exchange between two single entities. It involved collaboration on common policy approaches (e.g., the 2030 Agenda), supporting the UN as the cornerstone of the multilateral system, advancing strategic priorities and interests multilaterally. In 2018, the EU and UN Joint Communiqué on “A renewed partnership in development” paved the way for a more strategic framework for cooperation to deliver on the 2030 Agenda and achieve sustainable development.

⁸⁹ Although this is outside of the evaluation period we consider it important to mention it here.

⁹⁰ This was already the case in several policy documents preceding the period under review, such as: European Commission, Building and effective partnership with the United Nations in the field of Development and Humanitarian Affairs, COM (2001) 231 final.

The magnitude and the comprehensiveness of the EU-UN cooperation increased over the years. The EU contributed EUR 12.5 billion to the UN system for external action from 2014 to 2020. This funding covered 135 countries, key EU thematic sectors and 43 UN entities. Moreover, the yearly EU financial contributions to the UN steadily increased since 2015 until more than doubling by 2020 (from EUR 1.2 billion to EUR 2.5 billion). Finally, for several interventions the EU was the main or even the sole contributor.

This conclusion is based on the Inventory, EQ1, EQ2, and EQ3.

C2. The EU and the UN established an increasingly strong policy-based engagement at HQ level, which was generally not well translated in the cooperation on the ground, which was mostly driven by a pragmatic rather than a strategic approach.

At the global level, the EU and the UN increasingly strengthened the strategic nature of their partnership. For instance, the 2018 Joint Communiqué on “A renewed partnership in development”, reaffirmed their strategic partnership and centred it around five focus areas (gender, sustainable growth, climate action, HDP nexus, migration-development nexus). In its policy documents, the EU continuously promoted a rules-based global order with multilateralism as its key principle and the United Nations at its core.

At the country/regional level, cooperation between the EU and the UN often remained rather grounded in a pragmatic approach than part of a systematic effort to build a longer-term EU-UN partnership in the country/region.

- The EU generally selected UN entities as implementing partners on a project-by-project basis, given their context-specific added value (presence on the ground, technical capacities, etc.) or the lack of viable alternatives. The evaluation recorded limited opportunities for Joint Initiatives and strategic contributions to UN pooled, thematic, and joint funding.
- The EU considered that it was too often seen as a “payer” and not as a “player;” the UN considered that it was treated as a mere implementing entity.
- Overall, there was a lack of direct strategic dialogue and limited information exchange at the country level between the two institutions. Most exchange took place on an ad-hoc basis in the context of project/programme implementation or during established partner/donor fora in each country. Moreover, while UN entities often had good working relationships with the EU, the EU often perceived them as being fragmented and too costly.
- Still, cooperation between the EU and the UN at the operational level became more strategic in recent years. The launch of joint initiatives, such as the Spotlight, allowed some strategic engagements to translate into action on the ground. The introduction of the UN Resident Coordinator system provided a framework for strategic dialogue between the EU and the UN. Given the persistent fragmentation among UN entities, it has not led during the timeframe covered by the evaluation to improved strategic engagement with individual UN entities.

This conclusion is based on EQ1, EQ2, EQ3, EQ4, and the Inventory.

C3. While in most cases the EU and its EU MS were largely cohesive in UN central organs, they did not fully capitalise on their joint financial and political leverage, despite being jointly the biggest financial contributor to the UN.

Over the 2014-2020 period, the Commission was the fourth largest funder of the UN system. It contributed a total of EUR 21.41 billion and accounted for 6% of total UN funding. When combined with EU MS, the EU accounted for 42% of total UN funding or EUR 150 billion, being the biggest donor to the UN.

The EU and EU MS were largely cohesive in UN central organs. The EU dedicated significant resources for coordination with EU MS, primarily through the work of EU Delegations in UN HQ cities. In the UN General Assembly, while there was no perfect voting coherency between EU MS, the EU and EU MS cohesion was high as compared to other regional organisations. In a few cases, however, incoherences with EU MS persisted, mostly in the areas of migration, gender equality, LGBTIQ, and sexual and reproductive health and rights, with negative implications for EU influence.

In the governing bodies of UN entities, coordination between the EU and its EU MS was generally limited to information exchange, even if in most cases EU and EU MS positions remained coherent. EU Member States as donors were keen to highlight their individual contributions and promote their own positions.

At the country level, strategic coordination vis-à-vis the UN was limited despite frequent information exchanges between the EU and its EU MS. EU and EU MS coordination with the UN generally took place within the overall aid coordination structure and in the contexts of Multi-Partner Trust Funds (MPTFs).

Beyond the challenges of speaking with “one voice,” the EU was not able to fully leverage the potential for influence of its funding, both from EU and jointly with EU MS. A key issue was the availability of information (see also C7). EU Delegations to UN HQs reported not having a clear overview of what the EU, let alone its MS, was implementing on the ground, in each country and sector. They could thus not ensure sufficient leveraging on EU funding in their diplomacy efforts.

This conclusion is based on EQ1, EQ3, C7.

C4. While at the global level, EU-UN cooperation favoured EU visibility, at country level there was a lack of EU visibility in UN interventions it funded and compliance with EU visibility requirements and guidelines was not systematic.

The EU cooperation with the UN favoured EU visibility at the global level. The EU, through its engagement in different UN fora, was able to reaffirm its normative leadership. By being increasingly present in UN bodies, by “speaking as one” with EU Member States, by reaching out to a broader base of UN MS, the EU was able to increasingly project its values and priorities and get recognition for its inputs to the global development agenda.

The EU had well-articulated guidelines defining requirements to ensure visibility for its funded actions implemented by the UN as defined notably in the FAFA, the Commission-UN Joint Action Plan on Visibility and the subsequent Visibility Guidelines for EC-UN action in the field in 2014. Ensuring EU visibility using the EU emblem and funding statement has continuously been a contractual obligation.

