United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

MOPAN

Published 2025

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EXPLANATORY NOTE

MOPAN is the only collective action mechanism that meets member countries' information needs regarding the performance of multilateral organisations. MOPAN provides comprehensive, independent, and credible performance information through its institutional assessment report to inform members' engagement and accountability mechanisms.

MOPAN's assessment reports tell the story of the multilateral organisation and its performance. The reports support members' decision making regarding multilateral organisations and the wider multilateral system by detailing the assessment's major findings and conclusions, along with the organisation's performance journeys, strengths, and areas for improvement.

PREFACE

ABOUT MOPAN

The Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) promotes an effective multilateral system trusted to deliver solutions to evolving global goals and local challenges. As of 1 April 2025, it comprised 21 members, including one observer state (Figure 1).

MOPAN members share a common interest in assessing the performance of the major multilateral organisations they fund, given their mandate, operating model and the contexts in which they work. A MOPAN assessment report provides an organisation's diagnostic assessment, or snapshot, and tells the story of its current performance within its mandate. Box 1 describes MOPAN's mission and vision.

FIGURE 1. **MOPAN MEMBERS (AS AT 17 APRIL 2025)**

Australia	Belgium	Canada	Denmark	Finland	France
Germany	Ireland	Italy	Japan	Korea	Luxembourg
Netherlands	New Zealand	Norway	Qatar	Spain	Sweden
Switzerland	United Kingdom	United States			

Box 1: MOPAN's mission and vision

MOPAN is a network of members who assess multilateral organisations, shape performance standards, and champion learning and insights to strengthen development and humanitarian results and promote accountability.

Capitalising on the Network's unique cross-multilateral system perspective and expertise, MOPAN members work together to deliver relevant, impartial, high-quality, timely performance information as a public good through an inclusive and transparent approach.

MOPAN's performance information mitigates risks, informs decision-making and supports change. It helps to increase knowledge and trust amongst stakeholders, and ultimately to achieve a stronger, better performing multilateral system.

MOPAN's shared vision is to promote an effective multilateral system, trusted to deliver solutions to evolving global goals and local challenges.

MOPAN's assessments provide a comprehensive overview of organisational effectiveness, including how an organisation is positioned to address its current and future challenges. They support MOPAN members in their governance and decision-making for the multilateral organisations they fund. They also support the leadership of multilateral organisations in implementing reforms that reflect multilateral good practices.

MOPAN also produces a range of analytical insights into the multilateral system. For the full range of its performance evidence and analysis, see https://www.mopanonline.org/.

FOREWORD

MOPAN assessments are conducted through a rigorous and collaborative process to ensure that the findings are based on strong evidence and resonate with an organisation and its stakeholders.

This report is composed of two parts:

Part I: Analysis Summary

- *Performance at a glance,* which provides an overall summary of the assessment;

- *Chapter 1: Introducing UNESCO,* which provides key information about the organisation being assessed, including its mandate, governance structure, business model and operations;

- *Chapter 2: Assessment conclusions and future trajectory,* which lays out the overall conclusions of the assessment and identifies forward-looking considerations for the organisation and its governing body;

- *Chapter 3: Findings and ratings,* which describes the findings of the assessment against MOPAN's framework and Key Performance Indicators:

- *Chapter 4: About this assessment,* which provides information about the methodology and approach, including timelines for implementation and key activities.

Part II: Technical and statistical annex of UNESCO assessment available online contains:

- *Annex A:* Performance analysis detailing the methodology and data used to determine the assessment ratings.

- *Annex B:* Evidence list of documents.

- *Annex C:* Results of MOPAN partner survey.

HISTORY OF MOPAN ASSESSMENTS FOR UNESCO

This report provides a diagnostic assessment and snapshot of UNESCO and tells the story of its performance within its mandate. It is the second MOPAN assessment conducted for UNESCO and covers the period from the last MOPAN assessment published in 2019 (available:
https://www.mopan.org/en/our-work/performance-evidence/unesco/mopan-assessment-unesco-2017-18.html).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADM	Administration and Management Sector
ADM/OPS/PRO	Procurement Section
ADM/RCP	Risk Compliance and Policy Coordination Unit
BSP	Bureau of Strategic Planning
BSP/DPA/GRM	Section for Grants and Resource Management
BSP/DPA/SPD	Section for Strategic Partnerships and Donor Relations
BSP/RBM	Result Based Management Unit
CAB	Office of the Director-General
CI	Communication and Information Sector
CI/FMD	Freedom of Expression, Media Development and Media and Information Literacy Division
CLT	Culture Sector
CLT/CPD	Culture Sector, Cultural Policies and Development Entity
CLT/CEM	Culture Sector, Culture and Emergencies Entity
CPE	Communication and Public Engagement
DOM	Donor Outreach and Resource Mobilization Section
ED	Education Sector
ED/E30	Education 2030 Division
ED/GEM	Global Education Monitoring Report Team
ED/FLI	Future of Learning and Innovation Division
ED/PDS	Peace and Sustainable Development Division
ED/PLS	Policies and Lifelong Learning Systems Division
ETH	Ethics
EU	European Union
FA	Finance and Administrative Commission
GEF	General Fund
GEN	Gender Equality Division
HQ	Head Quarters
HRM	Human Resources Management
HR/STS	HR Strategic Support Section
IBE	UNESCO International Bureau of Education
ICTP	UNESCO International Centre for Theoretical Physics
IIEP	UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning
IOC	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission
IOS	Internal Oversight Services
IOS/AUD	Internal Audit Section

IOS/EV	Evaluation Office
IOS/INV	Investigation Unit
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
LA	Office of International Standards and Legal Affairs
MI	Micro indicators
MO	Multilateral organisation
MOPAN	Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network
OAC	Oversight Advisory Committee
OPF	Other Proprietary Funds
PAX	Priority Africa and External Relations
PAX/DFC	Division of Field Coordination
PAX/DRX/UN	Relations with the United Nations and Intergovernmental Organisations Section
PX	Programme and External Relations Commission
PFF	Programme Fiduciary Fund
RBM	Results-Based management
SEA/SH	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse/ Sexual Harassment
SC	Natural Sciences Sector
SC/EES	Ecological and Earth Sciences Division
SC/HYD	Water Sciences Division
SC/PBS	Science Policy and Basic Sciences Division
SC/SIDS	Small Island Developing States Section
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SHS	Social and Human Sciences Sector
SHS/SOP	Social Policies Division
SISTER	System of Information on Strategies, Tasks and the Evaluation of Results
SHS/REI	Research, Ethics and Inclusion Division
SHS/REI/YOU	Youth Section
SFF	Staff Fiduciary Funds
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UK	The United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UN GSDR	United Nations Global Sustainable Development Report
UN RC	United Nations Resident Coordinator
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDS	United Nations Development System
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework

UNESCO
PERFORMANCE AT A GLANCE

UNESCO: PERFORMANCE AT A GLANCE

CONTEXT

Since the last MOPAN assessment of UNESCO in 2019, the global context has evolved considerably. Conflicts, COVID-19, economic and debt crises, and climate-related disasters have led to setbacks in eradicating poverty, achieving gender equality, advancing education, and ending hunger. At the halfway point to 2030, the achievement of many Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is off track.

These trends and events are generating an increasing demand for the normative and programmatic support that UNESCO provides. At the same time, like other multilateral actors, UNESCO is facing heightened pressure to demonstrate effectiveness, efficiency and accountability. The culmination of these factors is an even more challenging operating context than that which pertained at the time of the last assessment.

This is UNESCO's second assessment using the MOPAN methodology, and the last MOPAN assessment provides a baseline against which to compare its current performance. The general conclusion of the 2025 MOPAN assessment is that while there are some areas where performance needs to continue to improve, overall, UNESCO has made strong progress since the last MOPAN assessment.

There is a lot of continuity between the findings of this assessment and the last assessment. In most areas, this is to be expected. For most of the assessment period, UNESCO's regular budget was at a similar level to the previous assessment period, with significant additional funds becoming available only when the USA rejoined the organisation in June 2023. COVID-19 was also a disruptive factor. However, UNESCO has made less progress in some key areas than could have been reasonably expected.

UNESCO IS WELL-POSITIONED TO CONTRIBUTE TO GLOBAL NORMS AND PRACTICE

UNESCO has continued to make a powerful contribution to global norms and practice in an extensive range of critical areas. Its combination of normative and programmatic roles is a strength. The organisation has rare expertise and a degree of authority that enables it to influence governments across the world. Areas of particular progress include:

UNESCO has reinforced its position as a global leader in knowledge and practice. It possesses expertise in diverse thematic areas, including education, statistics, culture and communications, freedom of expression, and climate science related to oceans and rivers. It mobilises an extensive network of partners across these fields to support the 2030 Agenda. In addition to shaping and setting global norms, it reviews the implementation of global agreements to promote implementation, including Conventions such as the 1972 World Heritage Convention. Rapid technological and social changes have made UNESCO's role as a global standard-setter increasingly important, as evidenced by its new participation at the G20. It has continued to demonstrate foresight and leadership, taking the lead on new or emerging issues of global concern.

UNESCO is central to the delivery of global goals. Since the last assessment, UNESCO has made a strong contribution to progress across a range of SDGs. For example, it contributes to the achievement of many of the SDGs and is the custodian of seven SDG targets and indicators. It plays a particularly important role in co-ordinating and monitoring SDG 4 as part of the Global Education 2030 Agenda, bringing together diverse stakeholders to provide policy guidance, capacity building, and promoting education as a human right and driver of sustainable development.

UNESCO has strengthened interdisciplinary working. UNESCO's mandate spans a much broader range of interconnected areas than any other multilateral organisation, allowing it to address complex challenges from a

holistic and interdisciplinary perspective. The Medium-Term Strategy introduced important measures to better capitalise on the organisation's broad expertise by encouraging sectors to work together in close synergy to promote a more integrated approach to addressing global challenges. In addition, UNESCO is combining the capabilities of its sectors and Category 1 Institutes more effectively and working more effectively.

In addition, UNESCO continues to demonstrate its core strengths of mainstreaming global priorities across its initiatives, including gender equality, environment and human rights, and is increasingly active in supporting crisis preparedness and response.

UNESCO is better at influencing policy and building capacities. UNESCO excels in providing high-quality policy advice across its fields of expertise, positioning itself as a key global player in enhancing the skills, knowledge, and capabilities necessary to advance SDGs. This capability is in high demand, as UN member states and the Secretary-General work to reform the UN Development System with the goal of supporting integrated policy advice and programmatic support aligned with country priorities. UNESCO stands out among multilaterals for its depth of experience in facilitating such policy advice, helping to build the capacity of national stakeholders who are responsible for key policy development in the respective countries.

UNESCO IS DELIVERING ON REFORM COMMITMENTS, ALBEIT AT AN UNEVEN PACE

Following the 2019 assessment, UNESCO produced a systematic management response identifying the specific actions the organisation would take to address areas for improvement. This assessment finds that important steps have been undertaken to deliver on these commitments and strengthen its systems in new areas covered by the MOPAN assessment framework. In several areas, these changes have delivered, or are starting to deliver, positive impacts, though continued attention is required to ensure that expected benefits are achieved in full.

UNESCO's audit, evaluation and RBM functions and systems increasingly support performance monitoring and learning. UNESCO has strengthened its functions and systems, enabling the organisation to receive timely performance feedback. For example, the Audit Office has greater independence, and its enhanced budget has enabled it to do more during the assessment period. Its audits, including performance audits, are robust and critically important in reflecting how the organisation can strengthen its systems. Likewise, the Evaluation Office has also been strengthened. It is more independent and has greater control over a portion of its budget allocation that it previously lacked. It also now has the funds it needs to perform its functions effectively and has delivered greater coverage in general and, specifically, of UNESCO's normative work over the last four years. Steps have been taken to strengthen decentralised evaluations. Internal audit and corporate evaluation reports are clear, helpful and comprehensive.

Progress in strengthening RBM systems has been more modest, with an ongoing need to strengthen tracking of performance, efficiency and results. Monitoring frameworks need to include performance indicators at the outcome level to enable UNESCO to systematically capture and analyse corporate performance more effectively. Furthermore, management needs to introduce systems to track poor performance and better integrate results tracking – a commitment set out in the 2019 Management Response. Some of these systems were still being developed within UNESCORE at the time of the assessment, so we cannot comment on their efficacy.

Corporate systems have been modernised, albeit unevenly. Whilst corporate systems have been modernised since the previous assessment, progress has been uneven, primarily due to ongoing financial constraints that have delayed the development of some corporate functions. UNESCO should focus on completing the introduction of key corporate systems such as UNESCORE to ensure it underpins strong performance monitoring and management, strengthens enterprise risk management, and improves human resource planning.

In particular, there is an ongoing need to reinforce UNESCO's risk management systems, an area identified for action in the previous MOPAN assessment. Whilst UNESCO introduced important measures in this area over the assessment period, including creating of Risk, Compliance and Policy unit, the Oversight Advisory Committee pointed out challenges that still needed to be addressed and the 2023 Internal Audit of UNESCO's Enterprise Risk Management concluded that UNESCO was at the "Developing" Level 2 in the UN's 5-level maturity model. The recent overcommitment in managing the Approved Programme and Budget for 2022-2025 (41 C/5) demonstrated the need to improve budgeting systems and strengthen risk management through stronger monitoring and escalation mechanisms.

Communication and outreach have improved, but further development is needed to report meaningful outcomes. The 2019 MOPAN assessment noted that while there was much excellent outreach, UNESCO's overall communications could be updated and strengthened to ensure its messages achieved the reach and impact they deserve. Recognising this need, UNESCO has implemented measures to strengthen its external communications. UNESCO reviewed its information function and presented a new engagement and advocacy strategy to the Executive Board in September 2019, following the last MOPAN assessment. The website has been redesigned to present a clearer and more coherent public face. However, there remains a need to highlight impactful interventions more effectively.

UNESCO demonstrates a strong commitment to tackling sexual harassment through comprehensive policies and strategies. It has put in place a victim-centred approach for both PSEA and SH. UNESCO upholds a Policy on the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), applicable to all staff and encompassing best practices alongside an action plan. Systems are in place to monitor policy implementation, and UNESCO is committed to taking swift disciplinary action in cases where SEA allegations are substantiated. Building on this important progress, opportunities exist to strengthen further the approach, including ensuring that intervention design includes formal consideration of the risk of SEA in relation to the intervention and maintaining the focus on staff training.

AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

UNESCO is well-positioned to address future challenges, demonstrating the capacity to innovate and providing essential services globally. This was especially evident during its response to COVID-19. It plays a key role in shaping discussions on education's future, science's role in sustainable development, the ethics of emerging technologies, the power of culture, and freedom of expression. Through building global coalitions, UNESCO has brought together diverse groups to develop consensus on complex challenges such as the ethics of artificial intelligence. By identifying emerging trends, it maintains a leading position in global thought. The current assessment highlights strong contributions globally and in member states' countries. The expertise and commitment of its staff underpin its normative and programmatic successes.

However, UNESCO must continue to reform to maintain this positive trajectory, respond successfully to the multilateral system's evolving pressures and increase its contribution to the SDGs. The assessment finds three areas where further progress is critical.

UNESCO must complete corporate reform commitments at pace. Whilst UNESCO has continued to develop its internal machinery in many areas, it must advance in those areas where progress has lagged. Financial constraints that UNESCO faced over much of the assessment period have delayed the development of some corporate functions, but the evidence also indicates that there would have been more progress if there had been stronger attention to modernising these systems at the very top of the organisation throughout the assessment period.

The need for continued attention to UNESCO's risk management systems is particularly important. Robust financial controls and risk management systems are critical priorities for member states across the multilateral system. It is

therefore paramount that UNESCO continues to strengthen its budgeting systems and risk management approaches, following up on the recommendations made in the IOS Performance Audit.

UNESCO must ensure that the field network is fit-for-purpose. Whilst the shape of the revised field office network is now clear, UNESCO faces significant challenges in making the new network fit-for-purpose.

A first cause for concern is the time taken to agree and implement the new structure; the new unified structure was finally announced in September 2023 and introduced in January 2024. Interviews indicate that the process was delayed by the need to satisfy member states' concerns about UNESCO's footprint in different geographic regions – an example of where member states' engagement can impact operational decision-making and delivery by the Secretariat. A second cause for concern is that UNESCO's revised global footprint lacks coherence with the UN Development System, with more Regional Offices (20) than UNESCO can realistically staff with the complement of expertise it anticipates, and with some of them located in cities that the rest of the UN Development System does not use as reginal hub undermining its ability to operate strategically. Thirdly, the redesigned network was introduced before key policies had been finalised. At the time of assessment interviews, UNESCO had yet to define the accountability framework relating to the field office network, and there was a lack of clarity on whether country and regional offices were required to produce strategies. We understand that an accountability framework now exists, and that work is ongoing to define the requirements for regional and country strategies.

UNESCO has a unique contribution to make in policy development at country level. The field network infrastructure is key to deepening and broadening its reach and enhancing the delivery of upstream policy expertise across a spectrum of policy areas.

All parties should support the development of an enabling environment. Member states can play a critical role in creating an environment that enables UNESCO to deliver on its strategic commitments.

Continued efforts are required to better align UNESCO's resources and its work programme. UNESCO continues to face pressures to deliver more within a constrained budget, creating a risk of overstretch. Greater efforts are required from member states to support selectivity and prioritisation to prevent resources from being spread too thinly and ensure key functions and structures have sufficient funding.

Furthermore, with voluntary contributions certain to continue to play an important role in supporting UNESCO's activities, the quality of this funding needs to improve. UNESCO needs more predictable, flexible funding to allow for long-term planning and sustainable outcomes, and to enable UNESCO to respond in an agile and efficient way to programmatic needs and opportunities.

Finally, member states and the Secretariat should reset behaviours to strengthen efficient delivery and accountability. Organisations function optimally when governance bodies focus on setting a strategic direction and providing oversight, with the Secretariat tasked to implement the resulting strategy and programme of work. However, at UNESCO, these accountability lines are blurred with a high level of engagement of member states on operational matters. This constrains the organisation's ability to respond effectively to opportunities and changing circumstances and can undermine efficiency. Achieving this change will require transparency and enhanced co-operation between the Secretariat and member states to build trust and strengthen mutual understanding.

TABLE 1. **UNESCO TOP 10 CONTRIBUTORS OF ASSESSED CONTRIBUTIONS 2022-23**

Member	Amount (in million USD)
China	105.3
Japan	55.5
Germany	42.2
United Kingdom	30.2
France	29.8
Italy	22.0
Canada	18.2
Republic of Korea	17.8
Spain	14.7
Australia	14.6

Note that the United States of America rejoined UNESCO on 10 July 2023 and was assessed pro rata USD 28.2 million for 2023.

TABLE 2. **UNESCO TOP 10 VC DONORS (2022-2023)**

Member	Amount (in million USD)
Sweden	96.9
Italy	80.3
Norway	74.6
European Union	69.1
World Bank/ I.B.R.D/ Global Partnership for Education	56.7
UNDP	45.1
Republic of Korea	36.9
France	32.3
Brazil	28.8
Japan	28.4

Note: All voluntary contributions are earmarked. 59% of voluntary contributions are tightly earmarked for specific projects, while 41% are softly earmarked for programmes funded through pooled funds (special accounts). Norway and Sweden are the only contributors with earmarked resources at the level of a Major Programme, notably to the Education Sector.

Box 2. UNESCO's strengths and areas for further improvement

Main strengths

- An innovative and agile organisation, positioned to respond effectively to current and future challenges. It adapted and led effectively during times of change to shape global discussions and responses to key issues, including during COVID-19.

- UNESCO mainstreams gender equality, environment and human rights effectively across the range of its work and is increasingly active in providing support in crises preparedness and response. It has enhanced its ability to drive innovative interdisciplinary work.

- UNESCO excels in helping governments, institutions, and populations to address global challenges by providing high-quality policy advice across its fields of expertise, influencing policies and building capacities in member states.

- Strong leadership in the promotion of education by setting global standards and promoting inclusive and equitable quality education.

- UNESCO's audit, evaluation and RBM functions and systems increasingly support performance monitoring and learning, though progress has been uneven.

Areas for further improvement

- Ensure that the field office network is effectively resourced and managed, equipped with the necessary policies, and that there is a clear and appropriate division of responsibilities between the Bureau of Strategic Planning and Priority Africa and External Relations.

- Modernisation of UNESCO's corporate systems should continue at pace, including improvement of the Enterprise Risk Management, strengthened human resource planning and implementation of UNESCORE ensuring it meets needs and underpins strong performance and results management.

- UNESCO must strengthen its capacity to track performance, efficiency and results, and its RBM approach needs to be applied more consistently across the organisation.

- UNESCO needs better quality financing – more flexible, predictable and less fragmented funding – to implement the mandate members states have given it.

- Member states and the Secretariat should reset behaviours to ensure that UNESCO can respond effectively and efficiently to opportunities and changing circumstances and strengthen accountability.

FIGURE 2. **UNESCO SCORING OVERVIEW**

Performance management

- 8.1 Independent evaluation function
- 8.2 Evaluation coverage
- 8.3 Evaluation quality
- 8.4 Evidence-based design
- 8.5 Poor performance tracked
- 8.6 Follow-up systems
- 8.7 Uptake of lessons

- 7.5 Performance data applied
- 7.4 Effective monitoring systems
- 7.3 Evidence-based targets
- 7.2 RBM in strategies
- 7.1 RBM applied

KPI 8 Evidence-based planning and programming applied

KPI 7 Transparent results focus, explicitly geared to function

Strategic management

- 1.1 Long-term vision
- 1.2 Organisational architecture
- 1.3 Support normative frameworks
- 1.4 Financial framework
- 2.1 Gender equality
- 2.2 Environment
- 2.3 Human rights
- 2.4 Indigenous Peoples

KPI 1 Organisational architecture and financial framework

KPI 2 Cross-cutting issues

ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE

- 6.9 Knowledge
- 6.8 Joint assessments
- 6.7 Accountability to beneficiaries
- 6.6 Information sharing
- 6.5 Co-ordination
- 6.4 Synergies
- 6.3 Use Country systems
- 6.2 Comparative advantage
- 6.1 Agility

KPI 6 Work in coherent partnerships

KPI 5 Planning and intervention design support relevance and agility

KPI 4 Cost and value consciousness financial transparency

KPI 3 Operating model and resources support, relevance and agility

- 3.1 Resources aligned to functions
- 3.2 Resource mobilisation
- 3.3 Decentralised decision making
- 3.4 Performance-based human resources

Relationship management

- 5.7 Implementation speed
- 5.6 Sustainability
- 5.5 Cross-cutting issues in intervention design
- 5.4 Risk management
- 5.3 Capacity analysis
- 5.2 Context analysis
- 5.1 Alignment to country

- 4.8 SH prevention / response
- 4.7 SEA prevention / response
- 4.6 Anti-fraud procedures
- 4.5 Control mechanisms
- 4.4 Audit
- 4.3 Results-based budgeting
- 4.2 Disbursement as planned
- 4.1 Transparent decision making

Operational management

Note: The 2025 MOPAN assessment of UNESCO was undertaken using the MOPAN 3.1 assessment methodology introduced following the previous assessment. Under the revised approach rating thresholds were raised to reflect the increasing expectations for organisational performance across the multilateral system. To facilitate a comparison with the findings of the previous assessment, UNESCO's scoring overview with application of MOPAN 3.0 rating scale is presented in Figure 11 on page 84.

