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**Gender equality at UNDP**

**Annual report of the Administrator on the implementation of  
the UNDP gender equality strategy in 2021**

*Summary*

This report presents the performance of UNDP in 2021 on implementing the gender equality strategy, 2018-2021. Chapter I gives an overview; chapter II provides development results under each outcome of the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021; chapter III shares institutional results to strengthen gender mainstreaming; and chapter IV summarizes lessons learned and indicates the way forward.

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## I. Introduction

1. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals guide the work of UNDP. This annual report shows strong overall progress towards implementing the UNDP gender equality strategy, 2018-2021. It demonstrates that as the largest United Nations organization in the field, UNDP plays a vital role at the global and national levels for women's rights and gender equality, through country programmes.

2. In 2021, UNDP implemented the gender equality strategy against the backdrop of a rapidly evolving global development landscape. New laws and policies were enacted to advance gender equality, meaningful progress was made in women's access to health services, and the rise of grass-roots civic action brought women's rights to the fore. The year also saw the climate emergency deepen, the social contract continue to come under strain and global strife increase. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continued exposing the fault lines of gender equality, gender-based discrimination and inequalities.

3. UNDP continued to reinforce gender-responsive social protection, elevating the value of unpaid care. There was a push to ensure that gender equality is at the core of UNDP efforts towards sustainable finance. An encouraging turning point was the inclusion of gender considerations in climate plans, with strong results in countries supported through the UNDP Climate Promise. UNDP continued to improve women's leadership in natural resource management and climate action, and to boost support for women-led community-based associations. UNDP also stepped up its work to respond to gender-based violence. A notable jump in achievement was in partnerships committed to shifting social norms that perpetuate gender and other forms of discrimination. The UNDP governance portfolio continued to transform public policies and institutions to bring about social change for gender equality.

4. In the years to come, UNDP will work to address the drivers of gender inequalities by fostering inclusive economies, elevating women's voices and contributing to changing negative gender norms. UNDP will sharpen its focus on countries in crisis and add a stronger gender lens to effectively address challenges, including the climate emergency and energy transition.

### Box 1. Global Report on Gender Equality in Public Administration

In 2021, UNDP published [the Global Report on Gender Equality in Public Administration](#) based on the University of Pittsburgh Gender Parity in the Civil Service Dataset. While there has been progress in women's overall representation in public administration, with women now making up on average 46 per cent of public administrators, they hold only 31 per cent of top leadership positions. The report resulted in dialogues with policymakers and practitioners from around the world, contributed to bridging data gaps and provided approaches to strengthen the capacities of public institutions to produce and track sex-disaggregated data related to Sustainable Development Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions).

### Highlights of progress on the gender equality strategy in 2021

5. Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis, performance against the gender equality strategy 2018-2021 and the Strategic Plan remained strong. In 2021, 11 of 15 gender-responsive output indicators met or exceeded their targeted milestones. UNDP continued to be rated as one of the best-performing organizations in the United Nations system in 2021, meeting or exceeding requirements for 88 per cent (14 of 16) of the relevant indicators in the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

6. UNDP continued increasing its commitments on social protection at a crucial time, helping to recognize the centrality of care work. In 2021, UNDP work on gender-responsive social protection reached a record 73 countries, an increase from 20 in 2019. This support came at a critical time as women and girls continued to face disproportionate socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic. The need for strong coordination, partnerships with the private sector and local actors such as women's networks, further investment in

digitized civil registration systems and in reducing the gender digital divide, are lessons learned to build more inclusive social protection systems.

7. In 2021, UNDP showed how to operationalize financing for the Sustainable Development Goals for gender equality. Achieving the aims of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and gender equality requires changes in the way that public and private actors interact, including alignment of the financing strategies. In 2021, amid a globally constrained fiscal context, UNDP worked in 40 countries to mobilize finance for gender equality and partnered with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) in 16 countries on integrated national financing frameworks. UNDP work with ministries for economy and finance will help to scale up this agenda in the coming years to expand financing for gender equality, including through new partnerships.

8. There was an encouraging turning point for gender equality in climate plans, with 96 per cent of the 117 countries supported by the UNDP Climate Promise including gender provisions in their nationally determined contributions in 2021. UNDP supported 95 countries to strengthen women's leadership and decision-making in natural resource management and climate-resilient governance, and 72 countries boosted support to women-led community-based associations. Learning during the year underscored how the recognition and involvement of women as key stakeholders in environment and energy-related programming at all levels can be a particularly vital element to improving national decision-making processes.

9. UNDP nearly doubled measures to support women's meaningful participation and leadership as the pandemic highlighted how women's full and inclusive participation in public institutions is critical but still lacking. With UNDP support, 384 measures – from electoral quotas to gender-smart business policies – were put in place, nearly double the measures in 2020, up from 180 measures in 2019 and 134 in 2018. Nearly half of these measures (42 per cent) supported women's political participation, which accounts for the significant progress in this area.

10. UNDP increased the number of country offices addressing and responding to gender-based violence, which escalated during the pandemic. UNDP supported 96 countries to address gender-based violence, delivered technical advice to strengthen legal frameworks and multisectoral policies and integrated a gender-based violence lens into COVID-19 interventions. The number of partnerships to address negative social norms that perpetuate gender discrimination grew notably. In 2021 alone, UNDP established 241 partnerships with Governments and other partners, an increase from 116 in 2020 and 58 in 2018.

11. UNDP equipped its personnel with capacities to implement the gender equality strategy and supported leadership for gender equality through the Gender Equality Seal. Almost 1,000 people participated in the Gender Seal awards ceremony that recognized 31 country offices (7 Gold awards, 17 Silver and 7 Bronze,) and celebrated their achievements, commitment and dedication to gender equality, which have proven essential for putting gender equality at the centre of the UNDP agenda. The 2021-2023 Gender Seal certification was launched by a record 83 (64 per cent of) country offices, with 15 of them participating in a dedicated Gender Seal crisis track.