Compliance with EU visibility requirements by the UN was not systematic, although UN agencies made regular efforts and although there were notable improvements towards the end of the evaluation period. This concerned both issues related to static visibility that remained problematic in several cases, and the more dynamic or “political” visibility. EU Delegations were generally not sufficiently involved and/or did not benefit enough from the UN policy dialogue with the national authorities in relation to EU-funded initiatives. In several cases, the EU Delegations were not invited to public events related to EU-funded projects. It was often not clear for partners or the broader public that the EU was one of the key financial contributors to the interventions implemented by the UN.

This conclusion is based on EQ1, EQ4, EQ6.

6.2 Results

C5. Through its engagement with the UN, the EU promoted its values and priorities at the level of the UN system and contributed to shaping the global development agenda. EU influence at the level of UN resolutions was considerable, although the full potential for influence was not used; EU influence at the country level was more limited.

The EU, through its engagement with the UN at the global level, was able to enhance its global role, project its values and interests in the multilateral system and contribute to shaping the global development agenda.

A key channel of influence was the EU's role in negotiating UN resolutions. The EU provided key policy inputs and played an important role in coordinating with EU MS to define common positions and build bridges with other actors. UN resolutions shape the global development agenda and reaffirm a global consensus on a wide range of issues. They also set the foundations for EU cooperation at the country level. Thanks to UN resolutions, EU interventions in partner countries could build on priorities, objectives, and values that the countries themselves had already, at least formally, agreed to. The EU played a key role in the development of the 2030 Agenda, which provides the principle normative framework for sustainable development.

Still, the EU and EU MS did not maximise their full potential for influence at the global/policy level. Some incoherences with EU MS persisted (see C3) and there was no clear strategy for building alliances, which in some cases constrained EU influence (see C4). Beyond these challenges, a key issue was the lack of aggregate information on EU funding and activities. As EU Delegations to UN HQs had no clear overview of what the EU was implementing on the ground, in each country and sector, they could not use such information to leverage on EU funding in their diplomatic efforts (see C7).

At the country level, the EU was also able to exercise influence through the implementation of projects supporting its global agenda and by engaging in dialogue with the UN in the context of donor coordination fora.

A difficulty for the EU was the fact that, in the context of several EU-funded projects, the UN did not involve the EU in its dialogue with the national authorities. The UN was a strategic partner of the EU on the ground precisely because of the access it could provide to national authorities, but this did not always materialise.

The lack of strategic bilateral dialogue between the EU and the UN, especially at the UN country programming stage, also constrained influence. The introduction of the UN Resident Coordinator system provided an opportunity to strengthen structural dialogue between EU Delegations and the UN. However, given the persistence of fragmentation and competition among UN entities, it has so far not been able to fill in the gap of strategic engagement with individual UN entities. It is to be noted that the reinvigorating of the Resident Coordinator system was recent (January 2019), so that it was still early to observe progress.

The lack of aggregate information was also a constraint at the country level. Several EU Delegations reported not having been aware of projects implemented by HQ in the country. This limited their capacity to use such projects as leverage and to get involved in relevant dialogues.

This conclusion is based on EQ1, EQ2, EQ3, EQ5, EQ6.

C6. Through its cooperation with the UN, the EU was able to strengthen the provision of multilateral solutions to address global challenges. However, building alliances beyond EU Member States was in some cases difficult.

Multilateralism is a cornerstone of the EU's external policy. With growing global challenges, the promotion of more multilateral governance gained momentum in EU policy documents over the years. Through its cooperation with the UN, the EU was able to offer multilateral solutions to global challenges in the following ways:

- By contributing to UN resolutions (see C5), and by EU participation in policy dialogue and in international fora, and joint EU-UN advocacy.
- By channelling significant amounts of funding through the UN. This can be considered a multilateral stance in itself. It enabled the EU to intervene in a wide range of areas, spanning socio-economic development; peace and security migration; Green deal and digitalisation.
- By jointly supporting with the UN the respect and implementation of international norms and agreements, notably in the above-mentioned areas (for instance in the fight against gender-based violence, children rights, the establishment of non-binding norms for international cooperation for the governance of international migration, environmental issues through the UN Global Pact for the Environment).
- By extending, together with the UN, multilateralism to new global realities, such as chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear weapons, conflict minerals, the circular economy, forest conservations-related climate action and the use of artificial intelligence.
- By contributing to the UN reforms to support the UN deliver tangible results on the global agenda in an efficient manner.

The EU was able, in certain contexts, to build bridges and form alliances with other partners, but this also remained a challenge regularly. As a regional bloc, the EU long sought to promote cross-regional cooperation within the UN, particularly between the EU and Africa / the African Union. However, the North-South divide within the UN, with the G77 (and China) on one side and traditional donor countries on the other, was a source of tension.

This conclusion is based on EQ1, EQ2, EQ3, EQ5.

C7. The EU contributed to strengthening partner countries' capacities and to improving regulatory frameworks in line with international standards in five Commission's thematic policy areas.

From 2014 to 2020, EU financial contributions to the UN covered five key thematic areas defined by the von der Leyen Commission in 2019: economic, social, and human development (41%), peace, security, and governance (28%), migration (21%), the green deal (8%), and transition to a new digital era (2%). This allowed the EU to collaborate with the UN in each of these areas, aiming for results of multilateral action in line with its own policy and political objectives.

Overall, EU-UN cooperation contributed to strengthen partner countries' institutional knowledge and capacity for policy development and implementation, and to improved regulatory frameworks in line with international standards. Results in terms of improved service delivery remained modest. Cooperating with the UN also enabled EU assistance to reach target populations thanks to e.g., the UN in-country presence and mandate, albeit with varying levels of success.

In each one of the five thematic areas, key effects include:

- Green Deal-related EU-UN cooperation contributed to improved environmental management and facilitated the mobilisation of additional funds for environmental and climate action.
- Thanks to its collaboration with the UN, the EU was influential in setting global agendas and priorities related to digital regulation. Evidence on the extent to which this trickled down to countries and regions was limited.
- Partner capacities for policy formulation and planning in e.g., health, education and social protection were strengthened.
- In the area of peace, security and governance, the most tangible results, with positive contribution of the EU-UN cooperation, are noted in the area of international electoral assistance.

This conclusion is based on EQ3 (and EQ1 and EQ2).