How to read these charts

Micro-indicator

Key Performance Indicator

- 🟩 **Highly satisfactory** (3.51-4.00)
- 🟩 **Satisfactory** (2.51-3.50)
- 🟧 **Unsatisfactory** (1.51-2.50)
- 🟥 **Highly unsatisfactory** (0-1.50)
- ⬜ **No evidence / Not applicable**

KPI 12 Sustainability

KPI 9 Achievement of results

- 12.1 Sustainable benefits
- 9.1 Results attained
- 9.2 Gender equality
- 9.3 Environment / climate change
- 9.4 Human rights
- 9.5 Other cross-cutting issues

RESULTS

KPI 11 Efficient delivery

KPI 10 Relevance to partners

- 11.2 Timeliness
- 11.1 Cost efficiency
- 10.1 Effective policy activities
- 10.2 Responsive to needs

INTRODUCING UNESCO

MISSION, MANDATE AND COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES

UNESCO is a specialised agency of the United Nations. Its mandate is to "contribute to the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, and sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information". UNESCO's mandate and comparative advantages position it as a key factor in the international development architecture. Within this architecture, UNESCO has a distinctive role, contributing to the broader Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda through its specialised areas of expertise. UNESCO's mandate spans a much broader range of interconnected areas than any other multilateral organisation, allowing it to address complex development challenges from a holistic and interdisciplinary perspective.

For example, UNESCO has a unique mandate in relation to education that encompasses the whole education continuum, from early childhood to lifelong learning. This enables it to promote integrated approaches to education and skills development.

As the only UN organisation with a dedicated culture mandate, UNESCO plays a leading role in protecting and safeguarding the world's cultural heritage in all its forms and natural heritage, as well as supporting creativity as fundamental to addressing existing and emerging challenges and seeking to harness the power of culture for sustainable development.

UNESCO also has a normative leadership and standard-setting role, shaping global agendas and influencing national policies in a broad spectrum of areas. UNESCO's standard-setting work provides a framework for international co-operation and helps to harmonise approaches to key development challenges. Recent examples are its work developing international agreements and recommendations, such as the Recommendation on Open Science and the Recommendation on the Ethics of AI. Examples of its development of binding standards are the Enhanced Anti-Doping Convention, which strengthens sport integrity in 192 countries, and the Global Convention for Higher Education Qualifications, which boosts student mobility.

To a greater extent than other multilaterals, UNESCO possesses strong convening power, bringing together diverse stakeholders – from member states and UN agencies to civil society organisations, private companies, and experts – to address shared challenges. UNESCO has convened global summits on education and culture, facilitated policy dialogue, and established multi-stakeholder platforms. UNESCO's network provides access to expertise, resources, and on-the-ground experience, enabling it to implement programmes across diverse contexts. UNESCO's ability to engage a wide range of actors helps underpin its consensus-building work and allows it to translate global commitments into concrete actions.

UNESCO also plays a crucial role in collecting, monitoring, and disseminating data on key development indicators in its areas of expertise. It has a leadership role in some global monitoring frameworks for governments, scientific and other relevant institutions, such as the Global Education Monitoring Report, Global Ocean Observing System, and UNESCO Science Report.

UNESCO identifies five core functions that define how the Organisation can deliver on its mandate.

Box 3. UNESCO's five functions

- Laboratory of ideas: serving as a laboratory of ideas, generating innovative proposals and policy advice in its fields of competence.

- Clearing house: developing and reinforcing the global agenda in its fields of competence through policy analysis, monitoring and benchmarking and the development and analysis of benchmark data and statistics.

- Standard-setter: setting norms and standards in its fields of competence and supporting their implementation.

- Catalyst and motor for international co-operation: strengthening international and regional co-operation in its fields of competence, and fostering alliances, intellectual, financial and technical co-operation, knowledge-sharing, mobilising resources, and operational partnerships.

- Capacity-builder: providing advice for policy development and implementation and developing institutional and human capacities.
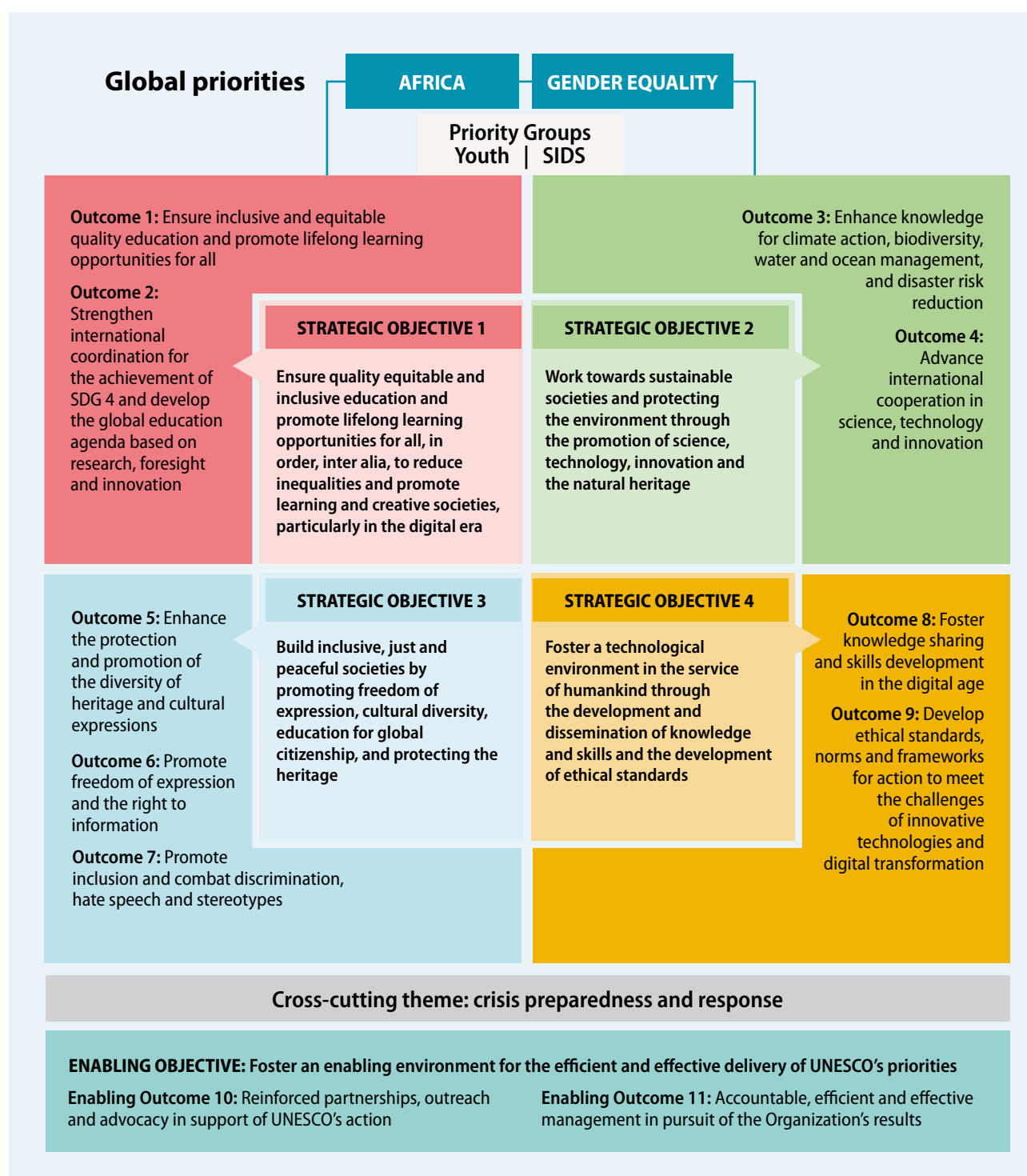
Source: UNESCO (2022), Medium-Term Strategy (2022-2029), p11

UNESCO contributes to the achievement of many of the SDGs as defined in the 2030 Agenda. Its primary contributions are to SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), SDG 13 (action to combat climate change), SDG 14 (life below water), SDG 15 (life on land), SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions), SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals). In line with the 2030 Agenda and reflecting a stronger focus in its current Medium-Term Strategy (2022-2029), UNESCO has defined four strategic objectives. These are:

- **Strategic objective 1: Ensure quality, equitable and inclusive education** and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, in order, inter alia, to reduce inequalities and promote learning and creative societies, particularly in the digital era.

- **Strategic objective 2: Work towards sustainable societies and protecting the environment** by promoting science, technology, innovation, and the natural heritage.

- **Strategic objective 3: Build inclusive, just, and peaceful societies** by promoting freedom of expression, cultural diversity, education for global citizenship, and protecting the heritage.

- **Strategic objective 4: Foster a technological environment in the service of humankind** through the development and dissemination of knowledge and skills and the development of ethical standards.

UNESCO also has an "Enabling objective" relating to the efficient and effective delivery of its priorities. This has two Enabling Outcomes: reinforcing partnerships, outreach, and advocacy in support of UNESCO's action, as well as accountable, efficient, and effective management in pursuit of the Organisation's results. UNESCO also has two "Global Priorities": Global Priority Africa and Global Priority Gender Equality. In addition, UNESCO has two Priority Groups: Youth and Small Islands and Developing States (SIDS). The organisation identifies crisis preparedness and response as a priority cross-cutting theme. The relationship between UNESCO's strategic objectives for the 2022-2029 period and its nine outcomes are represented in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3. **UNESCO'S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES**

Global priorities

AFRICA	GENDER EQUALITY

Priority Groups
Youth | SIDS

Outcome 1: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Outcome 2: Strengthen international coordination for the achievement of SDG 4 and develop the global education agenda based on research, foresight and innovation

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1

Ensure quality equitable and inclusive education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, in order, inter alia, to reduce inequalities and promote learning and creative societies, particularly in the digital era

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

Work towards sustainable societies and protecting the environment through the promotion of science, technology, innovation and the natural heritage

Outcome 3: Enhance knowledge for climate action, biodiversity, water and ocean management, and disaster risk reduction

Outcome 4: Advance international cooperation in science, technology and innovation

Outcome 5: Enhance the protection and promotion of the diversity of heritage and cultural expressions

Outcome 6: Promote freedom of expression and the right to information

Outcome 7: Promote inclusion and combat discrimination, hate speech and stereotypes

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3

Build inclusive, just and peaceful societies by promoting freedom of expression, cultural diversity, education for global citizenship, and protecting the heritage

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4

Foster a technological environment in the service of humankind through the development and dissemination of knowledge and skills and the development of ethical standards

Outcome 8: Foster knowledge sharing and skills development in the digital age

Outcome 9: Develop ethical standards, norms and frameworks for action to meet the challenges of innovative technologies and digital transformation

Cross-cutting theme: crisis preparedness and response

ENABLING OBJECTIVE: Foster an enabling environment for the efficient and effective delivery of UNESCO's priorities

Enabling Outcome 10: Reinforced partnerships, outreach and advocacy in support of UNESCO's action

Enabling Outcome 11: Accountable, efficient and effective management in pursuit of the Organization's results

Source: UNESCO (2022), Medium-Term Strategy (2022-2029)

THE CONTEXT IN THE ASSESSMENT PERIOD

UNESCO has operated in a complex and challenging global landscape between 2018 and 2024. This period was characterised by interconnected crises, rapid technological advancements and shifting geopolitical dynamics. Multiple overlapping crises strained social cohesion, exacerbated inequalities and impeded progress towards the SDGs. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted education and economies. It forced a rapid shift to digital technologies, revealing disparities in digital access and skills. UNESCO had to adapt rapidly to address the pandemic's impacts, particularly in education, culture, and communication. Climate change and environmental degradation have accelerated threats to biodiversity, ecosystems, and human well-being. UNESCO's work on promoting sustainable development, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction was more relevant than ever in addressing these challenges. New armed conflicts have emerged, leading to displacement, humanitarian crises and the destruction of cultural heritage. UNESCO's role in protecting cultural heritage in conflict zones, fostering peacebuilding, and supporting education in emergencies has become increasingly vital.

The rapid advancement of digital technologies, especially artificial intelligence (AI), has created opportunities and risks, requiring a strategic response from UNESCO. The digital transformation accelerated during the pandemic, but it also highlighted concerns over digital divides, algorithmic bias, disinformation, and threats to privacy and freedom of expression. UNESCO has been at the forefront of promoting ethical AI, media and information literacy, and inclusive digital governance. The rise of disinformation and misinformation has also become a major challenge, eroding trust in institutions and hindering efforts to address global challenges. UNESCO's work promoting media and information literacy and supporting independent journalism is vital for building resilience against disinformation and fostering informed societies.

The shifting geopolitical landscape and the need for multilateral co-operation to effectively tackle global challenges have also made UNESCO's context more challenging. Multilateralism has been strained, and consensus-building in multilateral settings is becoming increasingly difficult. UNESCO's role as a platform for dialogue, co-operation and standard setting has become even more important because of this context.

GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

UNESCO's governance system relies on three main organs: the General Conference, the Executive Board and the Secretariat. **The General Conference** consists of the representatives of the member states of UNESCO. It meets in ordinary sessions every two years and determines the policies and the main lines of work of UNESCO, including its programme and budget. It elects the 58 Members of the Executive Board and nominates the Director-General every 4 years. As of January 2024, there were 194 member states[1] and 12 associate members at UNESCO.

The Executive Board, acting under the authority of the General Conference**,** is responsible for the execution of the programme adopted by the Conference. The responsibilities and functions of the Board derive from the Constitution and directives set by the General Conference. The 58 members of the Executive Board meet in regular session at least four times during the biennium. The Executive Board has five permanent subsidiary bodies mandated to "examine and report to the Executive Board on all questions referred to them by the Executive Board":

- The Special Committee (SP) considers questions pertaining to the functioning of the Secretariat, particularly those relating to evaluation, internal control, oversight and accountability systems and mechanisms, relations with the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), and methods of work of the General Conference and the Executive Board.

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1. On 10 July 2023, the United States officially accepted the Constitution of UNESCO, becoming a full member of UNESCO, after having left the organisation in October 2017. Israel has not rejoined UNESCO.

- The Committee on Conventions and Recommendations (CR) considers reports of member states on the implementation of Conventions and Recommendations.

- The Committee on Non-Governmental Partners (NGP) examines statutory issues related to official relations with NGOs and foundations, in accordance with applicable Directives, and all other relevant questions regarding UNESCO's co-operation with non-governmental organisations.

- Two Commissions, the Programme and External Relations Commission (PX) and the Finance and Administrative Commission (FA), consider other issues, examine draft programmes and budgets, and make detailed reports to the Board.

The Secretariat is the executive branch of UNESCO. It comprises the Director-General and the staff she or he appoints.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

UNESCO is headquartered in Paris, France, and has a network of 54 field offices and 10 Category 1 Institutes or Centres.[2] UNESCO's Headquarters (HQ) is responsible for the overall management and administration of the Organisation. UNESCO's five main programme sectors (Education, Natural Sciences, Social and Human Sciences, Culture and Communication, and Information) and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission are headquartered in Paris. As of January 2024, HQ housed 1 136 staff, which represents 49% of UNESCO's staff members. HQ provides strategic guidance to field offices to support the implementation of UNESCO's priorities and objectives.

2.   There are 10th Category 1 Institutes: the 42nd Session of the UNESCO General Conference in Paris in November 2023 adopted a resolution to establish the UNESCO International Institute for STEM Education (IISTEM) in Shanghai. IISTEM is not yet operational.

UNESCO's field office network has been in transition. Under a new structure, formally introduced in September 2023 and implemented as of 1 January 2024, UNESCO's field network now consists of 20 Regional offices, 30 country offices, and 4 liaison offices, employing 822 staff in total, comprising 34% of the staff members of UNESCO. Under the new field office network:

- Regional Offices are responsible for strategic and programme guidance at the regional level, in accordance with the Medium-Term Strategy (C/4) and the Approved Programme and Budget (C/5), closely co-ordinating with the relevant programme sectors and central services at Headquarters. They guide UNESCO's work in their regions regarding the definition of priorities and their translation into regional programmes. They co-ordinate programme design, planning, and implementation in collaboration with other Regional Offices and the relevant Country Offices. They are responsible and accountable for the implementation of country and regional programmes in all the countries under their coverage, except for countries hosting Country Offices, and they provide technical support where necessary. All Regional Offices report to Headquarters.

- National offices implement the action plan set in the Approved Programme and Budget at the national level and offer technical support to national authorities aligned to their development needs. National offices collaborate with regional offices and report on their programme delivery to ensure the co-ordination of UNESCO's activities in the field. As representatives of UNESCO, national offices contribute to the United Nations co-operation framework at the country level.

- UNESCO Country Offices are responsible for implementing the Organisation's Approved Programme and Budget (C/5 document) at the national level. They support national authorities by providing technical expertise for their development plans and serve as UNESCO's official representatives in the host country. Country Offices
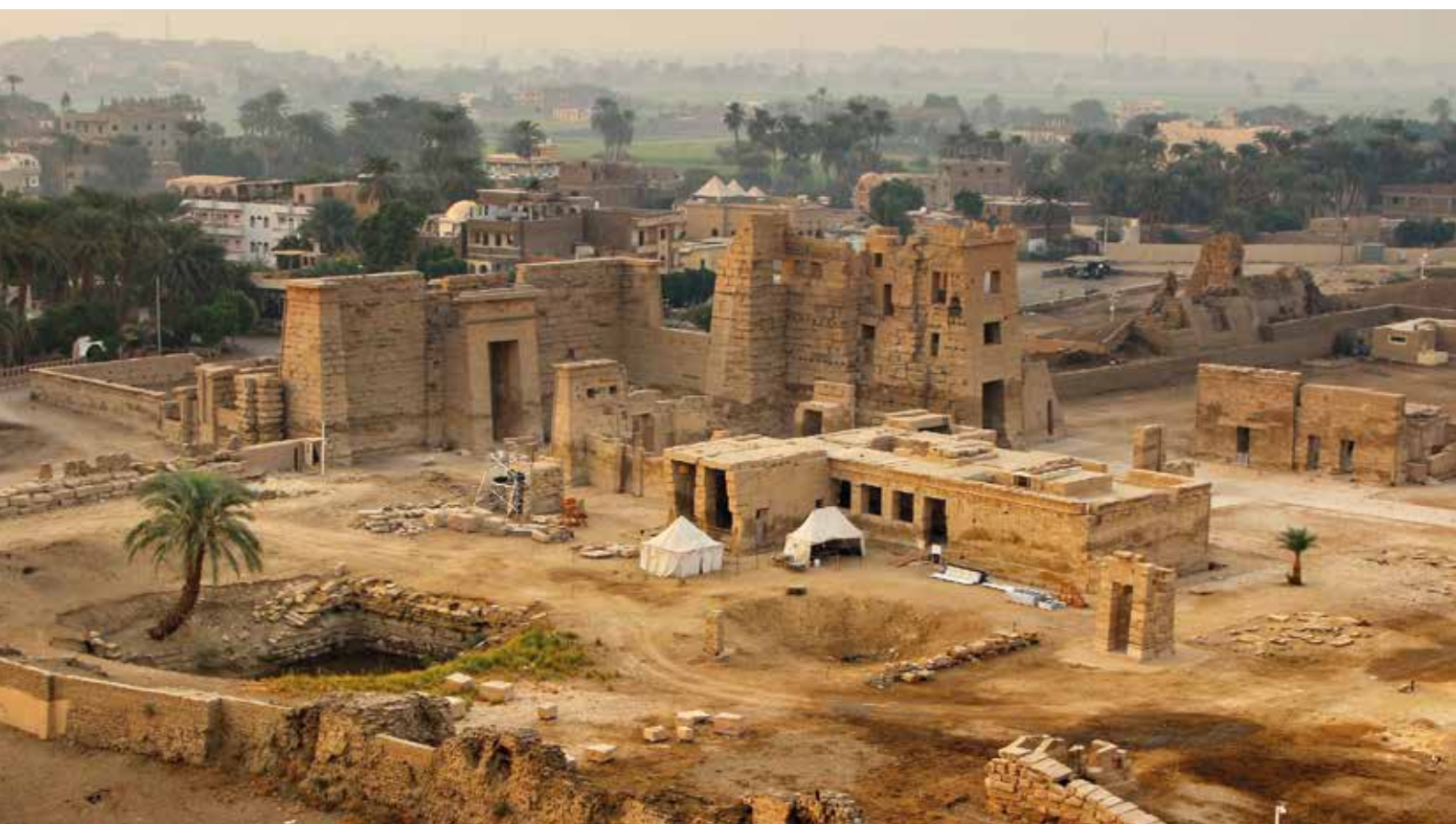
actively engage in United Nations co-operation mechanisms, particularly by contributing to the development and implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). To enhance co-ordination and effectiveness, they work closely with their respective Regional Office, ensuring alignment with regional priorities.