#### **Box 2. Gender Seal track for offices in crisis-affected countries**

This track was established to provide tailored technical support to strengthen the impact and results of gender equality initiatives in crisis contexts. In 2021, 15 country offices\* voluntarily enrolled. Several goals were identified, including the need for highly skilled gender specialists, gender focal teams and increased resource allocations towards achieving gender equality results. In 2022, offices will benefit from technical support services for gender mainstreaming, including programme portfolio reviews, skills-building and mentoring activities.

\* Burundi, Chad, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Haiti, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine, Yemen and the programme of assistance to the Palestinian people.

## II. Gender equality results by outcomes of the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021

### Outcome 1. Eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions

12. Multidimensional poverty, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, cannot be ended without tackling persistent gender inequalities that hold back half of the world's population. UNDP scaled up efforts to address the gendered impacts of economic downturn and empower women to navigate intersecting crises. Applying evaluation findings, UNDP worked to advance integrated development solutions with a focus on dismantling structural barriers to women's economic empowerment, from addressing unpaid care work and supporting women-led businesses as engines for gender-equitable economies to expanding equitable access to energy and addressing gender-based violence.

#### Gender-responsive social protection

13. As the pandemic continued to crush female-dominated industries and push more women into poverty, UNDP significantly scaled up gender-responsive social protection in 2021. The number of countries supported by UNDP skyrocketed from 20 in 2019 to 41 in 2020 to 73 in 2021. UNDP collaborated with Governments to develop gender-responsive social protection strategies and action plans, and empowered women-led businesses through digital skills and income support, while ensuring social security for those who need it most.

14. UNDP pushed for recognition of the critical role of unpaid care work, supporting Governments in promoting the care economy and addressing growing care needs. Examples of this work include developing a framework for the national care system with the Ministry of Women in Peru, and strengthening caregivers' capacities in the 2021 Operational Plan on Employment in North Macedonia. UNDP supported innovative programming and campaigns to shift social norms underpinning the gender-unequal division of labour in over 37 countries. In India, for example, UNDP conducted a behavioural insights pilot using communication and training tools to encourage men and boys to participate in unpaid care.

15. As part of a comprehensive strategy to eradicate poverty, UNDP continued to emphasize the nexus between gender equality and quality health care in 2021, supporting 67 countries to address gender-based violence in the context of HIV/AIDS. UNDP partnered with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS to train health providers while supporting women to lead the fight against HIV-related stigma in countries, including Djibouti.

#### Integrated responses to poverty

16. Counterbalancing the feminization of poverty caused by COVID-19 was central to the UNDP gender agenda in 2021. UNDP continued to partner across government ministries to integrate a gender lens in Sustainable Development Goal planning, implementation and reporting, including in crisis settings. For example, UNDP signed a memorandum of understanding with the General Secretariat of the Iraqi Council of Ministers' Women Empowerment Directorate to provide technical support and align the gender-related national commitment with the Goals.

17. Mobilizing new streams of development finance to accelerate progress towards the 2030 Agenda has been a key enabler. UNDP ensured that gender equality is at the core of sustainable finance efforts. UNDP continued to partner with UN-Women on integrated national financing frameworks, working in 16 countries. There are encouraging changes in countries like Lesotho, where nearly a third of recommendations under these frameworks targeted gender equality in mechanisms and decisions on development financing.

#### Gender mainstreaming in national planning

18. Achieving progress in gender equality and human development requires systematic gender mainstreaming in national development planning. In 2021, UNDP strengthened gender mainstreaming in national planning in at least 26 countries, up from 16 in 2020. For example, in South Africa, UNDP supported the parliament to develop the 'Women's Charter for Accelerated Development: Setting a 25-

Year Vision and Agenda for Women's Equality, Growth and Development', which outlines a trajectory towards gender equality.

19. UNDP in partnership with UN-Women expanded its work on gender-responsive budgeting to 25 countries in 2021, an increase from 14 in 2020. For example, with UNDP support, the Government of Armenia integrated gender budgeting into the Law on the Annual State Budget for the first time, and in Georgia, the Government introduced gender-budgeting principles in 10 municipalities. Gathering empirical evidence on the impact of gender budgeting in achieving gender equality will increase the motivation of countries to apply this tool.

#### **Access to basic services, finance and assets**

20. Gender-equitable access to basic services remained critical to alleviate economic and social stress caused by the pandemic. In the period 2018-2021, UNDP enabled 75.7 million women to gain access to basic services such as health and education; financial services, including bank accounts and credit; and non-financial assets.

21. While UNDP made progress in 2021 in increasing the number of women accessing financial services by over 2.5 million compared to 2020, it fell behind the target. Country offices reported challenges related to gender capacity constraints, limited financial resources and ongoing COVID-19 issues, as well as economic downturns, political instability, discriminatory laws and policies and societal norms. UNDP persisted in its efforts and under the African Continental Free Trade Area, for example, it worked with the African E-Trade Group to ensure that the development of the single African market provides access for women-owned exporting enterprises, thereby boosting their sales and markets.

#### **Access to clean energy**

22. Leveraging the multiplier benefits for gender equality of a clean energy transition, UNDP with partners continued to expand access to clean energy, with 4.4 million women-headed households accessing clean energy in 27 countries, a consistent increase from 2.6 million in 2020, 1.4 million in 2019 and 611,000 in 2018. The new UNDP Sustainable Energy Hub which builds on the existing energy portfolio, is committed to support over 100 countries in equitable transition to renewable energy. Following recommendations from the recent evaluation of UNDP support to energy access and transition by the Independent Evaluation Office, in its next gender equality strategy, UNDP will promote more targeted gender guidance for its energy programming, including addressing financial control that prevents women from benefiting equally from improved energy outcomes.