C8. There was a lack of analytical information generated on the EU-UN cooperation at the level of specific sectors, themes, countries, regions, or UN entities. This was a constraint in terms of knowledge on EU-UN cooperation, capacity to leverage on the EU contribution, and development of more strategic approaches at these levels.

The EU has different means to generate information about EU-UN cooperation. One can distinguish three levels:

- The EU has comprehensive databases that contain information about where the funds go. This makes it possible to provide overviews of the benefitting sectors, countries, UN entities up to contract/project level, as was done in the present evaluation;
- Through the FAFA, the EU requires the UN to monitor interventions and to report to the Commission. This provides the EU with information at the intervention level (even if this reporting also posed several problems as noted under conclusion 9);
- The EU has a system of Results Oriented Monitoring (ROM) that allows it to generate information at the level of the interventions.

This means that the EU can generate information at the two ends of the spectrum: a global overview in terms of financial flows, and information at the level of the interventions supported.

In addition, a periodically conducted strategic evaluation, like the current one, provide a 'bird's eye view' on some of the strategic cooperation issues.

However, it was very difficult for the EU to obtain comprehensive analytical information between those levels, despite the importance and financial weight of the EU-UN cooperation. Indeed, there were, to the best of the evaluation team's knowledge, very limited analyses of the EU-UN cooperation by agency, sector, country, theme, or priority. Exceptions were the EEAS/ EXCO fiches providing information on selected UN agencies, but with limited scope, and launched in 2019 (i.e., towards the end of the evaluation period). The EAMRs contained some often-basic information about UN cooperation by country and were not consistently provided across countries.

Consequently, it was very difficult or hardly possible at EU headquarter level, or in Delegations like the one to the UN in New York, to get an overview of certain funding, topics, or issues. Even at EU Delegation level, an overview and analysis of what the EU did in cooperation with the UN in the country was not always available. The limited knowledge and information sharing at sector, country, regional or UN Agency level, had different consequences. First it did not allow the EU to have a clear image of how the funds it provided at for instance sector, thematic or agency level were used and what results they generated. Second it was an information gap for a more strategic approach towards a specific sector, country, or Agency. Finally, it did not allow the EU to use this information to leverage on the support it provided, whether at UN Headquarter level or during dialogues at country level.

This conclusion is based on the Inventory, EQ3, and EQ4.

6.3 Cooperation modalities / implementation

C9 The general legal, financial, and administrative framework overall served its purpose of providing a global and harmonised basis for the cooperation between EU and UN entities. It facilitated the collaboration when applied well, while providing mechanisms for ensuring accountability on the use of EU funds.

However, there were difficulties and challenges in the application of this framework. The EU and the UN attempted to find solutions, but key difficulties remained. These created tensions, inefficient use of resources, and delays.

Over the years the Commission has put in place an overall legal, financial, administrative, and contractual framework for its cooperation with the UN. The framework consisted primarily of (i) the EU-UN Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement – FAFA; (ii) pillar assessments of international organisations, and (iii) successive ‘PAGODA’ and Contribution Agreement contract templates for pillar-assessed international organisations.

The existence of the framework was a solid basis for cooperation when applied well. It broadly met the challenge of harmonising implementation arrangements and mechanisms for the cooperation between two such large and complex families as the EU and UN. It facilitated the management of EU-funded interventions by UN entities, while offering safeguards to the EU for ensuring it could meet its own obligations on management of EU funds set out notably in the EU Treaty and EU Financial Regulations. It enabled UN entities to follow their own rules and regulations in their EU-funded interventions.

Nevertheless, concerns and contention remained about the application of the framework, and in relation to the framework itself. The EU, notably the Commission and the European Court of Auditors, reported on many occasions and for a long time that it was not receiving the necessary documents it was requesting from UN, or that it was but with serious delays and time-consuming interaction. Many UN entities faced for instance issues with the EU’s pillar assessments, related among others to critical EU audit recommendations and the additional three pillars introduced following Financial Regulation 2018. Additionally, determining the level of UN overhead costs that can be charged to the EU remained an issue. This related notably to the percentage of indirect costs but also to the possibility of including costs that could fall under the category of direct eligible costs and meet the eligibility requirements described in the General Conditions, and ways to do so. Moreover, access to information issues put the EU in a difficult position vis-à-vis compliance with its own obligations, notably the Commission towards IAS and ECA, and ECA towards the European Parliament and the Council.

The EU and UN attempted to find solutions, but difficulties remained. These points of contention created tensions, inefficient use of resources, and delays. Both sides explained that their expectations and constraints were not well understood.

This conclusion is based on EQ4 (and EQ1).

C10. The EU backed the new round of UNDS reform efforts launched in January 2019. One of the areas of the reform that has seen the most progress relates to the reinvigorating of the Resident Coordinator system. This facilitated effective collaboration in several cases. Other areas of the reform were still largely underway during the period under review and/or presented challenges.

Reform of the UNDS has been a longstanding area of discussion and effort. It has aimed at a more cohesive, outcome-focused, and efficient UN system. It was expected to contribute to a more policy-oriented partnership between the EU and the UN, which is more conducive to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. The EU provided significant political, financial, advocacy, and operative support to this reform.

The launch of the new round of reform efforts – discussions initiated in 2017 by the UN Secretary General, UN Resolution 72/279 adopted in 2018 and reform rolled out in 2019 – aimed to reposition the UNDS to support the 2030 Agenda. The transition to a reinvigorated Resident Coordinator (RC) system is one of the transformation areas of UNDS reform that has seen most progress during the period under review. This includes the designation of and taking office of the 131 foreseen Resident Coordinators (RCs), whose role is at the very centre of the reform. Positive effects are reported in terms of more effective collaboration and advocacy, a coherent UN voice, and for promoting strategic partnerships⁹¹. In some countries, this led to improved coordination between the EU and UN entities. Moreover, UN Country Teams (UNCTs) developed Common Country Analyses (CCAs) and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (SDCFs)⁹². This work provided a shared platform for dialogue and planning within the UNCTs, to ensure alignment of UN development action with national development priorities, the 2030 Agenda and the principles of the UN Charter.

The EU supported the Joint SDG Fund with a EUR 30 million contribution, being the Fund crucial for mobilising the RCs as the central coordinating components of the UN family at country level.