Liaison offices enhance collaboration between UNESCO, United Nations agencies, and intergovernmental organisations at regional and subregional levels. Through strategic liaison efforts, they facilitate the establishment and reinforcement of active partnerships and seek to advance UNESCO's mandate, priorities, and programmes while strengthening its positioning and visibility on the global stage. UNESCO also relies on a network of Institutes and Centres to carry out its mandate. These are often specialised in specific areas of action. There are two categories:

- Category 1 entities are legally part of UNESCO and are integrated into the organisation's programmes and budgets. There are 10 Category 1 Institutes, with the latest being adopted at the 42nd session of the General Conference. One is part of the Natural Sciences sector, eight are an integral part of the education sector, one of which has a cross-cutting mandate (UIS). Approximately 360 UNESCO staff are based in Category 1 Institutes and Centres (15% of the staff members).

- Category 2 entities are associated with UNESCO through arrangements approved by the General Conference, but are legally external to the Organisation, with their own staff and regulations. There are over 100 Category 2 Institutes and Centres that contribute to UNESCO's programmes in a wide area of competences such as natural sciences (e.g., the International Research and Training Centre for Science and Technology Strategy), oceans (e.g., the Regional Research Centre on Oceanography for West Asia), or communication and information (e.g., the International Research Centre on Artificial Intelligence).

Due to their institutional and governance relationship with the UNESCO Secretariat, Category 1 Institutes are within the scope of the MOPAN assessment, while Category 2 Institutes are not.

UNESCO defines the strategic objectives, outcomes, and outputs that are needed to respond to global challenges identified in its areas of action. Each is led by a programme 'Sector', which is led by an Assistant Director General. The programme sectors and UNESCO's role are set out below:

- Education: UNESCO's mandate covers all aspects of education. It provides local and global leadership in education and seeks to strengthen education systems and respond to priority challenges, whilst prioritising gender equality and Africa.

- Natural Sciences focuses on promoting the use of science to manage the environment in a sustainable way and protecting communities through the use of scientific knowledge and new technologies for disaster risk reduction and science education.

- Social and Human Sciences: UNESCO seeks to address emerging social and ethical challenges, foster social inclusion and promote intercultural dialogue through its activities in the field of social and human sciences.

- Culture: UNESCO seeks to promote cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, and a culture of peace. The organisation is at the forefront of the safeguarding of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

- Communication and Information: UNESCO promotes freedom of expression, media development, and information access. It focuses on fostering universal access to information and knowledge as well as promoting media and information literacy.

In addition, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO is the United Nations body responsible for supporting global ocean science and services. The IOC supports its 150 member states in the protection of the health of the oceans by co-ordinating programmes in areas such as ocean observations, tsunami warnings and marine spatial planning. The IOC has functional autonomy within UNESCO and designs and implements its programme according to its "framework of the budget adopted by its Assembly and the General Conference of UNESCO".

The Medium-Term Strategy 2014-2021 sought to create greater alignment between the Sectors, IOC, their associated 'Major Programme' and several of the nine strategic objectives in the Strategy. The 2022-2029 Medium-Term Strategy has taken this process further. It commits UNESCO to the four cross-cutting "strategic objectives", listed above, namely, to:

1. Ensure quality, equitable and inclusive education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, in order, inter alia, to reduce inequalities and promote learning and creative societies, particularly in the digital era.

2. Work towards sustainable societies and protecting the environment through the promotion of science, technology, innovation and the natural heritage.

3. Build inclusive, just, and peaceful societies by promoting freedom of expression, cultural diversity, education for global citizenship, and the protection of heritage.

4. Foster a technological environment in the service of humankind through the development and dissemination of knowledge and skills and the development of ethical standards.

These four strategic objectives are then translated into nine "outcomes" detailing UNESCO's priority areas of work. These priorities are adopted by Member States every four years. In turn, these 9 outcomes are associated with sectoral and interdisciplinary "outputs" (39 and 5 respectively, in the current Approved Programme and Budget). These are monitored with quantitative and qualitative performance indicators. Outputs are revised as necessary in the biennial Programme and Budgets.

FINANCES AND OPERATIONS

UNESCO's programmes are adopted every four years, while the budgets financing those programmes are adopted every two years. The two main sources of financing are Member States' assessed contributions and voluntary contributions.

UNESCO's integrated budget framework has grown significantly since the last MOPAN assessment. The approved budget, including voluntary contributions (VCs) in hand and anticipated, grew from USD 1 225 million for 2018-2019 to USD 1 448 million for 2022-2023, representing a USD 223 million (or 18.2%) increase (see Figure 4). Regarding agreements signed, in 2022-2023, the Organisation mobilised USD 816.4 million in voluntary contributions, an increase of 8% compared to the previous biennium (2020-2021: USD 756.5 million). The regular budget, mainly funded by assessed contributions, decreased from USD 595 million to USD 535 million over the same period.

With respect to the 2022-2023 approved budget 41 C/5, the 10 largest contributors of assessed contributions were: China (USD 105.3 million), Japan (USD 55.5 million), Germany (USD 42.2 million), United Kingdom (USD 30.2 million), France (USD 29.8 million), Italy (USD 22.0 million), Canada (USD 18.2 million), Republic of Korea (USD 17.8 million), Spain (USD 14.7 million) and Australia (USD 14.6 million). In addition, the United States of America, which rejoined UNESCO on 10 July 2023, was assessed pro rata USD 28.2 million for 2023.

The Education Programme and the Culture Programme benefitted from the largest increases, receiving USD 145.5 million and 127.6 million respectively. For the 2022-2023 period, UNESCO's programme budget was USD 1,091 million. This excludes programme-related services and the UNESCO's Institute for Statistics. The allocation was distributed as follows: 48.2% to Education, 22.4% to Culture, 18.3% to Natural Sciences, 5.6% to Communication, 5.4% to Social and Human Sciences, and 2.9% to the intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission.

In 2023, during the 5th extraordinary session of the General Conference held on 29-30 June, most Member States accepted the proposal submitted by the US to rejoin UNESCO as its 194th member State. In accordance with the scale of contributions, the United States agreed to fund the equivalent of 22% of the Organisation's regular budget. The progressive payments of their arrears, estimated at USD 619 million and, as of 2023, voluntary contributions to fund programmes, are also expected to be made.

FIGURE 4. **UNESCO'S APPROVED INTEGRATED BUDGET PER PROGRAMME AND SERVICES (2018-2023)**
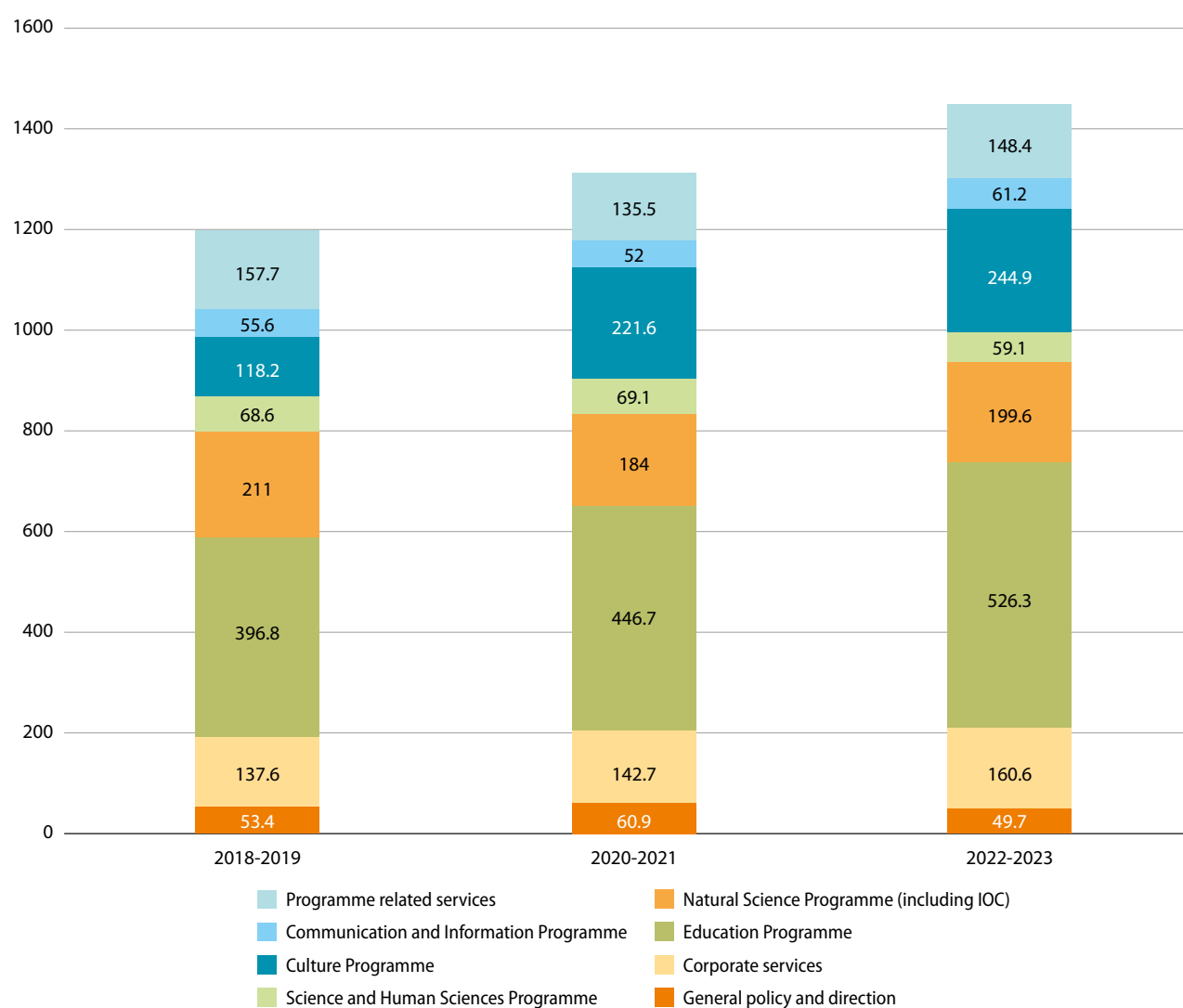
Source: UNESCO's Approved Budgets from 2018 to 2022
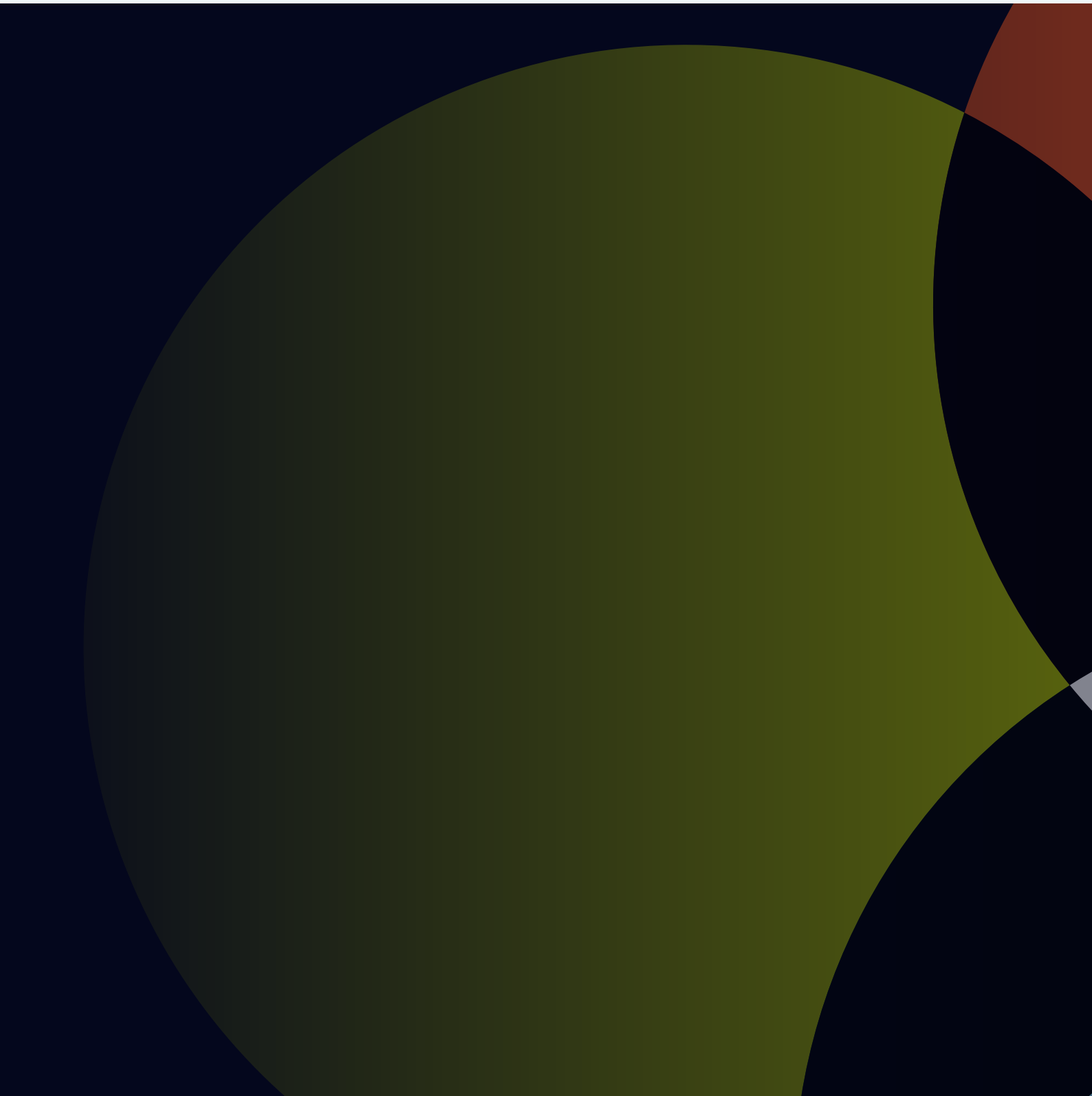
CONCLUSIONS
AND CONSIDERATIONS
FOR THE FUTURE

This chapter presents the assessment's conclusions, setting out how UNESCO has adapted to key changes in its strategic, policy and operating context since the last MOPAN assessment. It highlights the strengths, practices, risks and weaknesses that influence the ability of UNESCO to deliver results in line with its mandate and its role in the multilateral architecture. The chapter concludes by reflecting on UNESCO's future trajectory, including the potential pressures it might face, and identifies issues that MOPAN members and senior management of the organisation should consider. These conclusions build upon the ratings and findings of the assessment against MOPAN's framework, described in more detail in the next assessment Chapter and the supporting technical analysis (Annex A).

Since the last MOPAN assessment of UNESCO in 2019, the global context has evolved considerably. Conflicts, COVID-19, economic and debt crises, and climate-related disasters have led to setbacks in eradicating poverty, achieving gender equality, education, and ending hunger. The 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report shows that the SDGs are off-track at the halfway point to 2030.

These trends and events generate an increasing demand for the normative and programmatic support that UNESCO provides. At the same time, like other multilateral actors, UNESCO is facing heightened pressure to demonstrate effectiveness, efficiency and accountability. The culmination of these factors is an even more challenging operating context to that which pertained at the time of the last assessment.

In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic presented UNESCO with a unique challenge during the assessment period. The organisation responded nimbly with well-targeted initiatives. The evaluation of UNESCO's response concluded that it demonstrated a "remarkable level of resilience" during the pandemic. By swiftly shifting to digital platforms, mobilising funds, focusing on educational inclusivity, and enhancing intra-agency co-ordination, UNESCO was able to adapt and sustain its operations during the pandemic, ensuring that initiatives were relevant and effectively implemented. UNESCO has sought to build on the lessons and innovative practices developed during the COVID-19 period and take them through to its current practice.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE ASSESSMENT

This is UNESCO's second assessment using the MOPAN methodology, and the last MOPAN assessment provides a baseline against which to compare its current performance. The general conclusion of the 2024 MOPAN assessment is that while there are some areas where performance needs to continue to improve, overall, UNESCO has made strong progress since the last MOPAN assessment.

There is a lot of continuity between the findings of this assessment and the last assessment. In most areas, this is to be expected. For most of the assessment period, UNESCO's core budget was at a similar level to the previous assessment period, with significant additional funds becoming available only when the USA rejoined the organisation in June 2023. COVID-19 was also a disruptive factor. But UNESCO has made less progress in some key areas than could have been reasonably expected. The primary area relates to the slow progress in reforming and comprehensively supporting its field office network. The decision on the shape of the network took a long time to agree with member states, and while discussions were ongoing there was little progress in defining the key governance parameters that would apply to the field office network.

UNESCO'S AREAS OF STRENGTH

UNESCO has continued to make a very strong contribution to global norms and practice in an extremely broad range of critical areas. Its combination of normative and programmatic roles is a strength. The organisation has rare expertise and a degree of authority that enables it to influence governments across the world.

The assessment finds that the strengths identified in the 2019 MOPAN assessment are still among UNESCO's strengths:

- A central position to the SDGs
- A global leader in knowledge and practice
- A crucial role in education
- Successful mainstreaming of gender equality, good governance, environment and human rights
- Commitment to and strong process in results-based management and budgeting
- A high-quality central evaluation service.

The assessment finds that UNESCO continues to excel in these areas and has also developed new strengths, including in improving policy support to advance the SDGs and delivering a more integrated approach to global challenges. The following paragraphs summarise UNESCO's strengths today and consider how these have evolved since the previous assessment.

UNESCO is a global leader in knowledge and practice

UNESCO has continued to be a global leader in knowledge and practice and, demonstrating foresight and leadership, has taken a lead on new or emerging issues of global concern.

UNESCO continues to lead policy developments in a broad range of fields, from education, tsunami monitoring, geo and biodiversity protection, and freshwater use, to cultural heritage and the safety of journalists. It continues to review the implementation of global agreements, such as the Conventions that include the 1972 World Heritage Convention. Rapid technological and social changes have made UNESCO's role as a global standard-setter increasingly important, as evidenced by its new participation at the G20. Its advocacy for the freedom of expression in both online and offline spaces has been critical amid declining press freedom, violence against journalists, and disinformation. During the COVID pandemic, it used its mandate to combat misinformation and support initiatives to ensure journalists could operate safely.

The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and neurotechnology have raised ethical concerns which require global standards. With considerable foresight, UNESCO positioned itself to provide guidance and develop frameworks on AI prior to the last MOPAN assessment and has greatly strengthened its contribution in the current assessment period. UNESCO produced the first global standard on AI ethics in November 2021: the Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, which was adopted by consensus by 194 member states. The Recommendation sets guidelines to govern technology ethically but also provides the elements for effective implementation from the outset, such as diagnostic tools, reporting mechanisms, and platforms to exchange knowledge.

UNESCO has strengthened interdisciplinary working

UNESCO's current Medium-Term Strategy introduced important measures to better capitalise on the organisation's broad expertise by encouraging sectors to work together in close synergy to promote a more integrated approach to addressing global challenges.

The strategy introduced five specific Interdisciplinary Programmes to drive stronger interdisciplinary approaches and collaboration. The Interdisciplinary Programmes are not "owned" by any specific sector and, for the 42 C/5 they have dedicated combined budgets from two or more sectors which encourage collaboration across the disciplines. Reflecting this, UNESCO's results framework has moved from being aligned to the sectors to being aligned to four interlinked and cross-cutting strategic objectives. UNESCO is also combining the capabilities of its sectors and Category 1 Institutes more effectively and working in a more integrated way.

In addition to implementing Interdisciplinary Programmes, UNESCO continues to demonstrate its core strengths of mainstreaming global priorities across its initiatives, including gender equality, environment, and human rights, and it is increasingly active in providing support in crisis preparedness and response. UNESCO effectively mainstreams these issues across the range of its work and is driving innovative interdisciplinary work (e.g. women in science and sport, climate change and education). For example, whereas the last assessment found that UNESCO had a strong track record of responding to crises and conflict in the field of culture, this assessment finds that UNESCO has succeeded in addressing this priority from other disciplinary areas.

Attention towards crisis preparedness and response has also been increased as UNESCO's single cross-cutting objective in the current strategic period. UNESCO has increased its engagement in these fragile contexts accordingly and shown that it can deploy rapidly to respond to crises – for example, in Beirut and Ukraine.

However, UNESCO is still evolving its policies and standard operating procedures, drawing on its experience. Its strategy, dated to 2018, could also be updated in due course. The organisation has a small amount of crisis funds allocated within the regular budget and special extrabudgetary accounts/sub-accounts used to raise and deploy funds for specific crises. It has allocated a portion of the 2023 USA contribution to support crisis preparedness, emergency response and recovery.

UNESCO is effective at influencing policy and building capacities

UNESCO excels in providing high-quality policy advice across its fields of expertise, positioning itself as a key global player in enhancing the skills, knowledge, and capabilities necessary to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This capability is in high demand, as UN member states and the Secretary-General work to reform the UN development system. The goal is to shift away from a supply-driven, project- and sector-based approach by disparate UN entities to a more cohesive effort. These reforms aim to ensure that UN actions collectively provide high-quality, integrated policy advice and programmatic support aligned with country priorities, thereby facilitating national implementation of the SDGs. UNESCO stands out among multilaterals for its depth of experience in facilitating such policy advice.

Many of its interventions focus on developing national-level policies, as seen in laws, strategies, and budgets, thereby building the capacity of national stakeholders who are responsible for key policy development in their respective countries. A significant portion of UNESCO's capacity-building activities is "upstream," aimed at achieving broad country-level impacts. This includes the overall mandates of many of its Category 1 Institutes. Successive evaluations and syntheses have consistently found UNESCO's approaches to policy support and capacity building effective. Consequently, UNESCO is well-equipped to support country-level policy development in alignment with the UN Development System's frameworks.

UNESCO is central to the delivery of global goals

UNESCO has continued to make a strong contribution to progress across a range of SDGs since the last assessment. It continues to have a critical position within the global development delivery architecture. UNESCO contributes to most SDGs and is the custodian of seven SDG targets and indicators.

UNESCO plays a highly effective leadership role in education and has been crucial in maintaining momentum for education investment and ensuring continued progress towards SDG 4. With a mandate and the capacity to cover all aspects of education, UNESCO leads the co-ordination and monitoring of SDG 4, as part of the Global Education 2030 Agenda.