#### **Gender-based violence**

23. As the pandemic deepened, gender-based violence rooted in pre-existing unequal structures and toxic social norms intensified. UNDP ramped up efforts to address the continuing surge in gender-based violence. UNDP expanded its support from 80 countries in 2020 to 96 in 2021 to respond to the immediate effects of COVID-19, while providing technical advice to improve legal frameworks and multisectoral policies. In Uganda, UNDP worked with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development to develop a national strategy on gender-based violence and integrate gender into budgets across ministries, and in Papua New Guinea, UNDP support resulted in the first-ever dedicated allocation in the national budget to respond to gender-based violence.

24. In line with its integrator role, UNDP enhanced linkages between gender-based violence, climate change, poverty reduction and more representative decision-making. Examples of such work can be seen in Lebanon, where UNDP incorporated gender-based violence prevention into livelihoods programming.

#### **Box 3. Achieving more gender-equitable relationships in conflict settings**

In Iraq, the inclusion of activities to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in a broader economic recovery programme reduced the dropout rate of women participants by almost half, with UNDP support. The activities included sessions with married couples who were participants in the livelihood components of the project. Participants were invited to attend biweekly couples' sessions that encouraged healthy and equitable relationships. This promising result was achieved through a pilot

funded by the Government of the Republic of Korea and will inform future adaptations of the UNDP large economic recovery portfolio.

25. Many of the most successful interventions to address gender-based violence were carried out under the joint United Nations--European Union Spotlight Initiative. This demonstrated the tangible impacts of large-scale investments and political prioritization on ending gender-based violence. In at least nine countries, UNDP contributed directly to the mobilization of parliamentarians to draft or strengthen 84 laws on gender-based violence. In Mexico, UNDP supported reforms of the federal penal code with a focus on femicide. Through Spotlight, by the end of 2021, UNDP had channelled \$26 million, (out of \$52 million in total expenditure for all Spotlight components implemented by UNDP) to civil society organizations, which continued to be key partners in this effort.

26. UNDP increased efforts to address the drivers of violence exacerbated by COVID-19 lockdowns. With the shift to online work and life, UNDP stood at the forefront of efforts to combat online violence and cyberattacks. In India, for instance, UNDP supported social media analysis of 255,300 male users to understand their engagement in unpaid care work. UNDP will enhance online programming to prevent gender-based violence, as well as strengthen women's digital access and literacy.

## **Outcome 2. Accelerating structural transformation for sustainable development**

27. UNDP reinforced efforts to transform institutions that perpetuate gender inequalities by amplifying women's voices and continuing to help challenge structural barriers and gender-discriminatory practices across intersecting development areas. This entailed: (a) strengthening women's political participation and decision-making; (b) mainstreaming gender in climate change mitigation and adaptation, and in natural resource management; and (c) expanding legal, policy and institutional reforms and removing structural barriers to women's empowerment.

### **Box 4. The Gender Equality Seal for Public Institutions**

In 2021, UNDP launched the Gender Equality Seal for Public Institutions programme in Latin America and the Caribbean and in Africa to support public institutions to achieve global standards on gender equality. Forty-one public institutions from Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Panama, Paraguay and Peru enrolled in the programme, and 196 public officials participated in an online course on 'Keys for Gender Equality'. In the Dominican Republic, UNDP and the Ministry of Women led the process, creating a community of practice, including a repository to share national policies and regulations.

## **Women's political participation and decision-making**

28. COVID-19 exposed endemic gaps in decision-making affecting institutions, discriminatory laws, norms and practices. For instance, the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, a joint effort of UNDP and UN-Women, revealed that women were largely underrepresented in national COVID-19 task forces, holding only 24 per cent of membership. UNDP works to ensure that women have a seat at the table, making their voices heard in the decisions that impact their lives and communities.

29. Despite political turbulence, democratic governance continued to be a critical area of UNDP work in 2021. As one of the largest actors supporting women's political participation, UNDP worked in all regions to advance women's participation and leadership in public institutions, parliaments, the judiciary and the private sector. With UNDP support, 384 measures – from electoral quotas to gender-smart business policies – were put in place, a stable increase from 209 measures in 2020, 180 in 2019 and 134 in 2018. In Lesotho, for example, UNDP worked with the National Reforms Authority to facilitate bipartisan consultations that resulted in an agreement on constitutional amendments and 16 bills that directly impact gender equality.

30. As the world's leading supporter of elections, UNDP strengthened support for inclusive political processes that enable women to participate on equal terms. Across 42 countries assisted by UNDP electoral work, the share of all registered voters who were women increased from 47 to 50 per cent since 2017. For

example, in the Gambia, UNDP supported voter registration efforts for the 2021 presidential election which resulted in women accounting for 57 per cent of registered voters, and helped establish the Women's Branch of the Inter-Party Committee which advocates for equal representation in the executive branch. To secure equal representation of women and men on electoral lists, UNDP provided technical assistance to countries including Armenia, Lebanon, Rwanda, Somalia and Timor-Leste to introduce temporary special measures, including quotas. UNDP also supported women's caucuses and parliamentary committees at local, national and regional levels.

#### **Box 5. The Central Asia Women Leaders' Caucus**

With UNDP support, the Central Asia Women Leaders' Caucus brought policy advocacy for women's leadership to the regional level to expand women's participation in political and socioeconomic transformation. In 2021, the caucus formulated a regional action plan on sustainable development and a joint statement geared to building women's capacities for strengthening peace and stability. It also set up a platform for businesswomen with over 500 women leaders and entrepreneurs, and a network of nearly 50 young women leaders from Central Asia.