The UNDS reform was still underway during the evaluation period, with various areas presenting challenges, even if it were still early to observe progress. Resistance was observed on the part of some individual UN entities to collaborate at the country level, as well as to focus on overall policies and outcomes rather than individual projects. Moreover, stakeholders reported persistent challenges regarding internal coordination and continued competition between the UN entities at the country level in various cases.

This conclusion is based on EQ5.

⁹¹ See Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) (2021), *Is this time different? UNDS Reform: progress, challenges, and opportunities*, Lessons in Multilateral Effectiveness, Paris.

⁹² CCAs provide an integrated evidence-based analysis by the United Nations system of the prospects for sustainable development in a country in which it maintains operational development activities. The UN SDCFs are the most important instrument for planning and implementation of the UN development activities at country level. They are an agreement between the UN and the host government and determine and reflect the UN development system's contributions in the country.

6.4 UN added value

C11. Through its cooperation with the UN, the EU benefited from specific assets of the UN family. These related notably to the promotion of shared norms and values; the credibility and legitimacy of the UN mandate; the UN's convening power; the UN presence on the ground and its established relations with national and local counterparts; and its technical capacity.

Channelling EU funds through the UN allowed the EU to strengthen its position as a multilateral actor and to implement multilateral agendas. It also enabled the EU to benefit from several other advantages of the UN family:

- The **promotion of shared norms and values**, beyond what the EU could have done on its own. The EU and the UN are like-minded partners sharing the same values and promoting similar objectives. They are for instance both committed to support the implementation of international commitments such as the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on climate change. Similarly, in peace and security, both the EU and the UN have broad mandates, working across diplomacy, development, security, humanitarian aid, and human rights.
- The **credibility and legitimacy of the UN mandate**. The UN and its agencies have generally been perceived by partner governments as impartial partners and brokers. They can promote and facilitate the adoption of more ambitious norms and actions on sensitive issues. The EU benefited from the UN credibility and legitimacy, notably but not only in conflict-affected settings.
- The **technical capacity** of the UN, with various UN specialized agencies in areas that are important for the EU. The EU could benefit from the technical expertise and experience of the UN in several fields, notably through its technical agencies. This encompassed for instance environmental, electoral, or migration matters.
- The **UN strong presence on the ground**: the UN often have had longstanding presence in a wide range of countries and in different parts of specific countries. This meant that, in some cases, there was no real alternative for the EU to working with the UN (for instance in Iraq) or that the EU could benefit from the UN's presence on a range of locations in a country (e.g., in Mali).
- **UN trusted relations with government counterparts**. In many countries, the UN have been well positioned to conduct dialogue with national, regional, or local authorities. This is notably due to its longstanding presence and the legitimacy of its mandate. By cooperating with the UN, the EU benefitted in several cases from the UN access to partner authorities, notably in conflict-affected countries (e.g., Yemen, Somalia, and Afghanistan) and in countries facing migration (e.g., Lebanon and Jordan). The UN was not always seen as a "policy pusher" or "reform advocate," with often also a strong humanitarian imprint.
- Finally, the **absorption capacity** of the UN, coupled with the ease of channelling funds through UN entities under the FAFA, allowed the EU to manage large packages of funding.

This conclusion is based on EQ 2, EQ3, EQ4, EQ 6.

7. LESSONS LEARNT AND GOOD PRACTICES

This section presents some key lessons and good practices that emerged from this evaluation and that are relevant beyond its immediate scope.

Lesson #1: At country level, when applied, a more structured and regular cooperation with the UN, under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator, strengthened the EU-UN partnership and proved beneficial in terms of targeting countries' needs, joint engagement with national authorities, and capitalisation on partner's strengths.

At the country level, it proved beneficial to pursue a more structured and regular cooperation with the UN, extending beyond the implementation of specific projects. The following good practices were identified:

- Annual strategic dialogues between the EUD and the UN country teams under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinators, to define joint priorities and develop strategies for engagement.
- Mutual consultation at the design stage of the EU and the UN main strategic documents and plans (including MIP/NIPs, the UNSDCF, and EU MS programmes) to promote alignment.
- Joint analysis, including foresight, and definition of joint advocacy priorities.
- Strong coordination in national development coordination platforms/ groups.

In countries where such practices were adopted⁹³, they helped reinforce the EU-UN partnership on the ground. They supported the EU and the UN to develop strategies for joint engagement, better targeting the countries' needs and promoting the SDG agenda. They facilitated joint engagement vis-à-vis national authorities, promoted coherence and synergies, and allowed the two partners to capitalise on each other's technical expertise and unique advantages. In the absence of such practices, the partnership on the ground remained centred around financial aspects and donor/implementor dynamics dominated.

Lesson #2: Internal coordination both within the EU and EU MS and within the UN was a factor that strengthened strategic engagement between the EU and the UN.

Internal coordination both within the EU and EU MS and within the UN was crucial but remained a challenge in several countries.

On the UN side, the progress in the UNDS reform contributed to a strengthening in coordination. This translated in increased opportunities for synergistic collaboration across UN entities in the implementation of EU projects, and through the reinvigorated RC provided an important entry point for strategic dialogue and engagement with the EU at the country level. However, in several countries, progress in this area was still underway. This translated in persistent challenges in coordination, in continued competition for funding among UN entities, and in RCs being unable to perform the assigned tasks.

On the EU side, the increased emphasis on a joint approach with EU MS, encouraged stronger coordination, allowed for the exercise of joint leverage vis-à-vis UN, and provided new opportunities for joint engagement with the UN.

Good practices for the EU in this area included:

- Continued support for the UNDS reform and the strengthening of the role of the UNRC.

⁹³ In most countries examined in the case studies the adoption of such practices was only partial. There was no formal structure for in-country cooperation, and cooperation and dialogue beyond implementation aspects, depended on personal relations. Significant progress in this area was observed in the years since the end of the evaluation period according to interviewed stakeholders.