Evaluations have continued to give evidence on the effectiveness of its interventions. Its rich network of Category 1 institutes and centres supports education planners across the world. UNESCO's global leadership role in education during the COVID-19 pandemic was particularly valuable. In October 2020, UNESCO convened 100 member states in an extraordinary Global Education Meeting to safeguard education, catalysing a global response and setting the stage for future recovery initiatives. UNESCO prioritised continuity in education and educational recovery efforts to address the needs of 1.6 billion students impacted by school closures. It launched the Global Education Coalition to facilitate inclusive learning opportunities for children and youth, facilitated remote learning, and raised additional funds to finance its response. UNESCO also focused on reaching students, particularly those from disadvantaged communities, who were unable to access remote-learning populations, and promoting inclusive education. The 2024 SRR notes that UNESCO has supported education systems in 177 countries, including 133 crisis-affected and disaster-prone countries.

AREAS OF PROGRESS

Following the 2019 assessment, UNESCO produced a systematic management response identifying the specific actions that the organisation would take to address areas for improvement. This assessment finds that important steps have been undertaken to deliver on these action commitments and strengthen its systems in new areas covered by the MOPAN assessment framework (such as Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, and Sexual Harassment). In several areas, these changes have delivered or are starting to deliver positive impacts – though continued attention is required to ensure that expected benefits are achieved in full.

UNESCO's audit, evaluation and RBM functions and systems increasingly support performance monitoring and learning, though progress has been uneven.

UNESCO has strengthened its functions and systems, enabling the organisation to derive timely feedback on its performance. For example, the Audit Office has greater independence, and its enhanced budget has enabled it to do more during the assessment period. Its audits, including performance audits, are robust and critically important in reflecting how the organisation can strengthen its systems.

Likewise, the Evaluation Office has also been strengthened. It has greater effective independence than previously and a degree of control over a portion of its budget allocation that it previously lacked. It also now has the funds it

needs to perform its functions effectively and has delivered greater coverage in general and, specifically, of UNESCO's normative work over the last four years.

This MOPAN assessment has drawn heavily on both internal audit and corporate evaluation of reports and found them clear, helpful and comprehensive.

The 2019 assessment noted that the coverage and quality of decentralised evaluations required strengthening, and a stronger body of evaluative evidence on UNESCO's normative engagement was needed. UNESCO's management response committed to strengthening both. The Evaluation Office took steps to strengthen decentralised evaluation – through the continued support of the Evaluation Focal Point network and strong backstopping from within the core team, and is financing dedicated capacity in five regional offices, with staff expected to be in post by the end of 2024. This is a positive recent development which will yield fruit in 2025.

Progress in strengthening RBM systems is more modest, and there is an ongoing need to strengthen tracking of performance, efficiency and results. In particular, there is a persisting need for monitoring frameworks to include performance indicators at the outcome level to enable UNESCO to systematically capture and analyse corporate performance at the outcome level. Furthermore, management needs to introduce systems to track poor performance and better integrate results tracking – a commitment set out in the 2019 Management Response. Some of these systems were still being developed within UNESCORE at the time of the assessment, so we cannot comment on their efficacy. The Secretariat has revived a management committee (the Programme Coordination Group) that may help identify systemic poor performance. Likewise, where programmes, sectors and initiatives implement the RBM methodologies that BSP is promoting, managers should be able to identify poor performance. However, coverage is not universal. It is important that the RBM is resourced and rolled out across the Secretariat's portfolio.

Communication and outreach have improved, but need further development to be able to report meaningful outcomes

The 2019 MOPAN assessment noted that despite much excellent outreach, UNESCO's overall communications could be updated and strengthened to ensure that its messages achieved the reach and impact they deserve. Since then, UNESCO, recognising this need, implemented measures to improve its external communications (it was one of the priorities in the Strategic Transformation process). UNESCO reviewed its information function and presented a new engagement and advocacy strategy to the Executive Board in September 2019, following the last MOPAN assessment. The website has been significantly updated and redesigned to present a clearer and more coherent public face for UNESCO. However, there remains a need to highlight impactful interventions more effectively, and there is scope for headquarters to do more to effectively communicate country-level achievements. It is also likely that the field office network will require support to distil and publicise appropriate achievements. The 2024 Strategic Results Report – which was published after the data cut-off for this assessment – identifies UNESCO's results in a much more direct and compelling way than previously. It is hoped that this approach will continue to influence how UNESCO communicates its results in the future. The observations on the quality of UNESCO's communications and outreach are not part of the formal MOPAN scope, but they are fundamental to helping UNESCO gain and retain support.

UNESCO has introduced effective policies and controls to tackle and prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment

Overall, UNESCO demonstrates a strong commitment to tackling sexual harassment through comprehensive policies and strategies. UNESCO has implemented a victim-centred approach for both PSEA and SH. UNESCO upholds a Policy on the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), applicable to all staff and encompassing best practices alongside an action plan. Systems are in place to monitor policy implementation effectively, and UNESCO is committed to taking swift disciplinary action in cases where SEA allegations are substantiated. Building on this important progress, opportunities exist to further strengthen the approach, including ensuring that intervention design includes formal consideration of the risk of SEA Abuse in relation to the intervention and maintaining the focus on staff training.

AREAS FOR ONGOING ATTENTION

While the assessment finds that UNESCO has made strong progress since the previous assessment, it identifies several areas where renewed attention is required to ensure that this positive trajectory is maintained and that UNESCO can maximise its contribution to global and local challenges.

Continued efforts are required to better align resources and the work programme

Meeting the rising expectations of member states on UNESCO within a constrained budgetary environment requires careful consideration of the quality of funding and scope of planned activities.

As set out in Chapter 1 of this report, there have been positive trends in UNESCO's financing. However, they are relatively modest, and if UNESCO is to deliver its mandate, there is a need for the quality of UNESCO's funding to improve. Given the breadth of its responsibilities, UNESCO has a comparatively modest budget. The 2024 Strategic Results Report estimates that it is around 1% of multilateral funding. UNESCO's total budget is lower than that of many well-known universities across the world – as one representative of a member state noted in an interview. Voluntary contributions to UNESCO are characterised by a high level of earmarking. Unlike most other UN agencies, UNESCO does not receive any fully unearmarked voluntary contributions. At the programme sector level, while instruments exist to attract flexible funding, they have not been prioritised by donors. In addition, the relatively small average size of agreements results in high transaction and administrative costs for the organisation and leads to programmatic fragmentation, with some initiatives better funded than others. In 2022-2023, half of fund in trust projects were below USD 250,000, but they contributed less than 10% of the total resources mobilised. UNESCO notes that a disproportionate amount of staff time is spent mobilising, managing and reporting on small contributions with a low overall return.

There is a need for more predictable, flexible funding to allow for long-term planning and sustainable outcomes, and to enable UNESCO to respond in an agile and efficient way to programmatic needs and opportunities. There are costs to member states due to the fragmentation of programmes and the dependence on voluntary funding for projects. If UNESCO must pursue funding for stand-alone projects, this is at the cost of providing member states with the strategic policy support they need and expect. It is also the case that if more of UNESCO's voluntary contributions are given in a flexible form, it can attract the quality of staff it needs. "Projectised" funding only allows staff to be hired on contracts with the same duration as the project. If UNESCO can pool its voluntary contributions and treat them more flexibly, UNESCO could offer more secure fixed-term contracts, attracting the kind of specialised expertise that it needs if it is to continue to lead on global issues.

In addition to ensuring that the volume/quality of resources matches the ambition of its future programmes and mandate, UNESCO must prevent these resources from being spread too thinly. Whilst the previous assessment emphasised that member states needed to embrace a greater degree of selectivity and prioritisation than they had previously accepted, issues of overstretch remain, as there continues to be pressure to expand without facilitating stronger prioritisation from member states.

Although the urgency for UNESCO to prioritise persists, indications suggest it has become less acute. The Medium-Term Strategy (2022-2029) delivered some prioritisation of UNESCO's strategic objectives, reducing them from nine to four. Yet it seems the breadth of UNESCO's activities has not been significantly reduced. In practice, prioritisation decisions have been delegated to programme sectors and their equivalents. The strongest independent call for prioritisation during the last MOPAN assessment period came from the then External Auditors, who reiterated this need in all their performance audits. However, during the current assessment period, their scope has been limited to financial audits, and prioritisation was not a focus. It is anticipated that the new External Auditors will remain attentive to this issue as they undertake their work.

Corporate systems have been modernised, albeit unevenly: work on these should continue at pace

The 2019 assessment highlighted that UNESCO's investment in corporate systems had fallen behind, necessitating updates to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. Following the budget reduction of one-fifth in 2011, cuts to administrative and corporate functions were disproportionately severe. The last assessment noted the need for improvements in human resource management, staff mobility systems, and risk management. It also pointed out the need for adequate staffing in corporate roles to drive change and ensure the implementation of new systems across the organisation. In response, UNESCO's management acknowledged the need to modernise corporate systems and introduced several improvement processes, many of which were part of the 2019-2021 Strategic Transformation Strategy.

The assessment finds that whilst corporate systems have since been modernised, progress has been uneven, primarily due to ongoing financial constraints that have delayed the development of some corporate functions. Although staffing in corporate roles has increased in recent years, resources remain strained, and progress has been slower than expected in some areas. Human resource management has seen slow progress, and while risk management has improved, external and internal audits, along with the Oversight Advisory Committee, still point out challenges that need addressing. Implementation of UNESCO's new IT systems has been delayed over the assessment period; UNESCO's original "Redesign Core Systems Initiative" was paused, and work on redesigning core systems was reinitiated as the UNESCORE programme in 2021.

UNESCO should have been quicker in addressing the gaps in enterprise risk management that were identified in the 2019 assessment. While some important steps to strengthen risk management were taken following the MOPAN assessment, including creating of Risk, Compliance and Policy unit and conducting an internal benchmarking exercise as well as internal and external audits, the 2023 Internal Audit of UNESCO's Enterprise Risk Management concluded that UNESCO's was only at the "Developing" Level 2 in the UN's 5-level maturity model. The recent overcommitment in managing the Approved Programme and Budget for 2022-2025 (41 C/5) demonstrated the ongoing need to improve budgeting systems and strengthen risk management through stronger monitoring and escalation mechanisms. Actions are being undertaken to reinforce UNESCO's budget systems in line with recommendations from the Internal Auditor.[1]

Despite some growth in staffing numbers, roles remain stretched. UNESCO has pathways for most of these changes, but the primary challenge lies in ensuring the effective implementation of these change processes.

Ensuring the field office network is fit for purpose

The shape of the revised field office network is now clear, but belated decision-making has meant that key elements of UNESCO's decentralised operating model were delayed. The 2019 assessment noted that rationalising the global field network was a complex and overdue reform. It said that the heterogeneous network undermined UNESCO's ability to demonstrate coherence and led to unclear accountability and inefficiencies. It emphasised that the network needed to be reshaped in a way that dovetails with the same network footprint that was then being debated by the United Nations Development Group. It also pointed out that member states needed to accept and endorse the potential reduction of UNESCO's presence in some countries. UNESCO's management response affirmed that the "dual field structure" needed to be rationalised, stated that discussions on the future shape of the field office network were underway (in 2019), and that this was a priority of the Strategic Transformation process.

After extensive consultation, the new unified structure was finally announced in September 2023 and introduced in January 2024. That it took until the start of 2024 for changes to be introduced is a cause for concern. The previous MOPAN assessment noted that any changes to the field network have a political dimension that makes it more

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1   This issue is presented In Chapter 3: Assessment Findings.

difficult to deliver, and pointed out that previous attempts to reduce UNESCO's country presence met strong lobbying from member states. Interviews indicate that the process was again delayed by the need to satisfy member states' concerns about UNESCO's footprint in different global regions. This is a clear and significant example of how member states' engagement in what an operational decision for the Secretariat should be reduces UNESCO's ability to deliver efficiently.

Other performance issues mean that UNESCO faces significant challenges in making the new field office network fit for purpose. The revised network was supposed to have been reshaped in a way that dovetails with the UN Development System, to allow UNESCO to benefit from stronger alignment with the broader UN system. However, UNESCO's revised global footprint lacks coherence in at least two ways. First, there are more Regional Offices than UNESCO can realistically staff. Regional Offices are expected to backstop national offices with sectoral expertise and therefore require multiple staff positions. UNESCO will lack the funds to provide each of these 20 offices with the complement of expertise it anticipates. Second, some of them are in cities that the rest of the UN Development System does not use as regional hubs – undermining the alignment argument. Again, there are indications that these compromises are a result of UNESCO's agreement to member states' requests. There is a risk that these decisions on location, whilst ensuring member states' requests are heard, undermine UNESCO's ability to operate strategically.

This assessment also noted two critical gaps in the governance and accountability framework governing the revised field office network. First, at the time of the MOPAN headquarters interviews, UNESCO had yet to define the accountability framework relating to the field office network. This was identified as a gap in the previous MOPAN assessment: it noted that there was a need for greater clarity on the assignment of responsibility and accountability for the field network in Africa at that time. The assessment reported that UNESCO was then (2017/2018 in the process of reviewing and strengthening the relationship. UNESCO's accountability bodies have since then reiterated the need

for a clear, revised policy on the delegation of authority to regional and national offices. The Audit Office, in a note collating recurring findings from audits of field offices, recommended that the accountability framework, specifying clear delegation of authority, should be finalised. In its report on 2023, the Oversight Advisory Committee stated that "it is of utmost importance to develop a coherent strategy with a clear accountability framework, including financial and operational implications in both the Headquarters and the field". The last policy relating to the field network dates to 2014, and the policy listed in UNESCO's Administrative Manual (viewed in January 2024) still contains the 2011 policy. Assessment interviews in 2024 indicate that UNESCO has prepared a draft accountability framework for the field office network, but it was not available for review.

Second, there is a lack of clarity on whether country and regional offices are required to produce strategies, and if so, what their purpose is. At the time of the last MOPAN assessment, national offices were required to produce "UNESCO Country Strategies". In 2024, interviews found that there was a lack of clarity within UNESCO on whether national or regional offices are required to have these, and what the purpose of these strategies was. UNESCO is aware of these gaps. In its response to this observation in a first draft of the technical annex of this MOPAN assessment (Annex A), it stated that work has been ongoing since 2023 to address them. The Bureau of Strategic Planning is consulting on draft templates for regional and country strategy documents and stated that it anticipates that they will be finalised by the end of 2024. If that is the case, they would be finalised after the new field office network system had been operational for one year, which is not ideal.

It is recommended that UNESCO consider how it can align more strongly with the UN Development System while it defines what is required in terms of country strategies. Given that the UN Development System, under the guidance of the Resident Coordinator, develops UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and that UN entities have the option of using this as their country strategy, UNESCO may wish to derive its priorities from the Cooperation Framework and forgo developing its own country strategies. UNESCO could develop its internal implementation plan to complement its contribution to the Cooperation Framework. This is something to consider.

A further issue that UNESCO needs to address if the field office network is to meet its potential relates to workforce planning. A 2023 IOS audit of workforce planning found little evidence of strategic workforce planning for the field office network – noting that multiple issues undermined a genuine strategic approach. Staffing proposals for the field network show that, despite increased budget availability under the Programme and Budget for 2024-2025 (42 C/5), after the return of USA funding, staffing still falls short of requirements.

As noted, we understand that an accountability framework now exists, and that work is ongoing to define the requirements for regional and country strategies. However, given that these would be required, it is not clear why so little progress was made on them in advance of the finalisation of the field network footprint. It is possible that the latter two gaps stem partly from a lack of clarity in the respective responsibilities of the Bureau of Strategic Planning and the Priority Africa and External Relations Sector for defining the strategic requirements governing the field office network. UNESCO's Audit Office has observed that there is a need for greater clarity in their division of responsibilities with respect to country strategies, and it is possible that there are broader consequences. This division of responsibilities is an issue UNESCO should review going forward. The gaps also indicate a lack of top management attention to issues that, for a UN entity with a stronger legacy of field work, would be considered fundamental requirements.

Whilst the reorganisation of UNESCO's field network was a focus of this MOPAN assessment, because the reforms were finalised at the time of the assessment, beyond the above observations, we were unable to comment on how they were working on the ground. Given the issues noted above, the Executive Board may want to ask the evaluation office to commission a corporate formative evaluation of the reforms in 2026, two years after the changes were introduced. The last evaluation of the field office network was carried out in 2015.

The Secretariat and member states should reset behaviours to strengthen efficient delivery and accountability
The MOPAN assessment framework does not officially examine the relationship between the organisation and its governing bodies. However, it is necessary to repeat, almost verbatim, a concern raised by the 2019 MOPAN assessment about this relationship. The attitudes of UNESCO's governing bodies and member states, as well as their relationship with the Secretariat, are key determinants of UNESCO's future. The last MOPAN assessment noted that many member states have *in situ* permanent representatives who had grown accustomed to being able to lobby the Secretariat on issues that concern them. This can make it hard for the Secretariat to rationalise its work, programmes or country presence – as we saw with the very lengthy redesign of the field network – constraining its ability to respond efficiently and effectively to opportunities and changing circumstances.

It is also the case that member states, the Executive Board and the General Conference have developed an expectation that they will be consulted on a level of organisational or programmatic detail that would normally lie firmly within the purview of a Secretariat itself. The last MOPAN assessment noted that this tendency to micro-manage limits UNESCO's freedom of movement and leads to inefficiencies. This too persists. Member states' expectations on the geographic representation of new staff have reportedly led the Director-General to suspend the delegation of authority on the professional level recruitment process and personally make decisions on all professional level appointments. This degree of centralisation of recruitment decision-making is highly unusual within the UN and has led to delays in recruitment. For example, the need to extend staff searches to seek geographical representation reportedly adds around three months to recruitment processes.

This tendency also has a more serious consequence: when the Executive Board starts implicating itself in decision-making, it cannot hold the Secretariat responsible. Both member states and the Secretariat would benefit from resetting their behaviours and expectations.

UNESCO'S FUTURE TRAJECTORY

Extrapolating from UNESCO's performance during the MOPAN assessment period, UNESCO is well-positioned to address future challenges, demonstrating the capacity to innovate and providing essential services globally. This was especially evident during its response to COVID-19. It plays a key role in shaping discussions on education's future, science's role in sustainable development, the ethics of emerging technologies, the power of culture, and freedom of expression. Through building global coalitions, UNESCO has brought together diverse groups to develop consensus on complex challenges such as the ethics of artificial intelligence. By identifying emerging trends, it maintains a leading position in global thought. The current assessment highlights strong contributions globally and in member states' countries. The expertise and commitment of its staff underpin its normative and programmatic successes.

UNESCO's capacity to maintain this positive trajectory depends on its ability to address three interconnected priorities:

Completing corporate reform commitments

UNESCO has continued to develop its internal machinery in many areas – further strengthening some existing strong areas and developing new competence in others. There have been notable improvements in areas such as evaluation and internal audit. It has developed and implemented new policies to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse and tackle sexual harassment. More parts of the organisation are taking a comprehensive approach to RBM.

The evidence indicates that UNESCO would be in a stronger position if there had been stronger attention to these issues at the very top of the organisation throughout the assessment period. Gaps in decision-making and follow-through underpin some of the areas for improvement. To maintain effective management and delivery, UNESCO needs ongoing advancement in some areas where progress – despite commitments following the last MOPAN assessment – has lagged. Key among these are its human resource management and risk management systems. Robust financial controls and risk management systems are critical priorities for member states across the multilateral system. It is therefore paramount that UNESCO continues to strengthen its budgeting systems and risk management approaches, following up on the recommendations made in the IOS Performance Audit of the Integrated Budget Framework.

Implementing these changes will require resources and consistent top-level management focus on driving improvement initiatives within the Secretariat. By ensuring consistent attention to these internal processes, UNESCO can optimise its effectiveness and better deliver its global mandates.

Ensuring the field network is equipped to deliver

As this assessment has made clear, there is also a pressing need for UNESCO to address its field network and ensure it is fit-for-purpose. The organisation has long and deep experience delivering normative instruments and programmes from headquarters, its Category 1 Institutes and its former regional centres. It has less experience in managing a large field network, and this shows. UNESCO needs to develop clarity and strategic direction regarding its reformed field network – beyond identifying the location of its offices – and ensure the support systems work effectively. The health of the network is crucial for translating normative and programmatic support into policy support for member states. There is a need for improved understanding within headquarters about the requirements for the field network's effective operation. This assessment reveals significant gaps in preparation and inadequate planning. Essential elements like an accountability framework, including regional and country-level planning requirements, were not defined, leaving the network without the necessary support to function effectively. The reforms also went ahead without adequate human resource planning.

This is so important because UNESCO has something very valuable to offer member states. In comparison to most other UN entities, UNESCO has a unique contribution to make through its field office network: UNESCO offers and has experience in delivering upstream policy expertise across a broad spectrum of critical policy areas. These are issues

member states have a keen interest in and a need for. With its advantage in governmental partnerships, UNESCO is well-positioned to aid governments in developing and implementing their expertise in these areas. UNESCO can broaden and deepen its reach if the support infrastructure for the field office network is effective and if it has the flexible funds to meet member states' policy needs.

UNESCO is thus particularly well placed to support policy development at the country level, in precisely the way that member states have called for through successive Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Reviews. Maximising the potential of its field network enables UNESCO to maintain effective global outreach. But there also needs to be a strong interplay between the field and headquarters. A feedback loop from field offices and programme implementers to headquarters ensures policies, practices, and guidance remain relevant and grounded in reality. UNESCO generally develops policies and normative instruments in headquarters or Category 1 Institutes. The field network plays a vital role in helping member states to implement these standards, and providing feedback on lived experience to headquarters to enrich normative work. More broadly, at the country level, UNESCO must be responsive to national demands within the evolving UN Development System. And finally, headquarters must ensure that the reformed field network has the financial and human resources and overall backstopping it needs to serve the needs of its member states.

Creating an enabling environment for progress

Member states are critical in supporting an environment that enables UNESCO to deliver on its strategic commitments. This can be achieved in the following ways:

Firstly, for UNESCO to be able to deliver in the areas set out above – and for it to continue to develop the policy expertise on which member states depends – member states need to provide the flexible resources the Secretariat needs. With the regular budget likely to face ongoing pressure, voluntary contributions will continue to be important. But voluntary contributions mostly come with excessive earmarking. This restriction leads to high transaction costs and programmatic fragmentation, impacting efficiency. Without more flexible finances, UNESCO can only contribute to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals piecemeal – it risks being a "project factory" if its staff continue to have to chase small grants that align with a donors' needs rather than broader needs.