### **Mainstreaming gender in climate change and natural resource management**

31. One of the most important opportunities to change direction was the lead-up to the review of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. The UNDP Climate Promise is the world's largest source of support for these climate action plans and works to ensure that they are gender-responsive. In 2021, 96 per cent of the 117 countries supported by the Climate Promise incorporated gender considerations into their nationally determined contributions, of which 78 per cent included women or gender in adaptation measures and 57 per cent in mitigation measures. The biggest challenges faced by countries in the development of nationally determined contributions are the lack of readily available information on gender, limited participation of women's organizations and civil society organizations, and lack of coordination between government agencies working on climate or environment and gender. As countries approach the implementation phase of the nationally determined contributions, UNDP will continue supporting effective governance for gender mainstreaming, inclusive planning and integrated policy frameworks.

32. UNDP almost doubled its engagement with women's organizations, which are on the front lines of climate action. In 2021, the UNDP environment, climate and energy portfolio, financed by global environmental and vertical funds, supported women-led community-based associations in 72 countries, an increase from 42 countries in 2018. Several factors contributed to this tremendous progress, including improved attention to advancing gender equality in environment, climate and energy initiatives and growth in UNDP work with local communities, particularly in countries under the UNDP-supported Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme that upgraded to full-size country programmes.

33. UNDP is reporting more results in its work to empower women as decision makers in natural resource management. It supported 95 countries to advance women's leadership in natural resource management through the environment, climate and energy portfolio, financed by the global environmental and vertical funds. This increase from 80 countries in 2020 was due mainly to an improved ability to conduct activities compared to 2020, when offices were heavily impacted by COVID-19-related delays and lockdowns. For example, in Angola, Namibia and South Africa, UNDP supported the launch of a gender policy and action plan designed to ensure gender equality in transboundary governance structures in the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem.

### **Legal, policy and institutional reforms to remove structural barriers to women's empowerment**

34. UNDP increased support to countries in adopting legal, policy and institutional reforms to remove barriers to women's empowerment. In 2021, with UNDP support, 12.7 million women accessed justice in 38 countries, an increase from 8.1 million in 2020, 3.7 million in 2019 and 1.6 million in 2018. UNDP supported effective and innovative interventions such as legal aid and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, which were especially impactful during the pandemic.

### **Outcome 3. Building resilience to shocks and crises**

35. Crises and shocks—from COVID-19 and natural hazards to armed conflicts and violent extremism—grew exponentially in 2021 and their impacts are never gender-neutral. UNDP continued working on improved livelihood and employment opportunities for women; developing gender-responsive crisis response; preventing violent extremism; and improving women’s resilience and participation in economic recovery.

36. In 2021, the recently created Gender and Crisis Facility supported the UNDP early crisis response in Afghanistan, Haiti and Libya by providing technical guidance on programme design and supporting the inclusion of gender experts in SURGE missions. The facility partnered with UN-Women to roll out two gender-responsive conflict analyses in Myanmar and Sudan. The findings from the Myanmar analysis, completed in 2021, are now being integrated into programming guidance.

#### **Improving livelihood and income opportunities**

37. In 2021, UNDP worked in 28 countries to ensure that 1.4 million women gained access to jobs and improved livelihoods in crisis or post-crisis settings. While progress has been made since 2018 (1.2 million) it lagged behind its 2021 target of 2.9 million women. This reiterates the challenge of gender-responsive economic recovery in the COVID-19 crisis amid insufficient fiscal resources to support women’s participation in the economy. Despite this, there are good efforts like in Somalia, where UNDP engaged non-governmental organizations to create jobs for self-help groups and enhance entrepreneurship skills for women that improved their resilience, and in Azerbaijan where UNDP advanced women’s economic empowerment by establishing three new women’s resource centres to support women in conflict-affected areas.

38. Growing evidence shows that women’s participation and leadership in peace processes increase the reach and impact of recovery efforts, revitalize economies and build stronger and more durable peace. In 2021, UNDP supported women-led initiatives to promote social cohesion, tolerance and dialogue by, for example, creating the Women’s Rapid Action and Mobilization Platform in the Philippines, a network of grass-roots women mediators that convened community actors and promoted peaceful conflict resolution.

#### **Gender-responsive crisis response plans**

39. With an upward trend in natural disasters, UNDP continued to support Governments and local actors in strengthening gender equality in national disaster response and recovery policies and plans. Notably, in 2021, 12 countries with recovery plans and systems in place used sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis. UNDP enhanced national capacities on the implementation of gender-responsive disaster risk actions by improving knowledge on gender mainstreaming while shifting perceptions of women’s capabilities, including in Ethiopia.

40. Re-establishing the rule of law in conflict-affected countries forms the core of UNDP work to promote gender equality, prevent relapse into conflict and achieve sustainable peace. The UNDP Global Programme on Strengthening the Rule of Law and Human Rights supported over 48 conflict- and crisis-affected contexts in 2021. Developed in partnership with UN-Women, a new gender justice platform supported access to justice and services for over 34,000 people in 14 conflict-affected countries, nearly 90 per cent of whom were women and girls, including survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. A network with over 20 partners was established that contributed to wider initiatives. Through the Global Focal Point for the Rule of Law, UNDP and UN-Women increased the number of women justice and corrections officers in peace missions in 2021.

#### **Preventing violent extremism**

41. As the largest contributor to United Nations efforts for the prevention of violent extremism, UNDP continued to implement programming and promote policies informed by the gender dimensions of preventing violent extremism and consider the effects of misogyny and the role of masculinity in extremist narratives. For example, in the Maldives and Sri Lanka, UNDP partnered with UN-Women to pilot an innovative nonviolent communication training programme among local community and religious leaders, shifting participants’ behaviours away from violent extremism.