- Regular dialogue and information exchanges between the EUD and EU MS.
- Joint programming between the EU and EU MS, and Team Europe Initiatives.
- EU/Team Europe support for UN pooled funds.
- Trilateral dialogue between the EU, EU MS, and the UN.⁹⁴

Lesson #3: The lack of clear overview on EU funding to the UN was an important challenge, for EU Delegations to multilateral organisation and partner countries.

For EU Delegations to the UN in New York, Geneva, Vienna, Rome, Nairobi, and Paris, the lack of a clear overview of EU funding to the UN was a recurrent challenge. It was crucial for staff of EUDs to have a clear understanding of the EU funding channelled, and more broadly of the cooperation on the ground with relevant UN entities, including its thematic and geographic distribution. This was necessary to leverage EU funding as a tool of influence and visibility in UN central organs, governing bodies and fora, to strategically position the EU vis-à-vis other donors, and to demonstrate EU commitment on relevant issues.

For EU Delegations to partner countries, there was limited awareness of funding channelled at HQ level to global initiatives and pooled funds. This prevented them from having a comprehensive overview of EU support in each thematic priority area and use it as a source of leverage and an entry point for dialogue vis-à-vis the national authorities but also the UN.

Good practices in this area include:

- The EEAS led exercise launched in 2019, with contributions from multilateral Delegations and Commission services, involving a regular assessment of EU funding to key UN entities, chosen based on their strategic political importance and/or the level of EU funding.
- Regular exchanges between HQ and EUDs on the cooperation with the UN.
- Establishing explicit linkages in internal monitoring systems between funding activities and thematic priorities to facilitate a strategic overview of funding.

Lesson #4: Visibility was enhanced when the EUDs played a role to promote visibility and took joint initiatives with the UN in this respect

In this context, the following good practices for promoting visibility of the EU at the country level were identified:

- An active role of EUDs in promoting EU visibility. EUDs played a role in terms of encouraging the UN to strengthen its compliance with visibility guidelines, by being for instance proactive in ensuring the HoD was invited to speak at events and by making sure the EU's role in the projects was explicit in all communications. High-levels of prioritisation of visibility and sufficiency of staff to be assigned to visibility-related tasks were key for visibility.
- Regular discussions between the EU and the UN entities on the ground to foster a common understanding of the EU visibility guidelines.
- Joint initiatives and joint communication activities provided an important entry point for visibility of the EU-UN partnership.

⁹⁴ The retreat organised in Kenya in 2020 was a good example of such dialogue. It included the participation of the UNRC, EUD and representatives from EU MS, and the government of Kenya to explore ways to combine efforts to best support the country's actions to implement the SDGs (see: <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/united-nations-european-union-and-its-member-states-take-strides-enhance-their-strategic-en>).

Lesson #5: When funding was not directly associated with strategic priorities, it tended to be fragmented and was limited in terms of its capacity to contribute to wider results, and promote EU visibility

It was important to ensure that funding was embedded in a strategic approach to cooperating with the UN. When funding was not directly associated with strategic priorities and engagement for policy change it tended to be fragmented and was limited in its capacity to contribute to wider results and promote EU visibility and influence. Conversely, without funding, it was challenging to translate political commitments into implementation in the ground (Global Compact on Migration, 2030 Agenda etc). Funding supported countries in achieving the intended reforms, and crucially demonstrated EU commitment on the relevant issues.

The following good practices were identified in this area:

- The launch of joint initiatives such as Spotlight, providing large-scale financial support to key EU-UN priorities.
- Pursuing a strategic approach to funding the UN: Identifying a limited set of thematic priorities of cooperation with the UN in each country and embedding all funding in the support thereof.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents the evaluation's recommendations to the EU. They build on the conclusions, lessons learnt, and good practices identified in the previous sections. They are provided at four levels: (i) strategy; (ii) visibility and influence; (iii) implementation and follow-up/ capitalisation framework; (iv) and communication.

Recent context evolutions

The recommendations are framed within recent context evolutions following the 2014-2020 evaluation period, which include:

- The **constant evolution of a multipolar world**, with major geopolitical and economic power shifts which call for a more effective multilateral governance. The international environment is getting increasingly complex and competitive, with for instance China's rising global influence. The war in Ukraine, pandemics, climate change, and technological innovations also call for a more resilient global order.
- **Global Gateway**, launched by the EU at the end of 2021, is supporting major investment in infrastructure development around the world⁹⁵. Investment priorities concern digitalisation, health, climate and energy, transport, and education and research. The EU aims at mobilising innovative approaches to financing thanks to the guarantees provided by the EFSD+ and the EFSD+ blending facilities.
- The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (**NDICI**) - **Global Europe** is the EU's main financing tool for 2021-2027. The 'Global Challenges' thematic programme is at the heart of the EU's global and multilateral ambition. It aims to promote effective multilateralism, with the UN at its core.
- The **Team Europe approach** invites the EU, EU Member States - including their implementing agencies and development banks -, as well as the EIB and the EBRD to work better together. It is the backbone of NDICI – Global Europe and its programming.
- The EU and the UN are committed to **accelerating the implementation of SDGs**. Following the COVID-19 crisis, the EU committed to a comprehensive approach to accelerate the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable development (Council conclusions (22 June 2021), "Building back better from the COVID-19 crisis"), acknowledging the key role of the UN and its entities.
- The current progress on the **UN development system reform** provides opportunities for more strategic cooperation and policy dialogue between the EU and UN entities at the country level.
- As a follow-up to the Joint Communication on Multilateralism, the EU introduced in 2022 an **"Agency by Agency approach"** to have a more strategic take on some of its multilateral partner organisations, including several UN entities.
- The EU and the UN started in 2022 to organise **high level dialogues**⁹⁶ and **regional seminars on country cooperation**. The retreats and seminars aim to strengthen the EU-UN partnership at global and country level in the face of current international challenges.
- Further exchanges are taking place on the **cooperation framework**, for instance with the EU-UN FAFA Working Group and with the EU-UN Joint Technical Reference Group (JTRG) created in 2022.

The figure below presents a brief overview of the set of recommendations.

⁹⁵ Support to investments in infrastructure is not a new area for EU development cooperation.

⁹⁶ A first EU-UN retreat was organised in July 2022, involving the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, together with eight members of the College, the United Nations' Secretary-General António Guterres and other senior UN officials in New York.