Secondly, member states must play a stronger role in supporting a programme of activities that is better aligned with UNESCO's resources. Member states should better support efforts for selectivity and prioritisation, to prevent resources from being spread too thinly and ensure that key functions and structures have sufficient funding.

Finally, member states should redefine their interactions with the Secretariat to allow UNESCO the operational space it needs. The Secretariat holds the responsibility for operational decisions, with governance bodies accountable for oversight. When members involve themselves in operational matters, it blurs accountability lines. Ensuring members adhere to their governance roles will enhance UNESCO's efficiency and accountability. Achieving this change will require transparency and enhanced co-operation between all parties to build trust and mutual understanding.

Box 4. UNESCO's strengths and areas for further improvement

Main strengths

- An innovative and agile organisation, positioned to respond effectively to current and future challenges. It adapted and led effectively during times of change to shape global discussions and responses to key issues, including during COVID-19.

- UNESCO mainstreams gender equality, environment and human rights effectively across the range of its work and is increasingly active in providing support in crises preparedness and response. It has enhanced its ability to drive innovative interdisciplinary work.

- UNESCO excels in helping governments, institutions, and populations to address global challenges by providing high-quality policy advice across its fields of expertise, influencing policies and building capacities in member states.

- Strong leadership in the promotion of education by setting global standards and promoting inclusive and equitable quality education.

- UNESCO's audit, evaluation and RBM functions and systems increasingly supporting performance monitoring and learning, though progress has been uneven.

Areas for further improvement

- Ensure that the field office network is effectively resourced and managed, equipped with the necessary policies, and that there is a clear and appropriate division of responsibilities between the Bureau of Strategic Planning and Priority Africa and External Relations.

- Modernisation of UNESCO's corporate systems should continue at pace, including improvement of the Enterprise Risk Management, strengthened human resource planning and implementation of UNESCORE ensuring it meets needs and underpins strong performance and results management.

- UNESCO must strengthen its capacity to track performance, efficiency and results, and its RBM approach needs to be applied more consistently across the organisation.

- UNESCO needs better quality financing – more flexible, predictable and less fragmented funding - to implement the mandate members states have given it.

- Member states and the Secretariat should reset behaviours to ensure that UNESCO can respond effectively and efficiently to opportunities and changing circumstances and strengthen accountability.

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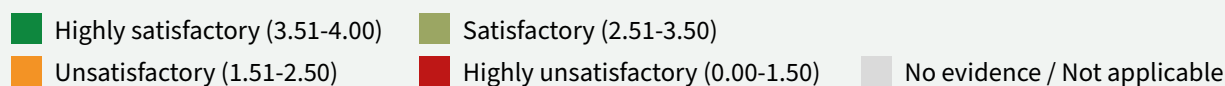United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2019. *UN Cooperation Framework Guidance*.
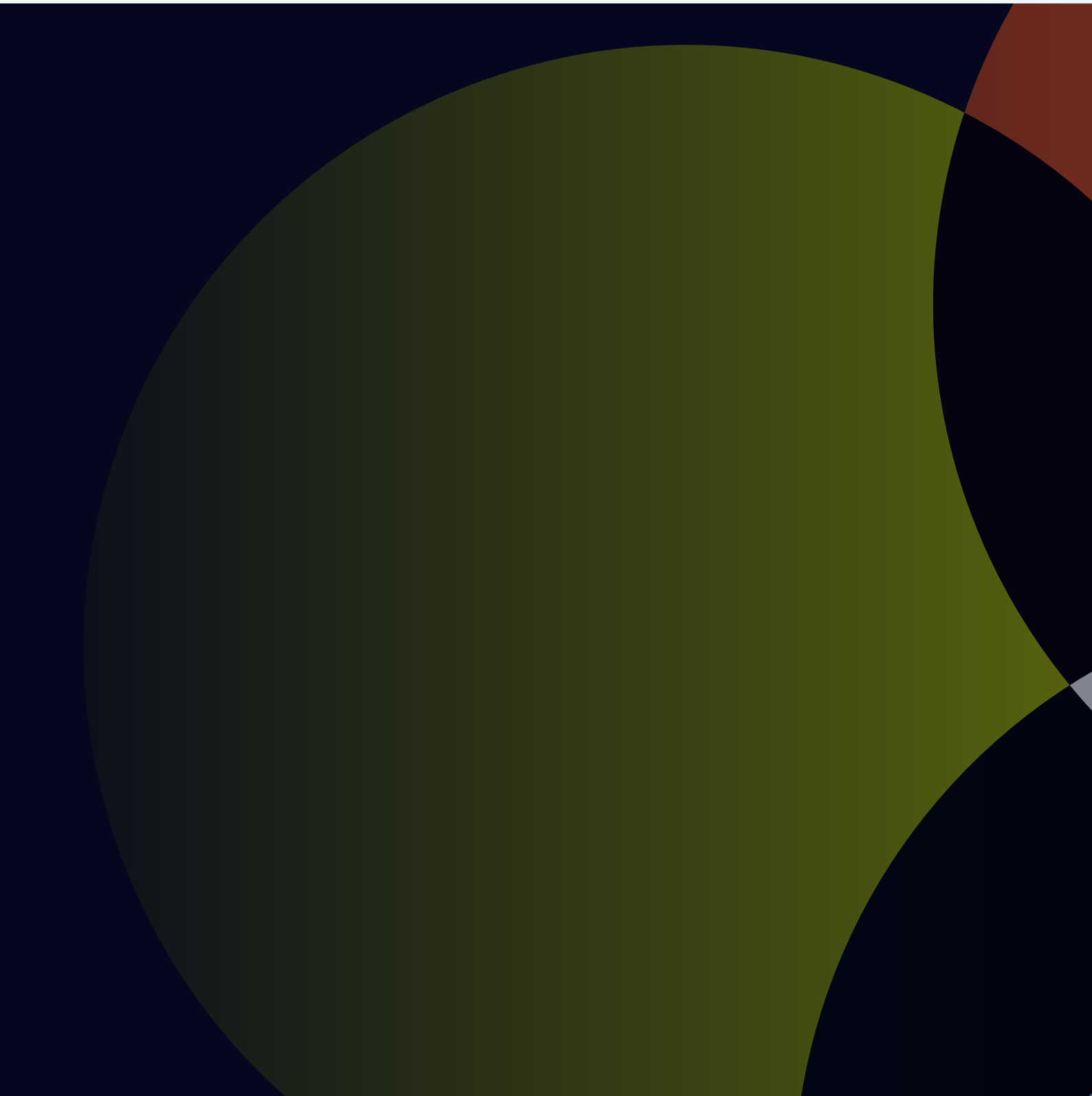
ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

This chapter provides a more detailed assessment of UNESCO's performance across the five performance areas – strategic management, operational management, relationship management, and performance management and results – and the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that relate to each area, accompanied by their score and rating.

FIGURE 5. **MOPAN 3.1 PERFORMANCE SCORING AND RATING SCALE**

|		
🟩 Highly satisfactory (3.51-4.00)	🟩 Satisfactory (2.51-3.50)	
🟧 Unsatisfactory (1.51-2.50)	🟥 Highly unsatisfactory (0.00-1.50)	⬜ No evidence / Not applicable

The assessment key findings draw on information from the three evidence sources (document reviews, interviews and a partner survey – see Chapter 4 for more information). Further analysis per micro-indicator and detailed scoring can be found in Annex A, while the full survey results are included in Annex C. For the full list and citation details of the documents referred to, please see Annex B.

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Clear strategic direction geared to key functions, intended results and the integration of relevant cross-cutting priorities.

FIGURE 6. **KEY FINDINGS ON UNESCO'S STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT**
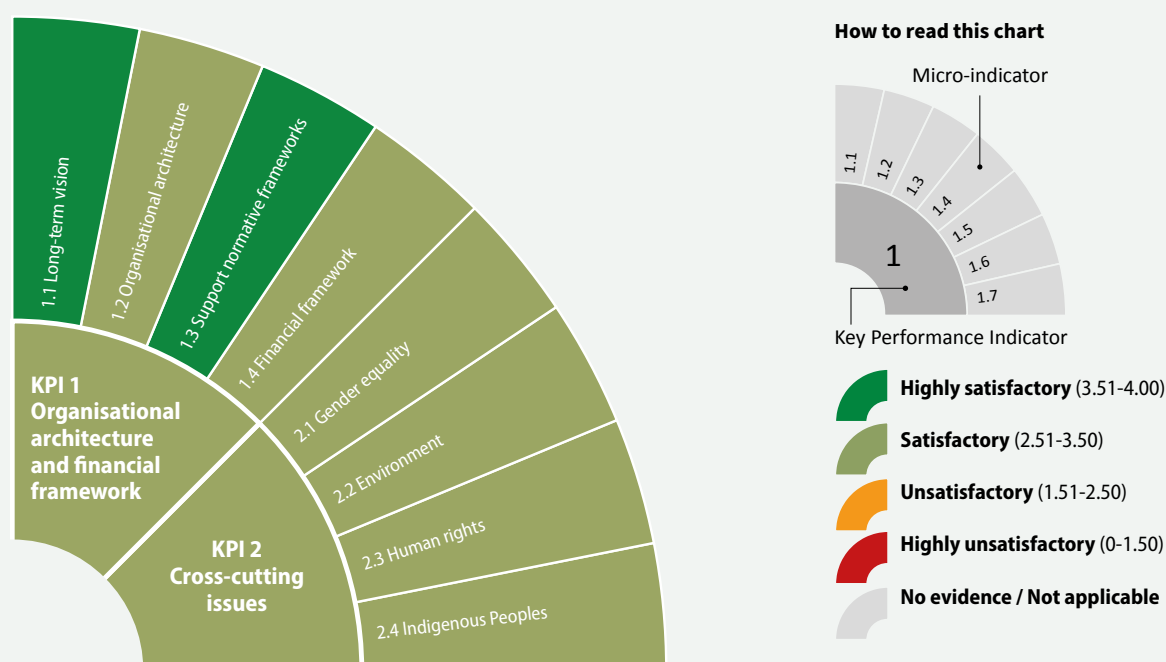
UNESCO has made its current Medium-Term Strategy more focused, and this is helping to drive more interdisciplinary work. The organisation has established four interlinked strategic objectives and five interdisciplinary programmes. UNESCO maintains its strength in cross-cutting initiatives, particularly in gender equality, climate and environmental leadership, and human rights. While it engages effectively in highlighting its current cross-cutting priority of crisis preparedness and response, it still needs to ensure a framework is in place for these activities. The Culture sector has established robust response modalities in crises contexts.

The reform of its field network has been slow, with delays in defining the shape of the new network. The current number of regional offices is not optimal, and there is an ongoing need to establish a framework that governs the relationships between headquarters and the field. The last MOPAN assessment indicated this reform was imminent, but it was only decided in September 2023 and implemented in January 2024. Of concern is the apparent lack of comprehensive planning on the operational aspects of the new system, which resulted in significant gaps, notably in the accountability framework, during the assessment. UNESCO has stated that it is committed to aligning with the UN Development System, and this requires careful monitoring at the country level to ensure it supports the agendas outlined in Cooperation Frameworks.

KPI 1: Organisational architecture and financial framework enable mandate implementation and achievement of expected results

Satisfactory	3.30

This KPI focuses on the extent to which UNESCO has articulated a coherent and strategic vision of how and for what purpose it has organised its activity and assets to deliver results.

Both the Medium-Term Strategies that span this assessment period outline clear, long-term visions. Programme and Budget documents operationalise this vision by setting out outputs. They set out how UNESCO aims to achieve results that are aligned with the organisation's comparative advantages. UNESCO's vision is based on a clear analysis and articulation of its comparative advantages and its fields of competence within the UN and among other development actors. UNESCO's strategic priorities and programmes build on the expertise it has developed in its sectors, the International Oceanographic Commission and its Category 1 Institutes, and in relation to its mandate to safeguard international Conventions signed under UNESCO's auspices. UNESCO has framed its mandate and comparative advantage within the Agenda 2030 framework and articulates clearly where it leads and where it contributes to the delivery of individual SDGs and their components.

Both Medium-Term Strategies define UNESCO's strategic objectives and intended results as "outcomes". The current Medium-Term Strategy does this particularly well. It further focuses on the organisation's work: reducing the number of strategic objectives from nine to four, with nine related outcomes. Equally important, the current Medium-Term Strategy seeks to drive stronger interdisciplinary approaches and collaboration across UNESCO: all the strategic objectives demand that UNESCO's sectors collaborate to achieve them. These four strategic objectives, alongside the nine outcomes, constitute the basis for two quadrennial Programme and Budget documents (referred to as C/5s) (2022-2025 and 2026-2029). Each of these is operationalised into two biennial Programme and Budget documents. The 2024-2025 Programme and Budget identifies a delivery and results framework underpinning each outcome. The strategic plan is reviewed regularly to ensure continued relevance and attention to risks every two years – specifically in the context of each biennial Programme and Budget document. The Secretariat has used review points to seek the approval of its governing bodies to operationalise its Medium-Term Strategy in ways that are responsive to new events and trends – including COVID-19 and the outbreak of conflict.

UNESCO's organisational architecture is complex, reflecting its breadth of responsibilities and mandates. In most respects, the architecture is congruent with the strategic plan and is managed so that it delivers well. Category 1 institutes are integral to UNESCO and are governed by UNESCO's rules and regulations, and their overall programmes and priorities are part of UNESCO's Programme and Budget. The relationship between UNESCO and its Category 1 Institutes effectively balances the need for functional autonomy and accountability to UNESCO. Institutes have the autonomy to deliver their strategic priorities how they see fit and, whilst they are also accountable to their

own governing bodies, they are also accountable to their parent Sectors for delivering results. Revising UNESCO's field network is a key part of this architecture. It is an area that is still developing and is explored below.

UNESCO's operating model supports implementation of the strategic plan to a large degree. UNESCO leads its global normative work at headquarters level and provides policy advice and capacity building from both headquarters and its field office network. At headquarters, its organisational architecture reflects its primary programme sectors. Sectors have introduced institutional changes to ensure they can better deliver priorities as these have evolved.

UNESCO's model enables sectors to work in close synergy when necessary, promoting a more integrated approach to addressing global challenges than previously. Since the last MOPAN assessment, **UNESCO has strengthened its approach to driving interdisciplinary working.** As indicated above, the 2022-2029 Medium-Term Strategy (41 C/4) embeds interdisciplinary/intersectoral working in UNESCO's structures and systems. With the current Strategy, UNESCO has introduced specific intersectoral programmes that do not "belong" to specific sectors and have independent allocated budgets. There are five currently. Reflecting this, UNESCO's results framework has moved from being aligned to the sectors to being aligned to the four interlinked and cross-cutting strategic objectives. Programme and Budget documents now list intersectoral programmes and outputs (e.g. the 2022-2025 Programme and Budget listed 39 sectoral and 5 intersectoral outputs).

UNESCO is also combining the capabilities of its sectors and Category 1 Institutes more effectively and working in a more integrated way. This is especially the case in the education sector, to which most Category 1 Institutes belong. Successive synthesis reviews of evaluations have noted that UNESCO has made genuine progress in promoting intersectoral and interdisciplinary co-operation. Challenges remain, mostly in relation to UNESCO's operational processes not facilitating cross-sectoral working in streamlined ways.

Both UNESCO's Medium-Term Strategies spanning the assessment period demonstrate strong and explicit alignment with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, and a commitment to wider normative frameworks and their results. UNESCO recognises the interdependence of the SDGs and considers that its multi-sectoral approach helps it make progress in an integrated way. For example, UNESCO notes that its work in promoting inclusive and equitable quality education directly contributes to SDG 4 but also supports goals related to gender equality (SDG 5), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), and peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16). UNESCO has increasingly sought to align its operations with the UN development system, working in partnership with other agencies under common UN frameworks.

UNESCO plays an important role in tracking and reporting normative results for the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, both in terms of its own results and on behalf of the global community. UNESCO collects data, conducts assessments, and produces reports to track progress towards the SDGs, including education, culture, natural sciences, social and human sciences, communication and information. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) is the UN's custodian agency for indicators used to monitor progress towards the SDGs on education (SDG 4) and key SDGs targets related to science, culture and communication, and information. UNESCO is also the UN custodian agency for SDG Indicator 16.10.2, reporting periodically on the adoption and implementation of Access to Information guarantees. UNESCO reports annually on all results in its Execution of the Programme, C/5 Implementation Report (previously named the Programme Implementation Report). Progress is aggregated at the level of outputs delivered/ achieved over the past year.

UNESCO's financial and budgetary planning processes seek to ensure that all priority areas have adequate funding. All UNESCO's Programme and Budget have been based on an integrated budget framework since the 2018-2019 biennium. UNESCO's integrated budget framework includes assessed contributions, committed voluntary contributions, and voluntary contributions to be mobilised and spent within the biennium.

For most of the current MOPAN assessment period, UNESCO has operated under financial stress. The last MOPAN assessment noted that UNESCO's financial situation was fragile, while it managed the sudden loss of 22% of assessed contributions in 2011. UNESCO's budget has grown since the last MOPAN assessment: the approved budget grew from USD 1 225 million for 2018-2019 to USD 1 448 million for 2022-2023, representing an 18.2% increase (USD 185 million). In 2022-2023, the Organisation mobilised USD 816.4 million in voluntary contributions, an increase of 8% compared to the previous biennium (2020-2021: USD 756.5 million). Notwithstanding this increase, UNESCO continued to operate under financial pressure for most of the current assessment period. The United States resumed assessed contributions in 2023 with USD 28.2 million, and a commitment to provide around USD 10 million in voluntary contributions has improved the financial situation.

UNESCO seeks to strengthen its financial situation by strengthening its resource mobilisation approach. It has refreshed its approach to resource mobilisation and is taking measures to attract more unearmarked and softly earmarked voluntary contributions and to encourage donors to enter long-term agreements. Currently, nearly all voluntary contributions are earmarked, with a large proportion tightly earmarked under single donor funds-in-trust. Between 30% and 50% of voluntary contributions were 'softly earmarked' to specific UNESCO pooled funds in the assessment period. Due to the multifaceted nature of UNESCO's mandate to date, donors have offered flexible funds to particular themes or sectors only (and mainly to the education sector). Only two donors provide flexible funding at the Programme Sector level. A related problem is the size of the contributions it receives and manages. In 2022-2023, half of fund in trust projects were below USD 250,000, leading to high transaction costs and fragmentation. These contribute less than 10% of the total resources mobilised.

UNESCO has reorganised its field network, but the change was overdue, and the footprint chosen generates new challenges. The field network is a key part of UNESCO's operating model and is a theme of this MOPAN assessment. It is necessary to contextualise its status here. Historically, UNESCO had thematic offices in regional hubs (for example, focusing on science or education), with some national offices. The reform process began by changing the field network in Africa into a two-tier system with multi-sectoral regional and national offices. The intention was to change the global system in line with Africa's. However, this was paused, largely in response to the budget crisis of 2011. Until the end of 2023, UNESCO's field network comprised some reshaped country and regional offices in Africa, and unchanged structures elsewhere. The heterogeneous network had mixed reporting lines and two parallel structures in operation

(multisectoral regional and national offices in Africa, and cluster and national offices and thematic regional bureaux in the rest of the world). Funding shortages also meant that African offices did not receive their anticipated staffing profiles, so the reform was not "complete" in this sense either.

In Spring 2018, the Director-General committed to re-examining UNESCO's field presence, noting that field office reform "remains unfinished in Africa and has not been pursued in the rest of the world as planned". A key driver for the change was UNESCO's ambition to be better aligned with the UN Development System at the regional and national level. UNESCO's thematic rather than multisectoral regional offices were seen as an impediment to engaging effectively with the UN Development system.

The Secretariat proposed and discussed various formulations for reshaping its field presence with member states between 2018 and 2024. After the Executive Board approved a global two-tier system, comprising regional and national offices, in September 2022, the Director General issued an "Azure Note," formally announcing the reorganisation of the field network in September 2023. The changes took effect on 1 January 2024 – too early for any changes to be reflected in this assessment. The fact that it took UNESCO five years to define and finalise the shape of the network is noteworthy. Interviews for this assessment indicated that the shape of the network may be further revised in one region to reflect member state concerns.

The previous MOPAN assessment noted that any changes to the field network have a political dimension that makes it more difficult to deliver. It said that previous attempts to reduce UNESCO's country presence met strong lobbying from member states. Interviews indicate that the process was again delayed by strong lobbying from member states. This is a clear and significant example of how member states' engagement in what an operational decision for the Secretariat should be reduces the ability of the Secretariat to deliver efficiently.

The reform has led to the creation of a very large number of regional offices: 20 in total. Other, much better-resourced UN agencies tend to have between five and seven regional offices. UNESCO aims to ensure that it staffs each Regional Office with representatives of each sector. Given its budget constraints, it is unlikely to be able to do this for 20 offices in the short term. It is not clear why UNESCO did not decide to focus down the number of Regional Offices in the same way as other UN entities. It is also the case that some of UNESCO's Regional Offices are in locations not used as regional headquarters by other UN agencies, undermining the extent to which UNESCO will align with other UN development entities' footprints.

At the time of the MOPAN assessment, UNESCO had yet to define its revised accountability framework for the field office network. This was identified as a gap in the 2018 MOPAN assessment: that assessment noted a need for greater clarity on the assignment of responsibility and accountability for the field network in Africa. It stated that UNESCO was in the process of reviewing and strengthening the relationship. Since then, UNESCO's accountability bodies have reiterated the need for a clear, revised policy on delegating authority to regional and national offices. The Audit Office, in a note collating recurring findings from audits of field offices, recommended that the accountability framework, specifying a clear delegation of authority, should be finalised. In its report on 2023, the Oversight Advisory Committee stated that "it is of utmost importance to develop a coherent strategy with a clear accountability framework, including financial and operational implications in both the Headquarters and the field". The last policy relating to the field network dates to 2014, and the policy listed in UNESCO's Administrative Manual (viewed in January 2024) still contains the preceding 2011 policy. Assessment interviews in 2024 indicate that UNESCO has prepared a draft accountability framework for the field office network, but was not available for review.