42. Recognizing that women are at the centre of addressing violent extremism, climate change and forced displacement, UNDP further supported the implementation of Security Council resolution 2242 (2015) on women, peace and security. For example, UNDP adopted the Women, Peace and Security Humanitarian Action Compact, an innovative multi-stakeholder mechanism that brings together Member States, United Nations agencies and civil society to tackle challenges in conflict-affected contexts through an intergenerational and intersectional approach. UNDP also expanded its work through a series of South-South knowledge exchanges for parliaments in 12 countries that focused on how this agenda and human security principles shape gender-responsive recovery plans.

### **Women's participation in economic recovery**

43. With a massive economic downturn triggered by the pandemic and other intersecting crises, UNDP remained committed to positioning women as drivers of economic recovery and resilience. UNDP continued to secure gender-balanced representation among those supported by its recovery work, including in crisis and fragile settings. Women accounted for 54 per cent of beneficiaries, compared to 55 per cent in 2020, 50 per cent in 2019 and 54 per cent in 2018.

### **Promoting women's leadership and the peace agenda**

44. Advancement of women's leadership in crisis settings is improving but remains a structural challenge, especially with the pandemic. In 2021, the share of women holding leadership positions in social dialogue and reconciliation mechanisms in 17 countries reached 34 per cent, a slight increase from 33 per cent in 2020 and 30 per cent in 2019. Women accounted for 41 per cent of leadership positions in prevention and recovery mechanisms, nearly attaining the 2021 target of 51 per cent. UNDP is taking on board the recommendations of the evaluation of UNDP support to conflict-affected countries, as well as the guidance provided in the UNDP 'Gender and Recovery Toolkit: Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Crisis and Recovery Settings'.

### **Partnerships**

45. Partnerships are critical to realizing the gender equality strategy. In 2021, UNDP expanded its joint work with United Nations agencies, regional organizations, the private sector, international financial institutions, civil society, women's organizations and academia. Notably, with UN-Women – which remains the main partner of UNDP on gender equality – collaboration took place in 102 countries, up from 91 in 2018. Of those, 80 per cent partnered on at least one substantive joint project or initiative. The largest areas of collaboration remain advancing legal and policy reforms, women's political participation and economic empowerment.

46. At the global level, as a co-leader of the Feminist Action for Climate Justice Action Coalition, UNDP committed to the five-year Global Acceleration Plan for Gender Equality to drive gender-responsive climate action. As part of a collective commitment made at the Generation Equality Forum in Paris in 2021, UNDP, UN-Women and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) agreed to expand the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, with a green lens.

47. In the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group Task Team on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, UNDP and UN-Women launched the 'Technical Note on Gender Mainstreaming in the [United Nations country team] (UNCT) COVID-19 Response'. The note aims to guide UNCTs on how to mainstream gender equality considerations into planning and programming work as part of their ongoing COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. UNDP also contributed to the development of the 'Gender Theme Groups: Standards and Procedures', launched in January 2022. In 2021, 37 country offices reported that they co-chaired an inter-agency gender theme group, and 74 country offices implemented the gender equality scorecard of the UNCT system-wide action plan, up from 54 in 2020, 42 in 2019 and 27 in 2018.

**Box 6. Expanded COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker**

In 2021, the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker developed by UNDP and UN-Women expanded to include nearly 5,000 policy measures from 221 countries and territories, and data on women's representation in 431 national COVID-19 task forces. The tracker revealed that globally, only 19.6 per cent of these policy measures support women's economic security and unpaid care, and women lead just 18 per cent of COVID-19 task forces. Data from the tracker informed policymakers, including the [G7 Gender Equality Advisory Committee](#), and supported country offices and development actors in gender analysis, resource mobilization, reporting and advocacy. The tracker was [rated](#) among the top three of the world's most significant policy tracker initiatives. Collaboration with the OECD is under way to integrate a 'green lens' to support gender-responsive green recovery.

48. At the regional level, UNDP continued collaborating with regional commissions. The UNDP regional digital platform in Europe and Central Asia, 'STEM4ALL', expanded its reach and partnerships by establishing a multisectoral global network of 'STEMinists' with over 80 members in 34 countries. The UNDP partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia enhanced the platform and leveraged the capacities and networks of both agencies to advance gender equality. In Asia and the Pacific, the Bangkok Regional Hub in collaboration with the [Nationally Determined Contribution] Support Programme developed the 'Framework for Enhancing Gender and Poverty Integration in Climate Finance' which provides tools and good practices for integrating gender and poverty issues into climate finance.

49. At the country level, there has been an evolution towards more strategic partnerships with civil society. In 2021, UNDP supported women-led community-based associations in 72 countries – an increase from 42 countries in 2018. For instance, in Rwanda UNDP strengthened gender mainstreaming in the work of 34 civil society organizations which provide essential support to women and girls.

50. Under the principle of leaving no one behind, UNDP continued to advance the rights of persons with disabilities. For example, UNDP worked with the Blind and Deaf Society of Turkmenistan to increase employment opportunities for women with disabilities. In Kenya, UNDP supported 11 women-led disability organizations to undertake economic empowerment activities.

**Academia**

51. As a thought leader, UNDP has worked with United Nations partners, academia and think tanks across the world to produce evidence-based research and policy guidance on gender equality. Through the partnership with the Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures at the University of Denver, in 2021 UNDP strengthened gender analysis of COVID-19 impacts, revealing far-reaching implications for women and offering bold policy recommendations. UNDP and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative published a report, 'Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2021: Unmasking disparities by ethnicity, caste, and gender,' which provides a comprehensive overview of multidimensional poverty in 109 countries with intersectional data.

52. UNDP partnered with local universities and networks to advance gender equality and women's agency through the development of university courses targeting women. In post-conflict Sri Lanka, UNDP worked with Uva Wellassa University to develop a diploma in community leadership and development for women elected officials and councillors. UNDP has also targeted women in the digital economy, supporting the creation of a digital economy lab at the Cambodian National University of Management, ensuring gender-balanced participation in preparing the workforce for the fourth industrial revolution.