Figure 12. Recommendations

Strategy	R1	Continue strengthening EU cooperation with the UN
	R2	Pursue efforts to strengthen the strategic focus of the EU-UN partnership
Visibility & Influence	R3	Ensure full compliance with EU visibility requirements + strategic visibility
	R4	Enhance coordination with EU Member States
Implementation framework Follow-up	R5	Solve together issues of concern
	R6	Conduct analyses for obtaining a better overview of EU-UN cooperation
Communication	R7	Develop further communication between EU HQs and Delegations

8.1 Strategy

Recommendation 1: Continue strengthening EU cooperation with the UN

The EU should continue developing its cooperation with the UN to provide a multilateral answer to global challenges.

This recommendation is linked to the Inventory and all conclusions.

Main implementation responsibility: Commission (policy and thematic units), EEAS HQ, EUDs.

Main associated actors: UN senior officials, EU MS.

Implementation timeframe: continuation.

What worked and should continue?

The EU has reinforced its cooperation with the UN since the early 2000s. During the period under review, it further intensified the strategic nature of its partnership - which is embedded in the pursuit of a rules-based global order - and massively increased its funding to the UN.

This evaluation confirms several benefits of the EU-UN cooperation as well as challenges. Benefits include the promotion of a multilateral stance, the ability to further promote EU values and priorities, the ability to jointly address global challenges in different key areas, and the possibility to benefit from specific advantages the UN system offers.

What should be strengthened (or discontinued) and how should this be done?

EU-UN cooperation also encountered challenges linked to e.g., an insufficient strategic approach at the country level, issues with reporting, low EU visibility. While improvements are possible for some of these issues, others are inherent to a cooperation of such complexity and magnitude between two major international organisations.

The evaluation considers that the benefits outweigh the challenges. It hence supports further development of the EU-UN partnership to address global issues, in a multilateral manner. This first recommendation aims at underlining the importance of continuing the road taken by the EU in terms of cooperation with the UN. As it is an overarching recommendation, the specific elements to be strengthened (or discontinued) are described in the subsequent recommendations.

Recommendation 2: Pursue efforts to strengthen the strategic focus of the EU-UN partnership, especially at the country level

The EU should pursue efforts to strengthen the strategic focus of its partnership with the UN, especially at the country level. These efforts should build on the current UNDS reform.

This recommendation is linked to conclusions C1 and C8, and Lessons Learnt LL1, LL2, LL5.

Main implementation responsibility: Commission (policy and thematic units), EEAS HQ, EUDs.

Main associated actors: UN senior officials, UN Resident Coordinators, UN Country Teams.

Implementation timeframe: Short and medium-term.

What worked and should continue?

Towards the end of the evaluation period, the EU made significant efforts to strengthen strategic dialogue with the UN, which should be continued. This included both strategic dialogue with individual UN entities at HQ level and High-level dialogue with the UNSG. Such dialogues allowed the EU and the UN to reaffirm the strategic importance of the cooperation and provided opportunities for mutual policy influencing and for strengthening policy cooperation.

What should be strengthened (or discontinued) and how should this be done?

At the country level, strategic dialogue and engagement with the UN remained limited over the evaluation period. It is important to strengthen such structural cooperation at the country level. This was in fact one of the direct operational conclusions of the EU-UN High-Level Dialogue of July 2022 between UN Secretary General Guterres and EU Commission President von der Leyen, and of the bilateral meeting held between Commissioner Urpilainen and UN Deputy Secretary-General Mohammed. The regional seminars conducted in 2022-2023 between EU Delegations, UN Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams to identify best practices and opportunities for strengthening EU-UN cooperation in the field were useful in this sense. It is important to continue them and ensure that they are followed up by concrete action.

At the same time, it is important to embed such cooperation at the country level, in a broader strategic approach vis-à-vis the UN. A comprehensive strategy for engaging with the UN was lacking. EU-UN financial cooperation was more often driven by a pragmatic approach and decided on a project-by-project basis. A clearer and more transparent approach to partnering with UN agencies could help inform choices and ensure that funding is based on evidence of how specific partnerships might best add value and support EU strategic priorities. The “agency by agency” approach elaborated by the EU in 2022, is an important step in this direction and should be further strengthened.

More specifically, it is recommended that the EU undertakes the following actions at HQ and country levels respectively:

R2.1 Continue organising annual EU-UN high level dialogues, following the example of the 2022 EU-UN Retreat with the participation of Mrs von der Leyen and Mr Guterres. Ensure that Action plans are developed to follow-up on the relevant conclusions, and that results of these dialogues trickle down to the field level.

R2.2 Follow the “agency by agency” approach and engage accordingly in regular policy dialogue with individual UN entities. At HQ level, this should involve the following, in line with the already established process: (1) Determining the key agencies to screen and ensuring an analysis of those agencies by clearly defined leads; (2) Screening based on a common template and with regular inter-service coordination inside and beyond INTPA ; (3) Roll-out for quality policy dialogue and better

alignment between funding, priorities and overall EU leverage. This analysis at HQ level, could be complemented by a relevant analysis at the country level to identify key agencies for advancing EU country priorities, based on their country presence. It is important to make sure that the agency-by-agency approach remains flexible, and compatible with an approach that sees the UN as one.

R2.3 Consider the possibility of strengthening Joint Initiatives with the UN and contributions to UN pooled, thematic and joint funds on key priority issues, recognizing their role as levers of influence and visibility at the global level. Examine possibilities in the context of the NDICI-Global Europe instrument. Make sure this takes due account of the specific contexts and specific constraints in each country, acknowledging that it is not always possible to do joint programming.

R2.4 Strengthen the structural engagement with the UN at country level, building on the Resident Coordinator system and UN country teams. This should include the following, in line with good practices identified and in the context of EU-UN regional seminars:

- Annual strategic dialogues between the EUD, and the UN country teams under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinators, to define joint priorities and develop strategies for engagement, in line with the respective planning and programming instruments.
- Mutual consultation at the design stage of the EU and the UN main strategic documents and plans (including MIP/NIPs, the UNSDCF, and EU MS programmes) to promote alignment.
- Joint analysis, including foresight, and definition of joint advocacy priorities.
- Strong coordination in national development coordination platforms/ groups.