There is a further gap in how UNESCO treats the field network: there is a lack of clarity on whether, with the new field network, country offices are required to set out country strategies, and what they should comprise. This important gap is discussed below in relation to KPI 5, Operational Planning.

Following the revision of the field office network, the new, clearer reporting and communication hierarchy (vertically from headquarters to Regional Offices to national offices) should make it easier to maintain alignment between field offices and headquarters, ensuring coherence in policy and strategy implementation. Before the reform, and for the duration of the MOPAN assessment period, all heads of field offices reported directly to UNESCO HQs (PAX).

KPI 2: Structures and mechanisms support the implementation of global frameworks for cross-cutting issues at all levels, in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda principles

Satisfactory	3.04

This KPI looks at the articulation and positioning within UNESCO's structures and mechanisms of the cross-cutting priorities to which the organisation is committed, in pursuit of its strategic objectives.

UNESCO has the necessary structures and mechanisms to support the implementation of global frameworks for cross-cutting issues, particularly about gender, human rights, and environment/climate change. UNESCO mainstreams gender equality, which is one of UNESCO's global priorities, across the organisation's work. It has integrated the requirement to address gender equality in its programming tools and has a method to track implementation. The Division for Gender Equality, part of the Cabinet of the Director-General, provides strategic policy advice and collaborates with Programme Sectors and the IOC to implement UNESCO's Global Priority Gender Equality Framework. It supports sectors by planning, implementing and monitoring gender initiatives. Corporate evaluations of the UNESCO Global Priority Gender Equality Framework showed strong progress in applying gender policies and strategies. Some sectors, such as education, have specific strategies to promote gender in and through their sectors.

UNESCO leads global debates and implementation in several specialised environmental sustainability and climate change fields and participates in key SDG areas. To its credit, UNESCO takes an increasingly interdisciplinary approach to addressing these challenges. UNESCO has a dedicated policy on environmental sustainability and climate change, with strong evidence of application. UNESCO is a world leader in some areas of climate change and the environment.

As the following examples demonstrate, UNESCO plays a prominent role in various aspects of climate change and environmental conservation, leveraging its expertise in education, science, culture, and communication. The Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme designates biosphere reserves worldwide to promote sustainable development through local community participation and science. These biosphere reserves function as living laboratories for integrated land, water, and biodiversity management. UNESCO also leads the Greening Education Partnership and the Education for Sustainable Development ESD2030 framework. Through the World Heritage Convention, UNESCO identifies and protects cultural and natural heritage sites crucial for biodiversity conservation and natural ecosystem protection, playing a significant role in climate change mitigation and adaptation. UNESCO also fosters international scientific co-operation on climate change through initiatives like the International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme, enhancing understanding of Earth's processes and promoting sustainable resource management, while also supporting member states to develop sound science, technology and innovation policy ecosystems.

Using a multidisciplinary approach, UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) initiative develops educational frameworks that integrate climate change and sustainability into education initiatives and curricula, encouraging countries to adopt sustainability education. UNESCO also helps member states to shape climate change policies through capacity-building, technical assistance, and knowledge exchange. With the Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme (IHP), UNESCO promotes sustainable water resource management and addresses climate change impacts on freshwater resources.

Additionally, UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) leads global ocean science research and monitoring, which is essential for understanding climate change impacts on marine ecosystems and promoting sustainable ocean management practices. UNESCO has also played a significant role in shaping and supporting elements of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

The evaluation of UNESCO's Strategy for Action on Climate Change (2018-2021) highlights the inclusion of Africa, women and gender equality, youth, Indigenous Peoples and knowledge, Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and marginalised groups in UNESCO's climate action. The evaluation noted that the extent to which UNESCO's climate change programming has integrated all these cross-cutting themes varies and that there are areas for further improvement.

Internally, UNESCO has prioritised environmental sustainability in its administration, operations, and activities. In 2021, UNESCO adopted its first Organisation-wide Environmental Sustainability and Management Policy, which aims to reduce the environmental impact of its facilities and operations worldwide. Training on implementing its principles is mandatory for all staff. The Internal Oversight Service (IOS) audit of UNESCO's implementation of the policy, noted in 2021 that progress had been made but also noted areas for improvement, especially in environmental and air travel data quality and facilities management. These recommendations informed the development of the 2024 UNESCO Environmental Sustainability Report.

UNESCO has a constitutional mandate to contribute to promoting all human rights. A substantial proportion of its programming supports human rights in different sectors, and there is robust evidence that UNESCO mainstreams human rights across its work. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights is one of UNESCO's foundational principles and, as its Human Rights Strategy makes clear, it has a fundamental responsibility to advance human rights. Within this commitment, UNESCO promotes specific rights, including the right to education, participation in cultural life, freedom of expression, information and privacy, benefits of scientific progress and its applications, and the right to water and sanitation. UNESCO has committed to advancing universal respect for justice, the rule of law, human rights, and fundamental freedoms across all its areas of expertise. UNESCO commits to prioritising marginalised, disadvantaged and excluded groups in line with the 2030 Agenda's central promise "Leave No One Behind". From 2022, UNESCO led a process to revise the 1974 Recommendation on Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, by conducting a consultative process to inform the revision of the Recommendation, ensuring it aligns more effectively with the challenges of the twenty-first century.

The Executive Board's Committee on Conventions and Recommendations has a direct and little-known mandate to protect the human rights of individuals. The Committee is mandated to receive and review complaints (called "communications") concerning alleged human rights violations. It mediates directly with member states concerned by the communications, seeking resolution. UNESCO's International Standards and Legal Affairs Unit functions as the Committee's secretariat. Between 1978 and 2023, the Committee considered 618 cases. So far, it has reported positive results against 414 cases, with more than half concerning alleged victims who were released before the completion of a prison sentence.

UNESCO is increasingly active in conflict and disaster response and preparedness, and it has made crisis preparedness and response its sole cross-cutting priority in its current Medium-Term Strategy (2022-2029). It is learning from its engagement in various contexts and refreshing its institutional framework to respond swiftly and learn from prior experience. UNESCO first published a crisis preparedness and response institutional framework in 2018. It sets out UNESCO's role in crises, in relation to each sector, and disaster risk reduction and preparedness. It gives examples of how UNESCO responds to different challenges but does not set out a prescriptive approach.

UNESCO is looking to formalise the standard operating procedures it has developed through various crisis responses, to aid co-ordination and the speed of response.

UNESCO also has a strategy for strengthening UNESCO's actions to safeguard and promote culture and cultural pluralism during armed conflict, along with supplementary guidance for emergencies arising from both natural and human-induced disasters. During the assessment period, UNESCO responded to several crises and further developed its approach through its responses. Its programmes include those related to protecting culture and education in emergencies. This includes in Mosul (Revive the spirit of Mosul flagship initiative), and multi-sectoral responses in Beirut, Ukraine, and Afghanistan. UNESCO is also engaged in developing a multisectoral response for Gaza when conditions permit. UNESCO also has regional strategies for promoting education in emergencies, and during the assessment period, it prepared a global Education in Emergencies strategic framework.

At the time of the assessment, UNESCO only had one temporary staff member in the Priority Africa and External Relations Sector, who was responsible for following UNESCO's overall approach to crisis preparedness and response (i.e., outside different sectors). Staff in the Cabinet Office provided strategic guidance, but UNESCO is still establishing its centralised capacity to co-ordinate its responses. Its 2024-2025 budget contains funding commitment for a new position to co-ordinate UNESCO's crisis preparedness and response (at P-3 level).

OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT

Assets and capacities organised behind strategic direction and intended results to ensure relevance, agility and accountability

FIGURE 7. **KEY FINDINGS ON UNESCO'S OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT**
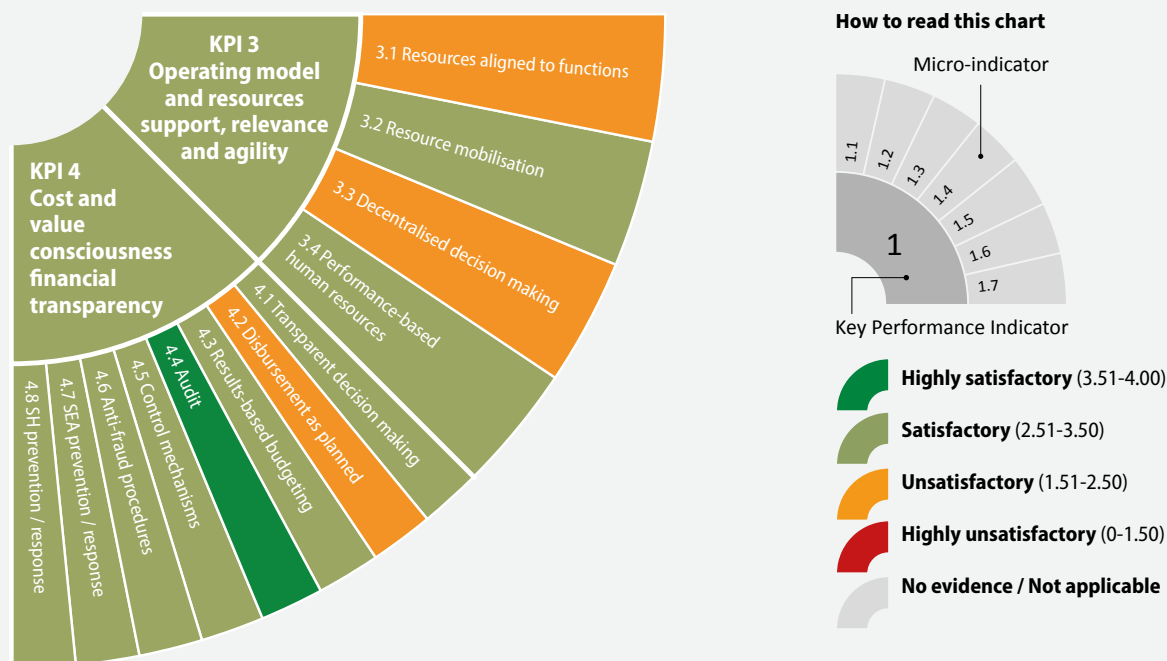
In terms of operational management, UNESCO has robust planning and budget management systems. However, a one-off budget over-commitment in 2024, attributed to weak monitoring and poor internal communication, highlights the need for improved risk management. UNESCO's internal audit function, already assessed as

strong in the 2019 MOPAN assessment, has strengthened, with performance audits generating valuable lessons, particularly on the field network. The organisation also demonstrates a strong institutional commitment to the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, with policies and procedures in place equivalent to those of other UN entities. Workforce planning has been perceived as weak, and reports indicate that the field reform occurred with minimal planning for workforce needs. The concentration of appointment decisions by the Director-General – with a view to ensuring geographical representation – is leading to recruitment delays. This concentration of appointment decisions was said to be in response to member states expectations in relation to geographical representation – which are already at high levels in UNESCO.

KPI 3: Operating model and human and financial resources support relevance and agility

Satisfactory	2.62

This KPI focuses on how key operational functions (e.g. human resources, resource generation and programming) are continuously geared to support strategic direction and deliver results.

UNESCO has continued to develop its operating model since 2019, and it deploys human and financial resources in ways that help it implement its mandate. **There have been improvements in some areas, but not at a pace anticipated after the last MOPAN assessment.** UNESCO's progress in implementing the commitments outlined in its management response to the last MOPAN assessment has been notably slow, particularly in field network reform, human resources management, and the deployment of core digital platforms.

Overall, UNESCO's organisational structures and staffing largely ensure that human and financial resources are well aligned and adjusted to its key functions. However, its ability to ensure full alignment has been limited by resource constraints – in particular, the field office network has remained under-resourced. UNESCO sought to address this by targeting a significant proportion of newly received USA funding to the field network.

A 2023 IOS audit of workforce planning found that UNESCO needs to make stronger progress in workforce planning if it is to implement its Medium-Term Strategy commitments and the most recent Programme and Budget. Weaknesses were particularly acute with respect to the field office network. The audit found little evidence of strategic workforce planning in relation to the network, noting that multiple issues undermined a genuinely strategic approach. Staffing proposals for the field network show that, despite increased budget availability under the approved programme and budget for 2024-2025 (42 C/5), after the return of USA funding, staffing still falls short of requirements. The assessment survey indicates that UNESCO's stakeholders broadly consider that it does not have adequate staffing in its field offices. IOS also noted that in addition to budgetary constraints, the lack of a clear strategy for field presence by programme sectors continues to hamper adequate staffing at field levels.

UNESCO's ability to manage staff mobility – seeking, for example, to ensure there is a flow of staff expertise between field and HQ – has also been mixed. Mobility is complex in UNESCO due to the specialist knowledge required in many fields of its mandate. At the time of the assessment, UNESCO was implementing the third cycle of managed mobility and should benefit from the lessons of a recent evaluation of its mobility policy.

A decision in November 2023 to require the Director General's approval for all P-level appointments is reportedly leading to delays in the appointment of staff and in filling vacancies. As part of UNESCO's strategic transformation, the Director-General decided in March 2019 to streamline the recruitment procedure and delegate the authority for fixed-term appointments from P1 to P4 posts to the ADGs. UNESCO management reported that this change negatively

impacted the level and objectives of geographical and gender representation of staff requested by Member States. Consequently, in November 2023, the Director-General decided to suspend the delegation of authority, such that all appointments above P1 must now be made by the Director-General, via a submission to Cabinet, to ensure UNESCO met member states' expectations for a very high degree of staff geographic representation. Under the new approach, UNESCO is achieving relatively high levels of geographic representation – they currently stand at 81%, close to the 85% target set by the UNESCO General Conference.

This degree of centralisation of recruitment decision-making is highly unusual within the UN and has led to delays in recruitment. For example, the need to extend staff searches to seek geographical representation reportedly adds around three months to recruitment processes.

Within its financial constraints, UNESCO's resource allocation across functions has shown a strong degree of alignment with priorities and goals since 2018. UNESCO has prioritised key areas of intervention that are closely aligned with its Organisational priorities. For example, investments in education programmes, particularly those focusing on access to quality education for all, have been consistently high, reflecting UNESCO's commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 4 on quality education. However, reflecting its difficult budgetary situation over the assessment period, there has been under-investment in UNESCO's IT and reporting tools. During this assessment period, the implementation of UNESCO's new IT systems has been delayed. UNESCO's original "Redesign Core Systems Initiative" was paused, and work on redesigning core systems was reinitiated as the UNESCORE programme in 2021. UNESCO is also exposed to risks from ongoing underinvestment in the maintenance of its headquarters buildings. There has been recent investment, but it is reportedly not yet adequate.

UNESCO has taken significant steps to engage with the revised UN Development System and in supporting the Resident Coordinator systems. UNESCO reports that up to December 2023, field offices contributed to 113 UN Development System Cooperation Frameworks (UNDSCFs), including in countries where UNESCO is a non-resident agency. UNESCO is a member of 125 United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs), with a physical presence in 72 countries and is non-resident in over 50. In terms of cost-sharing arrangements, UNESCO was the seventh largest UN contributor to the Resident Coordinator system in 2020-2021 (contributing USD 4.5 million), and the ninth largest contributor in 2022-2023. It is hard to establish the extent to which UNESCO country programmes are derived from Cooperation Frameworks, and to what degree UNESCO has adjusted its staffing or operations in response to commitments towards joint delivery of the Cooperation Framework (i.e. the extent to which it has implemented 'configuration' principles agreed at country level. To date, there has been one Resident Coordinator who was previously UNESCO staff.

The lack of clarity within UNESCO on the need for country programming documents means it is also not clear what UNESCO's policy towards 'derivation' is. UNESCO is applying UN mutual recognition principles and is building incentives into the performance objectives of heads of offices to engage fully with the UN Development System. IOS audits indicate UNESCO can do more to benefit from engaging with UN platforms in its field offices.

UNESCO's two-year resource mobilisation strategies have been well aligned with the two relevant strategic plans. UNESCO has continued to experience the same resource mobilisation challenges noted in the last MOPAN report: its mandate remains broadly underfunded from regular contributions, and it is highly dependent on voluntary contributions. However, as mentioned above, it has made progress in increasing the volume of voluntary contributions and in reducing the budget shortfall created in 2011 when assessed contributions dropped by more than a fifth. It doubled voluntary contributions in 2018-2019 and sustained this level of voluntary funding, reaching USD 816.4 million, in the 2022-2023 biennium, an 8% increase over the previous biennium. Equally important, UNESCO is seeking to improve alignment, predictability, and flexibility and to broaden the donor base. It is purposefully trying to improve the "quality" of funding and to use partnerships more effectively to leverage other sources of resources and obtain longer-term investments. UNESCO is seeking to strengthen its engagement with and benefit from UN pooled

funding opportunities. It is taking steps to ensure staff know about and have the skills to access pooled funds and is seeking to ensure it is part of governance arrangements on relevant UN multi-partner trust funds.

Despite positive trends, there is a critical need for "higher quality" funding. Voluntary contributions to UNESCO are characterised by a high level of earmarking. Unlike most other UN agencies, UNESCO does not receive any fully unearmarked voluntary contributions. At the programme sector level, flexible funding is limited to only two donors (Norway and Sweden) to the Education Sector. The Education Sector has been particularly effective in raising levels of "higher quality" voluntary contributions during the assessment period. While instruments exist to attract flexible funding, they have not always been prioritised by donors and can be optimised to better respond to donor demands for reporting. UNESCO needs flexible resources if it is to have the capacity to innovate or respond to crises and opportunities in an agile way.

In addition, the small average size of agreements results in high transaction and administrative costs and contributes to programmatic fragmentation. In 2022-2023, half of fund in trust projects were below USD 250 000, yet they only represent less than 10% of the total resources mobilised.

A significant amount of staff time is spent mobilising, managing and reporting on small contributions with a low overall return. UNESCO would be more efficient and effective if donors gave "higher quality", i.e. more flexible, longer-term, and less atomised, funding.

UNESCO has continued to strengthen its human resources and performance assessment systems since the last MOPAN assessment. In that assessment, they were seen as relatively weak: this was partly a consequence of budget constraints that had reduced the size of the office and its loss of 96% of its training budget. There are links between individual performance frameworks and UNESCO's results framework. At the time of the last MOPAN assessment, staff performance assessments were carried out every two years. They are now mandatory once a year, with a six-month review. UNESCO has online systems that facilitate this review process. UNESCO is using 360-degree feedback with staff with managerial responsibilities as a way of promoting professional development (it is not used to inform promotions). Whether this is rolled out further depends on budget availability.

Staff responses to the 2021 Staff Survey, the latest available for the MOPAN assessment, indicate that the performance assessment system is systematically implemented. Across all questions relating to performance management in the 2021 Global Staff Survey, views across the Organisation were satisfactory - this had improved by 5% on the 2018 Global Staff Survey. It is worth noting that many other UN entities conduct annual staff surveys rather than once every three years, the periodicity during the assessment period. UNESCO would benefit from gathering annual feedback from its workforce. There is further reason that UNESCO should consider conducting all-staff surveys annually. In a MOPAN assessment interview, representatives of UNESCO's two staff associations stated that a significant number of their members had raised concerns about workplace culture. An annual staff survey would allow UNESCO to identify whether there are widespread issues related to workplace culture, and help it identify the need to take action.

KPI 4: Organisational systems are cost- and value-conscious and enable transparency and accountability

Satisfactory	2.94

This KPI examines how UNESCO uses its external and internal control mechanisms to meet the standards it sets on financial management and transparency.

UNESCO has a clear and explicit decision-making system for the allocation of resources throughout the organisation. To operationalise its Medium-Term Strategy, UNESCO develops a "Programme and Budget" for the biennium, the "C/5". These strategic planning documents outline the strategic objectives (eight years), outcomes, and outputs for two four-year periods, as well as the resource allocation, budget, and programmatic target for a two-year period. The Programme and Budget for the Biennium (C/5) includes information on resource allocation budget, quadrennial performance indicators with associated baselines and biennial programmatic targets. It sets out how total resources available, including voluntary contributions to mobilise and spend, will be allocated to achieve outcomes and outputs. The document is publicly available and is approved by the General Conference, serving as a guiding document for UNESCO's work during the biennium. Resources are allocated in line with the approved Programme and Budget to facilitate the implementation of programmes and projects.

UNESCO systems and procedures ensure that its disbursements align with priorities; however, an overcommitment on the regular budget for the 2022-2023 financial period led the IOS to conclude that management of the Approved Programme and Budget for 2022-2025 (41 C/5) was not effective. At the programme level, funds align with time-bound work plans. Spending delays trigger alerts and management reviews. Financial information shows planned disbursements are tracked and reported in the annual implementation report (UNESCO's EX/4 documents), assessing progress and budget execution rates. Monthly management reports highlight variances in fund disbursements across sectors, with significant discrepancies reviewed by senior management. UNESCO tends to use voluntary contributions for pilot projects and special initiatives, as well as supporting in-country activities. Following an overcommitment on the regular budget of USD 5.6 million in the financial period 41 C/5 (2022-2023), IOS conducted a performance audit of UNESCO's Integrated Budget Framework (published August 2024). It concluded that the management of the 41 C/5 Regular Budget was not effective, resulting in an overcommitment of funds. The audit identified several factors that contributed to this and made associated recommendations.

UNESCO's 2024-2025 Programme and Budget aligns financial resources with strategic objectives, reflecting UNESCO's results-based budgeting system. This alignment is evidenced in UNESCO's Programme and Budget documents between 2018-2019 and 2024-2025. The 2024-2025 Programme and Budget provides an integrated budget, detailing costs for achieving each of UNESCO's eleven outcomes and allocating financial resources to each sector. Budget tables further break down allocations to outputs and outcomes, showing these across UNESCO's divisions.

Box 5. Overcommitment of funds in the 41/C5 Regular Budget

2023 was a period of inflationary pressures in staff costs and operating expenditures. The decisions of the International Civil Service Commission were applied to salaries such that actual salary costs exceeded the budget. Funding for non-staff costs were reduced, and alternate funding sources were also required to be identified to accommodate all commitments initially recorded against the Regular Budget at the end of the year.