**Innovation**

53. Advancing gender equality requires innovative approaches, from community conversations to behaviour change campaigns, to break traditional patriarchal supply chains of information, resources and power. During the COVID-19 pandemic, UNDP has been reinventing the ways in which it works, creating innovative solutions in at least 41 countries– from developing behavioural science to support the financial inclusion of women entrepreneurs to digital training in financial planning.

**Box 7. Nourishing women innovators in the Arab States**

In 2021, UNDP launched the Women Innovators Programme in partnership with GSMA (the global mobile operators' association), which provided one-on-one mentorship for women-led digital social enterprises in 12 Arab States. The programme tapped the expertise of the GSMA start-up platform '4YFN' (Four Years from Now) and the UNDP Crowdfunding Academy, thereby empowering women to advance their businesses and networks.

54. Examples of innovative practices have been featured throughout this report. For instance, in El Salvador, the Accelerator Lab and the Ministry of Tourism promoted inclusive digitization of women-run microenterprises. In Niger, through a partnership with UN-Women and the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Accelerator Lab contributed to establishing and disseminating a 'data-powered positive deviance' method to support women traders.

55. Data-driven e-governance is increasingly used as a new modality to tackle long-standing structural barriers. In São Tomé and Príncipe, UNDP supported the creation of the first government data centre and within the justice modernization programme, partnered with leading universities to train doctors, nurses, prosecutors and judicial police in collecting and analysing evidence in cases of sexual violence.

**Thought leadership to promote gender equality and women's empowerment**

56. UNDP drew on its flagship publications to advocate for gender equality and women's empowerment, and to demonstrate the linkages between gender equality and improved development outcomes to influence global discourse. UNDP effectively leverages data analytics to shaping policy debates on gender equality, social justice, with special emphasis on crisis settings.

57. Globally, UNDP launched a number of new and enhanced knowledge products in 2021. In the lead-up to International Women's Day, UNDP produced *Protecting Women's Livelihoods in Times of Pandemic: Temporary Basic Income and the Road to Gender Equality*, which calls for helping the world's poorest women cope with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. To support gender-responsive economic recovery, UNDP, UN-Women and the International Monetary Fund published a brief, *Gender Equality and COVID-19: Policies and Institutions for Mitigating the Crisis*. UNDP also launched the *Global Report on Gender Equality in Public Administration* with the University of Pittsburgh. Numerous powerful stories were created to highlight gender-based violence, women's leadership and women's rights in conflict-affected contexts.

58. Regionally, UNDP flagged the urgency of scaled-up innovative approaches to address gender inequalities in the labour market in a joint report with the International Labour Organization, *Informality and Social Protection in African Countries: A Forward-looking Assessment of Contributory Schemes*. As part of the Youth Co:Lab initiative co-led by UNDP and the Citi Foundation, a joint report was published by UNDP and UNICEF *Addressing Gender Barriers to Entrepreneurship and Leadership Among Girls and Young Women in South-East Asia*, strengthening evidence to address gender barriers.

59. Country offices generated numerous new analytical tools and insights, delivering practical solutions to real-world problems. For example, in 2021 UNDP launched a tool on 'Gender Mainstreaming for Integrated Nature, Climate and Energy Programming,' piloting it in nine countries, which enhanced gender capacities and resilient outcomes.

**III. Institutional results**

60. This section focuses on progress by UNDP in enhancing its institutional framework to strengthen gender equality development results. This includes interconnected elements such as leadership; gender-responsive policy, planning and programming; accountability and oversight; gender capacities and gender architecture; inclusive and safe working environments; and gender parity.

**61. Performance against the System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women 2.0.** UNDP maintained its high scoring rating against the United Nations System-wide Action Plan 2.0 and exceeded or met its targets in 14 of 16 (88 per cent) relevant indicators. UNDP also made notable progress against indicators on gender-responsive evaluation and audit. The evaluation performance indicator, based on 178 evaluations completed in 2021, showed steady improvement from 2020, with the mean at 9.87 (an increase from 9.51 in 2020).

**62. Implementation of the UNDP gender equality strategy requires ongoing leadership.** The Administrator successfully championed gender equality across all areas of work by continuing to articulate a vision for gender equality and women's empowerment in the new UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025 and the accompanying gender equality strategy, 2022-2025. The Administrator chaired the twice-yearly meetings of the Gender Steering and Implementation Committee and ensured that UNDP reached gender parity in senior management well ahead of the United Nations deadline. In 2021, 62 per cent of the Administrator's public speeches and statements explicitly advanced gender equality.

**63. UNDP improved the integration of gender perspectives into policies and programming.** In 2021 there was significant progress in this area. The share of country offices with a gender equality strategy and action plan continued to rise substantially to 80 per cent, up from just 69 per cent in 2020. Ninety-two per cent of the 24 approved country programme documents that were assessed for quality assurance in 2021 integrated a satisfactory gender analysis. Programme portfolio reviews were implemented in 12 country offices as part of the Gender Seal programme, as one of the central actions for a transformative leap towards gender equality development results.

**64. Financing for gender equality.** UNDP invests in gender equality on average more than other development actors. The gender marker data show a positive trend towards resource allocations to gender equality. Investments in programming where gender equality was a principal or significant objective increased steadily from 55.4 to 64.9 per cent between 2018 and 2021. While GEN3 increased slightly in 2021, accounting for 7.5 per cent, compared to 7.4 per cent in 2020, GEN2 improved from 56.4 per cent in 2020 to 57.4 per cent in 2021.

**65. UNDP cultivated a culture of accountability for gender equality at the highest level.** The Gender Steering and Implementation Committee chaired by the Administrator met twice, with the participation of all bureau directors. In 2021, directors reported achievements on leadership, resources and programming, including strong engagement in the Gender Equality Seal. The committee agreed to develop new commitments for 2022 that are aligned with the new gender equality strategy 2022-2025.