R2.5 Strengthen information exchange and establish channels for regular dialogue with individual UN entities at the country level under the leadership of the UNRC. Having regular dialogue with individual UN entities at country level remains crucial to foster mutual understanding, address operational challenges, identify strategic priorities for the cooperation and review progress, and foster EU visibility. This is important in a context where the UNDS reform is still underway, with challenges in most countries.

R2.6 Examine the strategic positioning of the UN in the context of Team Europe Initiatives and the Global Gateway in each country. Consider involving the UN in the design of such initiatives irrespectively of whether the UN is considered as an implementing partner option.

8.2 Visibility / influence

Recommendation 3: Ensure full compliance with EU visibility requirements and emphasise a more “strategic” approach to communication, and visibility

The EU should ensure full compliance with its visibility requirements and devote further efforts to improve its strategic communication and visibility at the country level.

This recommendation is linked to conclusion C4, and lesson learnt LL4.

Main implementation responsibility: Commission (policy and thematic units), EEAS HQ, EUDs.

Main associated actors: UN operational staff at country level, UN senior officials.

Implementation timeframe: short-term.

What worked and should continue?

At the country level, an active role of EU Delegations in donor coordination mechanisms and other in-country fora for dialogue, and in public events enhanced EU visibility.

What should be strengthened (or discontinued) and how should this be done?

The UN did not systematically comply with EU visibility requirements and guidelines, despite notable improvements towards the end of the evaluation period. Even when there was compliance with the contractual obligations and guidelines, the EU remained hidden behind the UN at the country level. Visibility of the EU vis-a-vis national authorities and beneficiaries tended to be low at the country level.

Taking action to ensure EU visibility is commensurate with EU policy and financial contributions is key for EU diplomacy and accountability. It is thus suggested that the Commission undertakes the following:

R3.1 Continue highlighting the importance of ensuring compliance with visibility requirements in dialogue with the UN, including High-Level dialogue, and continue addressing challenges in the FAFA Working Group.

R3.2 Apply the clauses on non-compliance of the specific contracts concluded with the UN at intervention level when necessary.

R3.3 Ensure a common understanding amongst EU and UN staff on the joint communication and visibility requirements to make sure the requirements are well applied. This could be done by continuing regular dialogue and information exchange between EU and UN operational-level staff involved in EU-funded UN interventions (see also R4.4).

R3.4 Promote the identification and sharing of good practices to enhance EU visibility at the country level. Consider the good practices identified in the context of this evaluation (LL4).

R3.5 Pursue a strategic approach to communication and visibility at the country level. This is in line with the 2022 EU Communication and Visibility Guidelines for external action which introduced the concept of strategic communication, conducted directly by the EU focusing on key priority areas in a country instead of individual projects. This is also in line with developments in UN approaches to communication. The EU-UN visibility guidelines are being updated jointly by the EU and the UN.

R3.6 Acknowledge the convening role of the UN and in certain contexts the preferred access to national authorities and reflect on ways to better engage in trilateral dialogue (such as the one conducted in Kenya) to promote EU visibility.

R3.7 Pursue joint visibility of the partnership, through high-level dialogue with the UN, joint events, and joint initiatives, to ensure that the EU and UN – and their strategic cooperation – is visible and understood by authorities, citizens and partners at country, regional and global level.

Recommendation 4: Enhance coordination with EU Member States

The EU should continue favouring coordination with EU Member States vis-à-vis the UN to enhance coherence and joint leverage.

This recommendation is linked to conclusion C3, and lessons learnt LL3.

Main implementation responsibility: Commission (policy and thematic units), EEAS HQ, EUDs.

Main associated actors: EU MS (permanent missions to the UN and at country level).

Implementation timeframe: short to medium term.

What worked and should continue?

“Speaking as one” and ensuring sufficient coherence with EU Member States was crucial for the EU to promote its values and priorities within the UN. The EU invested significant resources at the global level for coordination with its MS vis-à-vis the UN and managed to ensure overall coherence with its MS in UN fora, despite challenges on certain issues.

What should be strengthened (or discontinued) and how should this be done?

In the governing bodies of UN entities, coordination between the EU and its MS was however generally limited to information exchange, even if in most cases they remained coherent. EU Member States as donors were keen to highlight their individual contributions and promote their own positions.

At the country level, there were frequent information exchanges between the EU and its MS but strategic coordination vis-à-vis the UN was limited. EU and EU MS coordination with UN generally took place within the overall aid coordination structure and in contexts of Multi-Partner Trust Funds (MPTFs). Joint programming was overall limited and the potential to pursue a Team Europe approach in contexts where both the EU and EU MS were contributing to the same UN MPTFs was not fully exploited.

As the EU and the EU MS are key partners to the UN – representing 42% of UN funding over the period considered – and as they have not used their joint leverage to its full potential, the following is recommended, while acknowledging that improving coordination and coherence does not depend on the sole efforts of the EU institutions alone:

R4.1 Continue investing resources for coordination with EU MS at EU Delegations to UN HQs, and supporting the burden sharing arrangements with EU MS.

R4.2 Examine ways to strengthen coordination in UN governing bodies, while acknowledging the desire of EU MS to project their own values and interests.

R4.3 Further examine possibilities to exploit the combined analytical and knowledge capacities of the EU and its MS for evidenced based policies in support of negotiations. A Team Europe approach could be pursued to enhance evidence-based knowledge and policy inputs for development policy influencing at the global level.

R4.4 Consider a Team Europe approach to strategic dialogue at the country level between the EU and the UN, including in the framework of the Global Gateway/Team Europe Initiatives.

R4.5 Strengthen coordination and joint programming between the EU and its MS at the country level.

8.3 Implementation framework / follow-up

Recommendation 5: Solve together issues of concern regarding the EU-UN cooperation framework

Solve with the UN the issues of concern in the EU-UN cooperation framework.

This recommendation is linked to conclusion C9.

Main implementation responsibility: Commission services in charge of Relations with UN, Legal, Audit & Control, and Finance & Contracts.