An overcommitment of funds on the Regular budget of USD 5.6 million for the period 2022-2023 (out of a total approved budget framework of USD 1 448 million) and brought to the attention of the Executive Board at its 219th session in March 2024. The Board exceptionally approved measures to address the issue and commissioned an IOS performance audit.

The IOS report highlighted weaknesses in the budget management of the 41 C/5 Regular Budget which resulted in an overcommitment of funds. The report also noted that positive steps had since been taken to prevent a similar overcommitment in the current financial period (42 C/5) and identified further opportunities for improvement in budget management systems.

Both the Audited Consolidated Financial Statements and the IOS Performance Audit were published significantly after the document cut-off date for the MOPAN assessment, and they have therefore not been reflected in detail in MOPAN's report or detailed technical analysis. However, it is noted that several of the findings of the Performance Audit correlate with conclusions of the MOPAN assessment, in particular the need to further strengthen enterprise risk management systems.

Source: The audited consolidated financial statements 2024; Performance audit of UNESCO's Integrated Budget Framework, IOS July 2024

The previous MOPAN assessment noted that UNESCO had improved its results-based budgeting between 2013 and 2018. This trend has continued, and there have been incremental enhancements since the last MOPAN assessment. Positively, recent Programme and Budget documents also focus on the allocation of resources to outputs rather than just sectors. UNESCO's new core digital platform, UNESCORE, aims to better integrate project/programme management into UNESCO's results-based budgeting and management systems. However, implementation of the previous Redesign Core System project was behind schedule during a significant part of the assessment period; implementation was paused until 2021, after which it restarted as the UNESCORE programme. UNESCO's management response to the last MOPAN assessment in 2019 stated that the system was being introduced and that changes were underway.

External audits, conducted according to the International Standards on Auditing (ISA), confirm that UNESCO meets compliance requirements. UNESCO received an unmodified opinion on the 2022 financial statements. The terms of reference issued by the Executive Board for the external auditors of the assessment period required them to conduct only financial audits rather than performance audits. Positively, the terms of reference for the External Auditors who will serve between 2024 and 2029 will be for performance audits. The performance audits conducted during the last MOPAN assessment period provided strong independent commentary on the organisation's performance; this was not available for this assessment. Management responses to external audit recommendations are systematically compiled in an annual report, with clear actions outlined to address them, ensuring accountability and follow-through with updates provided to member states.

UNESCO's internal audit function was judged as strong in the previous MOPAN assessment, and it has continued to improve the quality of its audit products and has become more independent. The internal audit function, part of the Internal Oversight Service (IOS), has been validated as meeting international standards for independence and effectiveness. The already high degree of independence of IOS's audit function has been strengthened following a

revision made to the Internal Audit Charter in 2021, which reflects recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit. The Charter now ensures that IOS has "unrestricted access to the Executive Board", reinforcing its independence. The audit function is also better funded than during the last MOPAN assessment period. This has strengthened both its independence and effectiveness. The audit section has conducted several performance audits, some jointly with the Evaluation Office. Following an Executive Board request, the audit function aims to audit all field offices within a five-year cycle. The Audit Office's annual summaries of audit reports are published online. IOS has identified recurring observations that remain unaddressed and shared these in accessible synthesis documents that have underpinned many of the observations in this assessment.

UNESCO has well-defined policies that determine how action should be taken in relation to issues raised through internal control mechanisms. The organisation provides clear guidance, delineating management and individual responsibilities for addressing issues, including the secure reporting of violations and tracking the implementation of audit recommendations. However, internal audits have found that some field offices need increased administrative capacity to strengthen their internal controls.

UNESCO has robust policies and guidelines for addressing fraud, corruption, and financial irregularities, as detailed in the Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption (AFAC) policy, which was strengthened in November 2021. This policy incorporates guidance from the UN High-Level Committee on Management and the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU). It positions fraud risk within UNESCO's enterprise risk management framework and defines clear roles and responsibilities for prevention, detection, and response. Managers and staff are informed of their duties and are protected against retaliation for reporting issues. Training on these policies is mandatory for administrative and approving officers. UNESCO is developing online training to increase awareness of this policy further.

The IOS tracks and reports on audit recommendations biannually, presenting findings to the Oversight Advisory Committee and senior management. Recommendations are widely accessible, including those from the UN Joint Inspection Unit. In 2023, IOS created a consolidated register to help streamline the follow-up of audit recommendations and enhance monitoring and reporting capabilities. Action plans against audit recommendations are time-bound and regularly reviewed by senior management and reported to member states. Documentation is publicly available. External audits noted that work is ongoing in relation to twelve financial audit recommendations as of June 2023 and emphasised the need for timely implementation. Secure mechanisms for reporting suspicious activities—including online, phone, and email channels – ensure confidentiality and support "whistle-blower" protection. Annual public reports from UNESCO detail the number of allegations, case resolutions, and disciplinary actions.

UNESCO has made significant progress in its policies for preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), demonstrating marked progress since the last MOPAN assessment, when this issue was only reviewed in brief. The Organisation has developed and put in place a dedicated Policy on the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) that applies to all UNESCO personnel, including staff members, contractors, interns, volunteers, and occasional workers. This policy aligns with established practices and standards across the United Nations system and is supported by an action plan that defines actions, timelines, responsibilities, and indicators. Mechanisms are in place to regularly monitor the implementation status of the SEA policy at both headquarters and field levels. One gap UNESCO should address is ensuring that intervention design includes formal consideration of the risk of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in relation to the intervention.

A working group, comprising the Ethics Office, Human Resource Management, and the Investigations Unit of IOS, has been established to enhance and monitor UNESCO's overall response to sexual misconduct. Structures have been set up to enforce the SEA policy based on shared responsibilities. At headquarters, the Ethics Office serves as the focal point for PSEA implementation, providing global training and outreach initiatives for all UNESCO personnel.

Additionally, PSEA Focal Points have been designated in all field offices to represent UNESCO in inter-agency PSEA networks and meetings. Regular training and awareness-raising sessions on SEA policies are conducted by the Ethics Office, in line with its mandate as the global PSEA focal point.

UNESCO maintains clear standards and due diligence processes to ensure that implementing partners also prevent and respond to SEA. The Organisation supports established UN-wide mechanisms to ensure comprehensive and appropriate responses to allegations and cases of SEA. Mechanisms are in place for reporting allegations and for conducting timely investigations and disciplinary actions in cases of proven SEA. UNESCO takes a victim-centred approach and provides a multisectoral support mechanism that includes the right to be accompanied by a support person during key stages of informal or formal proceedings, psycho-social and medical support, work accommodations, and workplace restoration. Uniquely, IOS organises an annual training programme for UN investigators from different agencies, with training provided by a specialist unit of the French National Gendarmerie. This one-week training programme focuses on a victim-centred approach, interviewing and forensic techniques.

**UNESCO has also established comprehensive policies to prevent and respond to sexual harassment (SH).** The Anti-Harassment Policy, aligned with the Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service, applies to all personnel, including staff, consultants, service contract holders, interns, volunteers, and occasional workers. This policy supports a zero-tolerance approach towards sexual harassment. Mechanisms are in place to regularly track the implementation of the Anti-Harassment Policy at both headquarters and field levels. The Directorate of Human Resource Management (DIR/HRM) is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Anti-Harassment Policy, as well as the status of affected individuals and offenders, while the Ethics Office is the unit responsible for the implementation of the Whistleblower Protection Policy aimed at ensuring protection from retaliation.

UNESCO has established structures and procedures to enforce its Anti-Harassment Policy. The Ethics Office provides advice on questions relating to the prevention and resolution of harassment to staff and management, as well as regular training for personnel at headquarters and in field offices, covering issues including moral and sexual harassment. The Organisation has taken disciplinary measures in response to SH incidents, acting on formal complaints. UNESCO reports disciplinary measures taken by the Director-General annually in an information circular titled "Disciplinary measures taken by the Director-General during the year," which includes measures taken in response to SH, ensuring that there is transparency in reporting the number and nature of actions taken.

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Engaging in inclusive partnerships to support relevance, leverage effective solutions and maximise results.

FIGURE 8. **KEY FINDINGS ON UNESCO'S RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT**
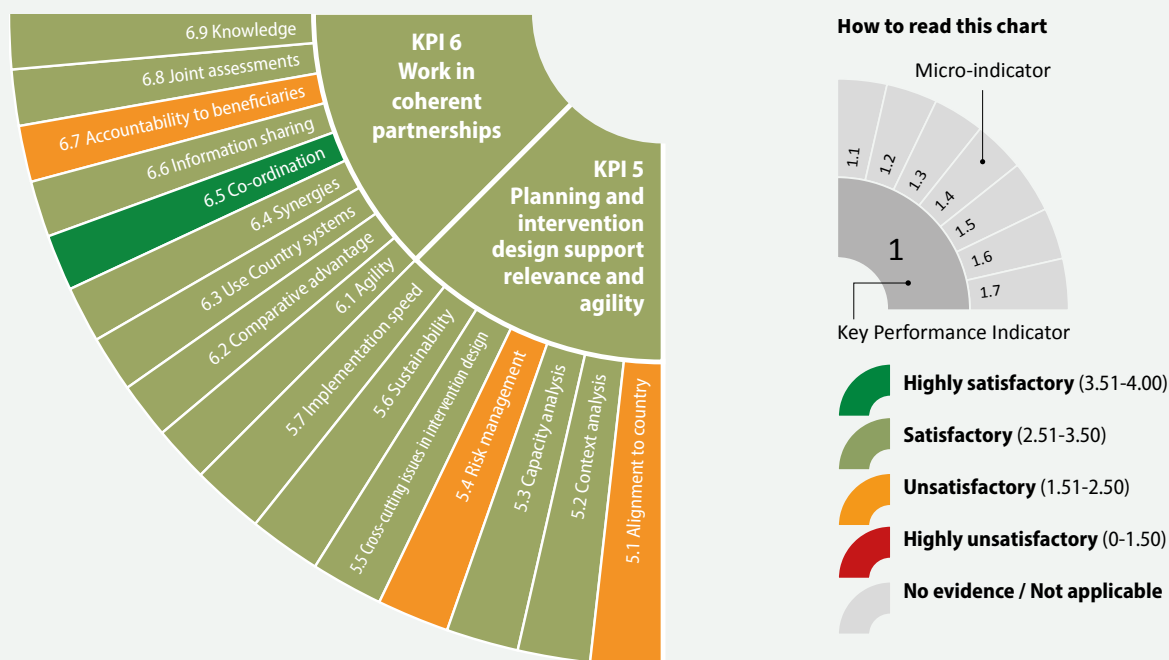
UNESCO performs well in planning and designing interventions, improving partnerships' relevance and agility. It aligns effectively with beneficiary needs and member state priorities. However, challenges remain in strategic planning and the division of responsibility at headquarters, especially regarding field office networks. There is a need for greater clarity between the respective roles and responsibilities of the Bureau of Strategic Planning (BSP) and the Priority Africa and External Relations Sector (PAX) with respect to the governance and policy framework governing the field network. Regional Offices and national offices have unclear obligations with respect to setting out their strategies. UNESCO has stated it is addressing these gaps through consultations and forthcoming new guidance. Audits identify the need for field offices to improve resource planning and communication. The reform offers a chance to align with UN strategies, potentially replacing standalone strategies with cohesive operational plans.

UNESCO's interventions generally align with national priorities and contexts. Evaluations praise its holistic approach, seen in policy changes through capacity-building and effective education sector interventions. Strong procedures and systems support partnerships, but UNESCO needs to clearly articulate its comparative advantages.

Despite work to streamline its procedures, resource shortages, administrative complexities, and slow processes challenge timely and efficient delivery. Enhanced risk management, marked as "Developing", requires strategic strengthening to improve operational resilience and efficiency.

KPI 5: Operational planning and intervention design tools support relevance and agility in partnerships

Satisfactory	2.80

This KPI focuses on the scope and robustness of UNESCO's processes and practices to support timely, flexible and responsive planning and intervention design for partnerships.

Overall, UNESCO's systems ensure that its interventions and strategies are well aligned with the needs of beneficiaries and member states' priorities. But there is a critical lack of clarity on what strategic planning is required at country level, and an unhelpful division of responsibilities in UNESCO's headquarters over key aspects of the field office network. At the time of writing, there was no requirement for Regional Offices to have strategies. While at the time of the last MOPAN assessment, there was a requirement for national offices to produce "UNESCO Country Strategies", there is currently a lack of clarity on whether national offices are required to have a country strategy, and if so, what the purpose is. UNESCO is aware of these gaps in its response to the observation in a first draft of the technical annex of this assessment (Annex A) and stated that work has been ongoing since 2023 to address them. BSP is consulting on draft templates for regional and country strategy documents and stated that it anticipates that they will be finalised by the end of 2024. Given that UNESCO has been finalising the reform of the field office network for several years, it is suboptimal that new regional and country offices will only know what kind of strategies they need to develop a year after the reforms were finalised. This clarity is overdue and much needed.

Recent audits of national offices note that where country strategies exist, they need to be strengthened. Based on 15 audits of UNESCO's 54 field offices, the Audit Office highlighted the lack and quality of UNESCO Country Strategies as its first recurring observation. It noted that country strategies will help field offices better plan resource requirements and communication plans. It also noted that whilst BSP is mandated to provide high-level guidance and support to field offices in elaborating regional strategies and UN common country programming processes, "BSP is not able to provide systematic monitoring of new UCS [UNESCO country strategy] documents to ensure they contain the requisite planning, resourcing and monitoring elements." It also notes that "PAX does not have the programmatic overview to be able to do so" – and thus that "The current situation leads to incomplete UCS documents." The Audit Office's observations indicate that there is a need for greater clarity in the division of responsibilities between BSP and PAX in relation to the strategic requirements governing the field office network.

With the reform of the field office network, UNESCO has an opportunity to review the status and purpose of country strategies and requirements for regional strategies. UNESCO also has an opportunity to review and set out how it intends to align with the UN development system's policy of asking members of UN country teams to derive their strategic priorities from the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). UNESCO has the option of forgoing the development of a country strategy altogether and using the Cooperation Framework as the point of reference. This may be appropriate in some cases, leaving UNESCO with the need to develop an operational plan, which could set out resource and communication plans. A broader comment on how UNESCO collaborates within the UN development system is made below, in text on KPI 6.

Evaluative evidence indicates that, overall, UNESCO interventions do refer to and seek to meet the needs of beneficiaries, including vulnerable populations. UNESCO's most recent Medium-Term Strategy and Programme and Budget documents commit it to enhancing its focus on inclusive and participatory approaches in combination with strengthening its contextual analysis so it can deliver benefits to those most in need. Evaluations consider that UNESCO has a good record in meeting the needs of beneficiaries, but with an area that could be strengthened. Several evaluations identify programmes that demonstrate effective and intentional efforts to address the needs of

vulnerable groups. The 2023 synthesis of evaluations notes good practice when initiatives have a focus on inclusion or are specifically targeted towards a priority group. However, both this and UNESCO's synthesis review of evaluations for 2022 noted that UNESCO's attention to inclusion rarely addresses persons with disabilities. This said, the Education Sector has a strong track record of helping governments develop and implement inclusive educational policies and programmes, with a special emphasis on the rights of persons with disabilities.

Evaluations of UNESCO's interventions indicate that they are generally coherent with national priorities and the local context. The 2023 evaluation synthesis considered that UNESCO Headquarters and field office staff pay close attention to policy and implementation coherence during both design and implementation phases. All interventions must contain a clear statement positioning the intervention within the operating context. Evaluative evidence indicates that this contextual understanding informs the implementation of UNESCO projects and is reflected in how relevant the intervention is judged.

The 2019 MOPAN assessment considered that UNESCO had a strong approach to capacity building, and there is clear evidence that this is still an area of good performance. UNESCO's 2014-2021 and 2022-2029 Medium-Term Strategies give capacity building, "developing institutional and human capacities", the status of being one of the organisation's five core functions. Evaluative evidence indicates that UNESCO has strong capacity-building design practices and that UNESCO interventions have delivered stronger capacity. For example, the 2022 synthesis of evaluations notes that "Common achievements resulted from improvements in the capacity of national government bodies and other partners and interlocutors at various administrative levels, increased awareness and commitment by local, national, regional, and global actors convened and co-ordinated by UNESCO on key themes aligned with its mandate, and increased access to data, information, and tools to support action in these areas".

UNESCO's intervention designs require a holistic approach to the problems they seek to address. UNESCO's interventions include both normative/standard-setting programmes and country-level programmes. Much of UNESCO's normative work, particularly its support to help countries implement conventions, is aimed at ensuring that an enabling policy or legal environment is in place and that these are sufficiently robust so that they can be readily implemented. For example, with the 2003 Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO promotes universal ratification and the effective implementation of the 2003 Convention. The last two evaluations of its work in this Convention show that UNESCO has been effective at strengthening the legal, policy and institutional environments that support the diversity of cultural expressions – also illustrating the credibility of its capacity-building approach.

Evaluative evidence indicates that UNESCO's interventions have led to policy change, indicating that its plans to deliver shifts in policy and legislation are effective. The synthesis review of UNESCO evaluations produced in 2019, 2022 and 2023 cite a broad range of areas in which UNESCO has contributed to policy or legislative changes. For example, UNESCO has contributed to the reform of media law in several countries and to the adoption of a new law on science, technology and innovation in Tunisia.

Since the last MOPAN assessment, UNESCO has streamlined some of its systems to allow greater delegation of responsibility to its field network, and this needs to continue. UNESCO's procurement unit has strengthened its capacity and processes, particularly in relation to project-funded posts, where spending units have greater delegated authority. Headquarters has embedded some procurement and Human Resources posts into regional offices to streamline the national offices' delivery capability. As indicated elsewhere, UNESCO still needs to finalise its accountability framework to reflect the new shape of the field office network. Interviews indicate that the organisation's Enterprise Resource Planning system to facilitate delivery (e.g., contract management) has yet to be updated and integrated into UNESCORE. UNESCO has amended its procedures to ensure its field office network can use the procurement and contracting systems established by other UN entities.

There are streamlined systems to facilitate emergency responses, and protocols are still being developed. UNESCO's response in Ukraine with respect to the Education Sector and in Beirut with respect to Culture are examples of their use. A 2020 evaluation of UNESCO's action to protect culture in emergencies, including the Heritage Emergency Fund, noted that UNESCO did not have the financial or human resources to always effectively respond in a timely manner. Interviews indicate that UNESCO is considering how to ensure the policies and systems are in place to facilitate rapid responses across the organisation.

There is evidence that procedural delays have not hindered the speed of implementation across reviewed interventions, but also that UNESCO's systems and workflows are experienced as burdensome. The 2021, 2022 and 2023 synthesis review of evaluations showed that "almost all" evaluations found that available resources were used efficiently, budgets were executed as planned, and activities were conducted and outputs delivered in a timely way. These syntheses state that delays or adjustments were often explained by issues beyond UNESCO's control. Notwithstanding these evaluations, many staff consider that UNESCO's systems and processes hinder the speed of implementation. UNESCO's most recent internal staff survey indicated that staff feel that bureaucracy and slow processes hamper their everyday work and make it difficult to get things done quickly, which in turn affects the effective implementation of deliverables. UNESCO will need to ensure that, as it develops its systems, it ensures they facilitate streamlined and efficient workflows and are designed with attention to the perspective/experience of the user.

UNESCO's approach to the assessment and management of project/programme risk is clear and set out in its 2021 Risk Management Policy. All UNESCO interventions require a detailed analysis of risk and mitigation strategies to be identified at the design stage. All projects funded by voluntary contributions with a value of USD 3 million and above require the completion of a standalone risk assessment. This is reviewed, leading to a decision on whether it needs to be considered by the organisation's Committee for the Review of High-Risk Projects (CRHRP), established in 2022 to focus on managing intervention-related risks.

However, UNESCO's overall Enterprise Risk Management – outside that related to projects and programmes – has been judged as "Developing" and both the External Auditors and the Oversight Advisory Committee recommend it be strengthened. In 2023, the Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS) conducted an audit of UNESCO's Enterprise Risk Management (ERM), assessing the progress of the ERM roadmap implementation, the maturity of risk management, and the integration of risk management practices into key processes and decision-making. The audit used the UN system's reference maturity model for risk management, endorsed by the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM), to assess UNESCO's risk maturity. The audit concluded that UNESCO is at Level 2 ("Developing") of the overall maturity model, indicating it has the basic architecture, structured implementation, and some reporting and repeatable management processes for risk management. The audit highlighted good practices, such as the creation of the CRHRP and the creation of a network of risk focal points representing various sectors, services, field offices, and Category 1 Institutes.

KPI 6: Working in coherent partnerships directed at leveraging and catalysing the use of resources

Satisfactory	2.99

This KPI looks at a range of dimensions of how UNESCO engages in partnerships to maximise the effect of deployment of its investment resources and its wider engagement.

The 2019 MOPAN assessment found UNESCO to be a respected and strong convener. UNESCO has continued to show its ability to lead international action with an extraordinarily broad network of partners. It has an extensive range of partnerships, reflecting the breadth of its mandate. UNESCO functions effectively as a "clearing house" and a "catalyst and motor for international co-operation", as it aspires to do in its Medium-Term Strategy.

In line with its mandate and its comparative advantages, UNESCO brings together global, regional, and national partners across its programmes. It probably has the widest range of partnerships among multilateral Organisations. These partnerships include the private sector, NGOs, the media, parliamentarians, affiliate centres and clubs, schools, higher education and research institutions, ambassadors, a global network of technical and vocational education centres, Category 2 affiliated institutes and centres, and National Commissions. Within these partnerships, UNESCO acts as a convener, broker, facilitator, and implementer of partnerships to support the 2030 Agenda. It also builds partnerships that support South-South and North-South-South co-operation. Each of UNESCO's sectors outlines its partnership activities in UNESCO's Programme and Budget documents.