**66.** With one of the strongest institutional results reporting and monitoring systems in the United Nations system, UNDP continues to sharpen its focus on gender-responsive results. UNDP strengthened gender-responsive indicators in the new integrated results and resources framework of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025, with an emphasis on more structural issues in measuring results on gender equality.

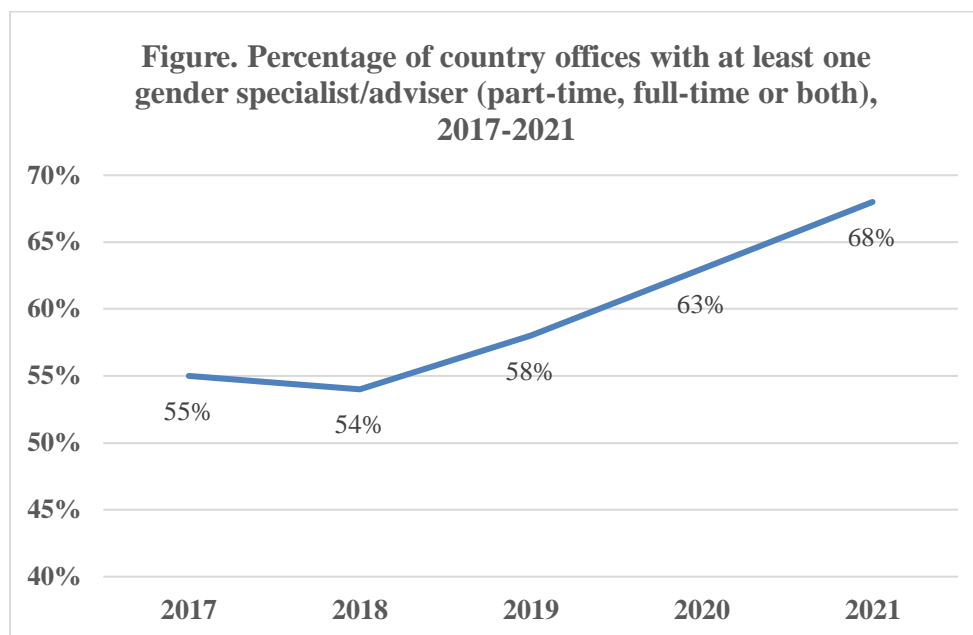
### Gender capacities

**67.** The gender team remains the pillar of the UNDP gender architecture. There are 24 full-time International Professional staff, showing an increase from 19 in 2018.

<b>Table. Number and duty stations of full-time International Professional staff in the gender team of the Global Policy Network</b>		<b>No. of staff</b>
Addis Ababa		3
Amman		2
Bangkok		1
Istanbul		2
New York		13
Panama		3
<b>Total</b>		<b>24</b>

**68.** Multidisciplinary gender focal teams continue to be an effective mechanism to improve vertical and horizontal coordination. In 2021, 83 per cent of country offices reported having a multidisciplinary gender

focal team led by a senior manager, an increase from 70 per cent in 2020; and 88 country offices (68 per cent) had gender advisers and/or gender specialists. This is an increase from 81 offices (63 per cent) in 2020.



69. The UNDP Gender Equality Seal is the gender team's flagship evidence-based initiative, with the team having more than 10 years of experience in improving standards and building transformative change. To recognize the strong performance in 2018-2020, the gender team hosted a ceremony in January 2021 to reward 31 country offices for their achievements. Almost 1,000 participants joined the virtual event, which was opened by the President of the Executive Board, with the Administrator presenting the awards. Some of these achievements rewarded in 2021 included a sharp increase of 50 per cent in standards relating to gender capacities and better integration of gender in the programme cycle, with a 55 per cent increase in gender screening mechanisms in the project document appraisal process.

70. In 2021, UNDP invested significantly in external engagement. By December, nearly 6.7 million followers from global English, Spanish and French channels followed UNDP social media, an increase of 624,000 followers from 2020. UNDP tweets about gender reached 57.6 million Twitter subscribers and were viewed 897 million times across all languages. In Latin America and the Caribbean, 53,523 Facebook followers viewed the regional office's page 'America Latina Genera', and the associated website had over a million visits and received more than 697,800 impressions on Twitter.

71. UNDP Goodwill Ambassadors underscored the important role women play in COVID-19 recovery efforts through initiatives such as the women-led vaccine equity campaign, highlighted by the public service announcement, #AShotForAll, featuring Goodwill Ambassadors Padma Lakshmi, Yemi Alade, Michelle Yeoh and Connie Britton which was featured during the General Assembly. In addition, UNDP Goodwill Ambassadors supported International Women's Day on 8 March, engaging in 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. UNDP has fine-tuned its gender narrative in digital spaces, ensuring human-centred storytelling and data-evidenced information, in stories like "[Finally, I exist!](#)" about UNDP support for civil registration, and "[I really didn't want to be a wife at 14.](#)" about Roma rights and gender roles.

72. UNDP effectively expanded its knowledge-sharing on gender equality and reached a wider development community. Externally, UNDP strengthened its use of SparkBlue, a tool from the Global Policy Network communities of practice that facilitates virtual engagement. Internally, the gender community of practice increased from 1,763 UNDP personnel in 2020 to 2,569 in 2021. UNDP organized 30 webinars bringing together 2,300 participants – an increase of nearly 1,000 from 2020 – including more

than 500 external partners. This is testament to the collaborative efforts across thematic teams to place gender equality at the forefront of UNDP knowledge-building initiatives.

#### **Inclusive, diverse and safe environment for all**

73. UNDP has a comprehensive policy to enable work-life balance while continuing to build on lessons learned from the pandemic, supporting flexibility in the workplace across the organization, including teleworking/telecommuting, compressed work schedules, provision of tele-health and psychosocial support services and greater flexibility with annual leave days.