Main associated actors: IAS, ECA.

Implementation timeframe: medium term.

What worked and should continue?

The existence of the current legal, financial, and administrative framework was a solid basis for cooperation when applied well. Moreover, regular exchanges took place between the EU and UN for dealing with the issues and challenges encountered. Hence, this overall framework and exchanges should be continued.

What should be strengthened (or discontinued) and how should this be done?

A series of issues with the framework and its application caused problems. Some were solved, others remained. Examples of the latter relate to access to information for EU entities (Commission, IAS, ECA); assessment of the three pillars added in 2019; and determination of UN overhead costs at intervention level. Both sides explained that their expectations and constraints were not understood. Operational staff also indicated the need for a better understanding of each other's requirements and of a clear line of conduct from EU and UN HQs. These problems are key to resolve as they created delays, inefficient use of resources and tensions.

Options for addressing it:

- **R5.1 Continue making significant efforts to resolve, as far as possible, longstanding complex issues** (e.g., on access to information by the Commission, IAS and ECA). Put technical staff, (senior) management, and probably also political-level staff around the table, on the EU and UN side. Discuss the estimated level of effort needed on the UN side for meeting EU requirements, and conversely. Pursue efforts to ensure a strong understanding of the other side's constraints and pragmatic solutions. Continue to clarify with the UN the elements of the agreements on which the EU and UN have different interpretations, revising them or providing interpretative notes (as has been done with the Contribution Agreement Manual in December 2022). Arrive at agreements which are very clear on both sides (e.g., on project/programme reporting, EV, RER, ECA).
- **R5.2 Continue monitoring recurrent implementation issues** with the framework, notably at intervention level and with field-based staff, for instance with relation to the Common Understanding on expenditure verifications and EV ToR.
- **R5.3 Continue with frequent and informal exchanges** at HQ level for solving issues of lower complexity or relating to specific cases. The EU-UN Joint Technical Reference Group (JTRG), which met for the first time in December 2022 and again in April 2023, is a good example of this.

- **R5.4 Further reinforce understanding and communication between EU and UN operational-level staff** involved in EU-funded UN interventions, regarding the requirements and expectations of each partner, including rules and procedures and their *raison d'être* (see also R7). In case grey zones have been identified and clarified between EU and UN (see R5.2), provide clear instructions to intervention-level staff. Where a grey zone may remain (e.g., possibly on the negotiation of indirect and direct eligible costs), provide a clearer line of conduct to EU and UN staff.

Recommendation 6: Conduct analyses for obtaining a better, more strategic overview of EU-UN cooperation

The EU should conduct studies or analyses for obtaining a better knowledge on and overview of the EU-UN cooperation to enhance a more strategic cooperation at both HQ and country level and to leverage on support provided.

This recommendation is linked to conclusions C8, and lesson learnt LL3.

Main implementation responsibility: Commission services in charge of Relations with UN, Knowledge Management, and possibly thematic and geographical units.

Main associated actors: -

Implementation timeframe: short to medium term.

What worked and should continue?

As explained under conclusion 8, the EU has at its disposal the information required to generate an overview of its funding flows to the UN, including on the concerned UN entities, sectors, countries, etc. In addition to this macro level, the EU obtains information at intervention level through the UN reporting on interventions and the EU's result-oriented monitoring and EU's annual results reporting exercises. It is important to continue gathering this type of information.

What should be strengthened (or discontinued) and how should this be done?

However, there was little information generated, and analysis conducted between these levels. The EU had limited analytical information on its cooperation with specific UN entities, or of its cooperation with the UN for a specific sector, theme, regions, or country⁹⁷. This is despite the huge amount of funding that was concerned, and the breadth and complexity of the collaboration.

This created difficulties for leveraging support provided or trying to optimise the cooperation in a certain country or sector for instance, but also simply in terms of having a more in-depth knowledge on different aspects of the cooperation.

It is therefore suggested that the EU conducts analyses, studies or evaluations more regularly at these levels, to obtain better overviews for informing decision-makers at HQ and in Delegations to the UN HQs and to partner countries. This could be initiated on a need basis and could be done by both EU HQs and EU Delegations.

⁹⁷ In 2022, analysis on individual UN entities started being conducted in the context of the agency-by-agency approach. OPSYS and the Results Dashboard that is expected to go live in Q3 2023 will change this.

8.4 Communication

Recommendation 7: Develop further the communication between EU HQs and Delegations

The EU should improve the communication between EU HQs and Delegations regarding EU cooperation with the UN, in both directions, and ensure the uptake of existing information.

This recommendation is linked to conclusions C2, C8, and LL3.

Main implementation responsibility: Commission services in charge of relations with UN, EU Delegations.

Main associated actors: -

Implementation timeframe: short term.

What worked and should continue

The EU uses several documents and instruction notes to communicate with EU Delegations and managers of agreements in Headquarters. This also includes the Contribution agreements, the FAFA agreement and Manuals of Procedure that inform how the EU and the UN collaboration works. These different sources are important and should be maintained.

What should be strengthened (or discontinued) and how should this be done?

The evaluation has identified issues in terms of communication between EU HQs and Delegations. Indeed, Delegations were not always aware of details related to the cooperation between the EU and the UN taking place in the country in which they are based. Similarly, EU HQs did not always have a clear idea of what kind of cooperation there was between the EU and the UN in a specific country. Moreover, and despite the various sources of information, Delegations seem not to be aware of their responsibilities on matters related to EU-funded UN interventions (negotiation of overhead costs, verification of reporting on budget and results, etc.). This may also be linked in a lack of use of already existing information.

It is suggested to increase communication from EU HQs to Delegations on these various matters, for instance clarifying the objectives of the EU-UN partnership; institutional contexts and expectations on both sides; the EU line of conduct on application of problematic financial and administrative provisions; objectives in terms of strategic/political visibility, etc. This is not only a matter of making available documents, but also making sure interlocutors are aware of their existence and use them. It is also suggested to make sure EU HQs have at all moments a clear view on what EU-UN cooperation is taking place in a specific country and, conversely, that EUD are well informed of EU-UN interventions that are taking place in the country of the EUD.

The European Commission Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations - NEAR

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