74. To strengthen internal capacity to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse, UNDP focused on four priority areas in 2021: prevention, reporting and response; support to survivors; and accountability. All bureaux and offices submitted sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse action plans and the annual certifications of implementation for 2021 to the Administrator. Approximately 1,200 UNDP personnel participated in trainings on sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse, including a series of webinars with 14 country and regional offices. UNDP also launched a podcast on reporting and workplace culture and worked with five United Nations agencies to pilot a new electronic incident reporting form to centralize data and coordination across the United Nations system.

75. Achieving gender parity in staffing is a critical component of UNDP institutional growth and an area in which UNDP made important progress in 2021. By December 2021, UNDP had achieved full gender parity among all staff, including in the Executive Group, which consists of Assistant Secretaries-General, and among resident representatives and deputy resident representatives. Challenges remained at the P-4, P-5 and D-2 levels, where men continued to hold the majority of positions. In 2021, women held 44 per cent of P-4 posts, 42 per cent of P-5 posts, 49 per cent of D-1 posts and 42 per cent of D-2 posts. To address these gaps, UNDP is building a pipeline of strong women candidates for future leadership roles, including through the Women Mentoring Programme rolled out in 2021 by the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, and the second cohort of the African Young Women Leaders Fellowship Programme implemented with the African Union Commission.

76. UNDP took decisive steps to institutionalize gender competencies at all levels. In 2021, UNDP launched a new competency framework which includes gender-related technical competencies, such as gender and institutional development; and gender parity and diversity are explicitly mentioned on the UNDP jobs site. In line with the Secretary-General's System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity, UNDP and UN-Women launched a United Nations system-wide dashboard that enables all relevant stakeholders to track the progress of each United Nations agency towards gender parity.

77. UNDP increased internal capacity to create a workplace environment that is gender-sensitive, safe and inclusive by providing learning opportunities for staff and managers on gender equality issues. In 2021, UNDP updated the online 'Gender Journey' course which is part of the mandatory courses for all personnel.

78. In 2021, UNDP was awarded the EDGE 'Move' Certificate by the Economic Dividends for Gender Equality (EDGE) organization, recognizing the significant progress UNDP has made towards ensuring gender equality and its commitment to an inclusive workplace. The EDGE Move award is the second highest level of certification, and UNDP is only the second United Nations entity to receive it.

79. Building on the progress achieved, UNDP will reinforce efforts to improve gender equality in the workplace and prevent all forms of discrimination, including a gender divide observed in the global staff survey that remains significant for issues such as career development. Although the divide has started to shrink, closing that divide continues to be a priority.

## **IV. Lessons learned and the way forward**

80. The year 2021 was a moment of change for UNDP, marking the last year of the 2018-2021 gender equality strategy and launching preparations for the new strategy for 2022-2025. In this context, UNDP carried out an analysis of key evaluations and reports of its work on gender equality. Lessons learned from the last four years underscore the growing demand for UNDP to help countries go further in shifting power relations and cutting the deep roots of gender inequalities. UNDP also learned how the portfolios in crisis

and post-crisis contexts, sustainable environment and energy and women's economic empowerment would benefit from better integrating gender-responsive approaches, considering social norms and structures of inequality, and improving women's positioning in decision-making roles. Stronger linkages of interventions to upstream policy processes will also bring about stronger results.

81. UNDP has already begun to implement a next generation of initiatives to move from counting numbers towards a more transformative approach to achieving gender equality on many fronts, as this report illustrates through a range of examples. Governance continued to be the most transformative area of work, contributing to building a more equal society. The other two areas with notable growth in removing structural barriers were women's leadership in natural resource management and climate action initiatives.

82. In 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to shift UNDP into different ways of thinking, working and reasserting its gender equality priorities. Lessons that can be applied to thrive in future crises include: (a) the need for evidence-based decision-making, as shown by the better quality data from initiatives such as the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker; (b) the care economy can no longer be ignored, as evidenced by UNDP work in gender-responsive social protection in a record 73 countries; and (c) when crisis hits, violence against women and girls gets worse and life-saving services must be treated as essential.

83. The Independent Evaluation Office published a 'Reflections' paper on lessons from UNDP work to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and the new gender equality strategy 2022-2025 benefited from the findings. The paper includes the following major lessons:

(a) More capacities and sound gender analysis are needed for a deeper understanding of intersecting forms of discrimination. Evaluations show that women are often placed in the same category as other vulnerable groups, which is a disservice to both gender equality and the other vulnerable groups;

(b) Diversified partnerships and multi-stakeholder platforms accelerate gender equality and women's empowerment. Looking ahead, UNDP will continue to nurture its relationships to build national, regional and global platforms for policy and social change;

(c) The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment should be the cornerstone of the UNDP crisis response. When social and cultural norms allow, women are active stakeholders in humanitarian crisis prevention, response and recovery. UNDP remains committed to increasing resources and ensuring that its programming helps improve women's status;

(d) The UNDP Gender Seal promotes gender integration across programmes to accelerate results beyond achievements for gender equality and women's empowerment. Factors that have proven successful to advance these results include multidisciplinary and active gender teams, with a workplan to improve the pace and quality of gender outcomes. The Gender Seal has contributed to increasing allocation of funds for gender equality, establishing better partnerships and expanding gender-responsive programming.

84. To conclude, the gender equality strategy 2022-2025 will elevate the ambitions of UNDP to help transform structural causes of gender inequalities through each signature solution. It will acknowledge that such changes do not happen overnight, nor by UNDP alone, as this is a four-year contribution to a longer-term vision. The next strategy will present new ways of working such as integrated approaches, investments in data and analysis, solutions to transform social norms and re-envisioned partnerships.