UNESCO's comparative and collaborative advantage is effectively reflected in its strategic priorities and normative function. UNESCO's role in co-ordinating the SDG4-Education 2030 High Level Steering Committee, its leadership in statistics, culture, communications and freedom of expression, and climate science related to the ocean and rivers are all explicit. Its Comprehensive Partnership Strategy (2019) gives a framework for a co-ordinated approach to strategic partnerships. It articulates UNESCO's unique role in developing and overseeing international norms and standards. By leveraging its comparative advantages, UNESCO has shown how it can function as a catalyst for international co-operation. UNESCO has leveraged financial and non-financial resources towards its strategic objectives, for example, taking a leadership role in initiatives like the Global Education Coalition, which focused on education responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Global Forum against Racism and Discrimination. The Global Education Coalition was one of UNESCO's highest-impact partnerships. It also excels in multi- and inter-disciplinary expertise, youth, climate change, and gender equality in STEM.

Relating to UNESCO's role at the field level, a 2023 Audit considered that UNESCO could do more to define and communicate its comparative advantages more clearly organisation-wide, particularly in relation to other UN entities. Notwithstanding this, UN Resident Coordinators interviewed for the assessment were clear on the comparative advantages that UNESCO brought to the UN family in-country (e.g. culture/heritage, education, including Technical and Vocational Education and Training, freedom of expression).

UNESCO has the "machinery" to manage partnerships effectively: it has an overarching policy, and procedural systems that allow it to manage partnerships in a relatively agile way. Partnerships follow a clear policy framework. UNESCO produces a comprehensive report on its partnership strategy and reports on how partnerships contribute to its results framework. An internal audit recommended that a robust IT system would help it manage contractual elements of its partnerships more effectively.

UNESCO is seeking to align its practices to the UN development system's Management and Accountability Framework. UNESCO has disseminated guidance on implementing the Management and Accountability Framework through a series of dedicated workshops for field offices in 2023. It integrates the need to work within the current UN Development System and collaborates with it within its parameters and the flexibility it has. It is generally a non-resident agency member of UN Country Teams when it lacks country presence, and it is thereby a signatory to 113 UNSDCFs.

A key driver for UNESCO to reform its field office network was to better enable it to work in alignment with the UN Development System. Interviews with UNESCO at HQ, field, and with Resident Coordinators indicate that, at least in the countries reviewed, UNESCO is seen as an integral member of UN Country Teams and makes strong efforts to align with the UN Development System. There will be a continuing need for UNESCO to deepen its alignment, demonstrate that it derives its country priorities from Cooperation Frameworks, and configure its country teams in line with the needs identified.

UNESCO is a global leader in creating knowledge that shapes norms in developing and disseminating knowledge to promote policy dialogue, advocacy, and effective programming. In line with its function, set out in

its Medium-Term Strategy, UNESCO serves as a "laboratory of ideas," promoting "knowledge sharing" and "intellectual co-operation." UNESCO consistently produces high-quality, accessible knowledge for partner governments and development actors. UNESCO's knowledge products are tailored to meet the needs of different target audiences and to support the organisation's strategic direction. The partner survey results indicate that UNESCO's knowledge products are generally regarded as user-friendly, with 90% of respondents affirming their ease of use.

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics provides crucial data and analysis for designing education programmes. Its advocacy in education influenced the global response to COVID-19, and it has influenced global debate on the management and ethics of artificial intelligence. UNESCO's reports on trends in freedom of expression, including Internet freedom, and other global status reports are foundational documents. Other flagship knowledge products of global value include:

- UNESCO Science Report (USR): focuses on global monitoring of Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) policy trends with emphasis on both high-income and low-income countries.

- World Water Development Report (WWDR): A key annual UNESCO publication on behalf of UN-Water that highlights sustainable freshwater management's role in addressing global issues like migration and job creation.

- Global Ocean Science Report (GOSR): This Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission report provides a comprehensive assessment of ocean science on a global scale, also helping member states gauge their capacity in ocean science against global standards.

- Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM): monitors and reports on SDG 4 and other education-related SDGs. It examines emerging issues, analysing global education trends, and advocates for effective education policies and practices. The GEM was evaluated in 2023 and was judged as "highly credible" and "authoritative", and it has improved since 2018. The evaluation found that stakeholders consistently used the report's evidence, with 80% of survey respondents indicating that they either cited GEM Reports in their work or used its data.

- "World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development": monitors global trends in freedom of expression and media development, emphasising issues such as press freedom and journalist safety.

UNESCO lacks a formal statement on accountability standards for beneficiaries. This was a gap identified in the 2019 MOPAN assessment, and it remains. Its programming manual includes procedures for accountability, but it is unclear how well these procedures are implemented. This gap applies only to development interventions with identifiable beneficiaries, rather than UNESCO's broader normative work.
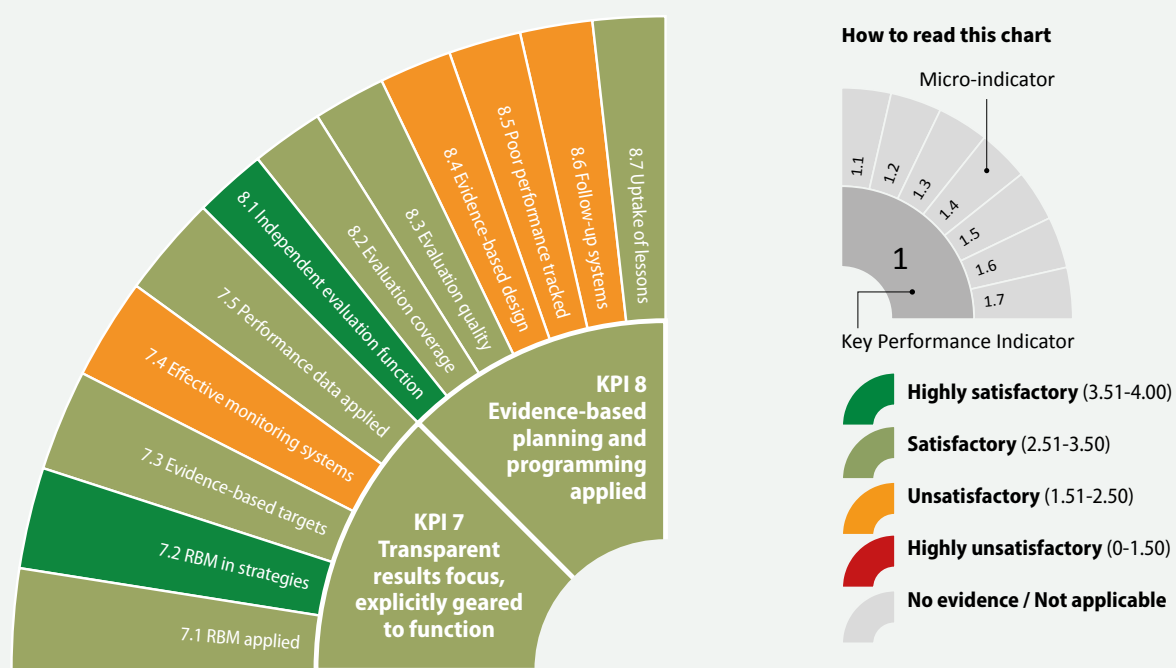
UNESCO maintains a high level of transparency and aligns its reporting with the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI). The agency joined IATI and has reported its data on its public portal since 2015. In 2017, it commissioned an audit to review the status of its transparency efforts, and by implementing the recommendations, it has further improved the quality and scope of the data it posts to IATI. UNESCO has more recently updated the format for Programme Implementation (EX/4) reports to better align with IATI standards. UNESCO has committed to enhancing the quality of data on its associated Transparency Portal to better meet operational needs with partners. UNESCO's score (42/100) given by IATI on its overall compliance is lower than that of several other UN entities. UNESCO may wish to review what underpins this and what actions would be needed to strengthen its compliance.

UNESCO has significantly upgraded its website since 2019, making it a more user-friendly way to access knowledge and information. However, there are still opportunities to make the quality and style of UNESCO's communication more engaging and effective.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Systems geared to managing and accounting for development and humanitarian results and the use of performance information, including evaluation and lesson-learning.

FIGURE 9. **KEY FINDINGS ON UNESCO'S PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

How to read this chart

Micro-indicator

Key Performance Indicator

Highly satisfactory (3.51-4.00)

Satisfactory (2.51-3.50)

Unsatisfactory (1.51-2.50)

Highly unsatisfactory (0-1.50)

No evidence / Not applicable

In performance management, there is evidence of a strong Results-Based Management (RBM) system being promoted and applied at headquarters and in some programmes; however, its application is not yet universal. A substantive gap persists in UNESCO's ability to report on corporate performance at the outcome level - donors also continue to request more meaningful reporting, focused on the achievement of outcomes rather than the delivery of outputs. The system is not well-resourced, either within or outside headquarters. Additionally, UNESCO still lacks robust systems for identifying poor performance. The corporate evaluation function has improved from an existing strong base, with better funding, and there are some advancements in decentralised evaluations. It is anticipated that evaluation associates will be posted in five Regional Offices by the end of 2024 – this should help to support the quality of evaluations outside headquarters.

KPI 7: Strong and transparent results focus, explicitly geared to function

Satisfactory	2.90

This KPI examines how UNESCO interprets and delivers an organisation-wide focus on results.

The 2019 MOPAN report noted that UNESCO has a corporate commitment to a results culture, which has continued to extend through this assessment period. The focus on results-based management is evident in its standard-setting and implementation roles. Organisation-wide plans and strategies usually include results frameworks, and all sectors and Category 1 institutes identify their contributions to the SDGs. The partner survey supports this view: 67% of respondents agreed that UNESCO prioritises a results-based approach. Interviews also indicate that UNESCO's donors appreciate the progress UNESCO has made in the last few years in terms of its results reporting. However, some still think that UNESCO could better communicate them in a more meaningful way.

However, UNESCO still faces a challenge in ensuring its results-based approach is implemented across the Secretariat and provides meaningful results to the required breadth and depth. A substantive gap persists in UNESCO's ability to report on corporate performance at the outcome level. This constraint partly relates to limits in human and financial resources for deepening UNESCO's approach to results across the organisation. Resources were constrained in 2019 and remain so, with modest increases in 2024.

There is evidence that UNESCO's results targets at a corporate level are generally based on sound evidence and logic. While no single results framework aggregates the results of all of UNESCO's major programmes, UNESCO has developed some results frameworks for individual ones. For example, the Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme has a clear results framework, and the education sector has developed a sector-wide theory of change. UNESCO's 2020 Strategic Results Report sets out the aggregated performance of each expected result by major program, against five criteria: relevance, capacity to deliver, comparative advantage, demonstrable results, and sustainability. In the Strategic Results Report 2020, there was no aggregation at a higher level from expected results to strategic objectives.

The 2019 MOPAN assessment noted that UNESCO does not assess its longer-term outcomes, and this gap persists during the assessment period. The 2024 Strategic Results Report, made available after the document cut-off date for this MOPAN assessment, notes that the monitoring frameworks for the reporting period do not enable UNESCO to systematically capture and analyse corporate performance at the outcome level. The report notes that these frameworks lacked performance indicators at the outcome level and used output-level indicators instead, which varied in their levels of change. As also observed in the 2019 MOPAN assessment, this makes it hard to establish a clear results chain and complicates performance analysis, including the linking of results to resources. UNESCO has the opportunity to modernise its strategic planning, monitoring, and reporting systems with the new UNESCORE project. There is an opportunity to design a monitoring framework that better captures UNESCO's results at different levels and across different programme sectors. This will be essential for UNESCO to accurately track, maximise, and communicate its influence.

Performance data is applied in planning and decision-making, but evidence tends to come from evaluations rather than ongoing monitoring. UNESCO's Organisational level and corporate level monitoring documents, which were improved in 2018, generate performance data for corporate reporting and planning. UNESCO has systems that encourage those designing interventions to adapt them to performance data, but there is some way to go to ensure that it is universally applied. There are some good examples from programmes that have received targeted support from the RBM Unit in BSP. However, the use of performance data in planning documents throughout the results framework is uneven. UNESCO's 2022 Synthesis Review of Evaluations noted that results frameworks and performance measurement tools were often missing from programme documentation. The 2023 report found that many evaluations did not use a theory of change or a results framework when reporting on effectiveness. Monitoring systems generate output-level performance data in response to strategic priorities.

On balance, UNESCO's corporate monitoring system is underfunded, and capacity and resources for monitoring are still inadequate. Successive synthesis reviews of evaluation have noted that M&E capacities are "limited" and need "urgent attention." Beyond the RBM Unit in the Bureau of Strategic Planning, expertise is limited, as are resources. There are no dedicated M&E staff in the programme sectors in HQ Executive Offices or in regional or other field offices financed by the regular budget. Under the plans in place at the time of the assessment, UNESCO did not intend to create new positions outside of BSP in Regional Offices to support the monitoring function in the field network. UNESCO should keep this decision under review: situating M&E experts in some regional hubs may be a cost-effective way of strengthening its overall programme delivery capability.

KPI 8: Evidence-based planning and programming applied

Satisfactory	2.83

This KPI focuses on the evaluation function, its positioning within UNESCO's structures, and attention to quality, accountability and putting learning into practice.

UNESCO has continued to strengthen its corporate evaluation function, which was assessed as strong and independent in the last MOPAN assessment. Whilst there have been improvements in the quality of decentralised evaluations, the decentralised evaluation function faces the same challenges noted in the last MOPAN assessment: primarily, that there is no dedicated expertise to support decentralised evaluation outside headquarters, and this limits the extent to which the quality of decentralised evaluations can develop. At the beginning of 2024, there was still no dedicated expertise to support decentralised evaluation outside of headquarters, limiting the extent to which it can develop. The Evaluation Office informed the assessment team that a proposal to recruit five regional evaluation associates (to be placed in five Regional Offices by the end of 2024) has been agreed. They will be funded by the Evaluation Office's budget.

UNESCO has an independent corporate evaluation service. The Evaluation Office has operational independence and a budget allocation that has increased since 2018. UNESCO's procedures safeguard the ability of evaluators to access any information or persons. The Head of the Internal Oversight Service, which houses UNESCO's Evaluation Office (as well as its Internal Audit and Investigations Offices), formally reports to the Director-General but also has unrestricted access to the Executive Board. The Evaluation Office can also report to the Director-General and the Executive Board. The mandate of the UNESCO Oversight Advisory Committee includes oversight of the evaluation function. Composed of external advisors, it acts as a standing committee that reports to the Director-General and the Executive Board. It has regularly commented on what is needed to ensure UNESCO's evaluation function is effective.

Corporate evaluation coverage is strong and includes corporate functions and issues. The 2022-2029 Evaluation Policy, introducing a recommendation made by the OECD DAC/UNEG Peer Review, transfers 3% of the operational budget of each Sector to the Evaluation Service's budget to the Evaluation Office. The Evaluation Office can use this

budget flexibly to support the evaluation function in UNESCO, including the decentralised evaluation function (as it now proposes to do). Before this, the 3% allocation remained within the budget of the relevant sector (it was not fungible), limiting how the Evaluation Office could use the funds.

The last MOPAN assessment judged that UNESCO has strong corporate evaluations but weaker decentralised evaluations. This disparity has remained during the current MOPAN assessment period. A robust system is in place to ensure the quality of corporate evaluations, but the systems for ensuring the quality of decentralised evaluations are less robust. Corporate evaluations, which are managed directly by staff of the Evaluation Office, have strong quality assurance mechanisms built into their implementation, and these are aligned with the UN Evaluation Group standards. They tend to be based on stronger design, planning and implementation processes than decentralised evaluations. Evaluation Office staff are responsible for backstopping field offices, but there are limits to the depth of support they can provide. Evaluations managed by the sectors or field offices, though they must adhere to the same UNEG standards, have been identified as generally weaker by annual evaluation report syntheses. This said, these synthesis reports have noted that there have been quality improvements. As a form of quality assurance, UNESCO's Evaluation Office commissions meta-syntheses and analyses of decentralised evaluations and is establishing new measures to improve their quality and address shortcomings.

The establishment of evaluation associates in five regional offices from the end of 2024 should help to lift quality further. UNESCO's evaluation function is subject to periodic peer review under the OECD DAC UNEG assessment framework as well as regular oversight by the Oversight Advisory Committee.

All corporate evaluations, but not all decentralised evaluations, include a management response. UNESCO's evaluation policy states that all UNESCO evaluations, whether corporate or decentralised, require a management response and action plan. The Evaluation Office tracks the status of follow-up for corporate and system-wide evaluation recommendations, and it reports on these to the Executive Board and the Oversight Advisory Committee. The report, which is a public document, sets out the status of implementation and shows how evaluations have contributed to strengthening UNESCO's interventions. The IOS report from the end of 2023 states that there were 84 open recommendations. This includes 27 new recommendations issued by 6 corporate evaluations published in 2023, and 57 recommendations open from previous years.

Dissemination of evaluation lessons is strong. UNESCO makes all its corporate evaluations publicly available. It also seeks to share lessons with UNESCO staff and the broader practitioner community in a user-friendly and systematic way. All evaluations, alongside all evaluation guidance, are available on IOS's internal "Evaluation Knowledge Hub". The Evaluation Office produces an online newsletter containing an overview of key evaluations or evaluation issues and distils key insights and lessons from its annual "synthesis evaluations". Evaluation Focal Points also share experience and knowledge and communicate the findings, recommendations and lessons learned, particularly on decentralised evaluations. UNESCO requires its sectors to reflect lessons from evaluations when planning new strategies. At the level of individual interventions, guidance requires staff to show in project documents how an intervention will build on "lessons learnt" emerging from monitoring and evaluation.

Reflecting that UNESCO is still developing the application of a results-based management approach, there is not yet a functioning organisation-wide, institutionalised system to track poorly performing interventions, aside from identifying issues relating to expenditure. This was identified as an area for improvement by the last MOPAN assessment and remains one. Some programmes have put results-based monitoring systems in place that are effective (e.g. the CapED programme), and some have introduced stronger systems following evaluations – for example, the Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme and the International Global Geoparks Programme. The HQ-level newly re-established Programme Coordination Group aims to identify performance issues related to larger, strategically important programmes.

DEVELOPMENT/HUMANITARIAN EFFECTIVENESS

Achievement of relevant, inclusive and sustainable contributions to humanitarian and development results in an efficient manner.

FIGURE 10. **RESULTS AT UNESCO**
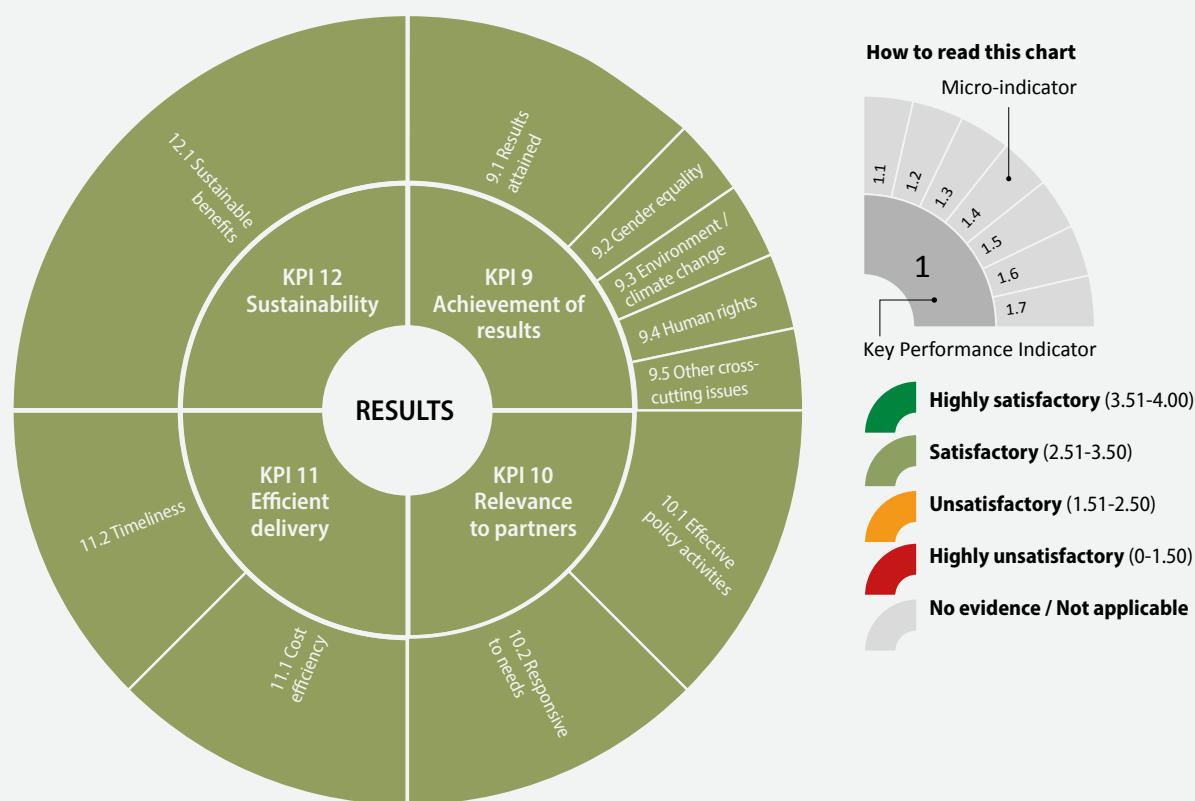
UNESCO achieves development and humanitarian goals effectively, although there are inconsistencies in monitoring outcomes. While interventions are successful at the output level, gaps remain in linking outputs to broader outcomes. Nevertheless, UNESCO has made notable strides in education, Open Science, and cultural policy dialogue. It has demonstrated effectiveness in advancing gender equality, climate action, human rights, and crisis response. The Global Education Coalition and gender-focused initiatives illustrate UNESCO's proactive approach. Challenges remain in embedding gender equality and addressing its underlying causes comprehensively. Budgetary resources added since 2023 will help drive this agenda.

UNESCO's interventions align well with the needs of partner countries, with significant influence on global and regional policymaking. Notable achievements include the Recommendation on the Ethics of AI and the Global Convention on Qualifications concerning Higher Education. Despite this, some initiatives variably include marginalised groups, stemming from design stage constraints. UNESCO generally delivers results efficiently. However, resource limitations and administrative complexities hinder timely outcomes. Recent funding improvements have had positive effects. In terms of sustainability, strong national ownership and alignment with frameworks like the SDGs enhance long-term sustainability prospects. The sustainability of UNESCO's work, particularly in normative work, are hindered by resource gaps and local engagement challenges.

KPI 9: Development and humanitarian objectives are achieved, and results contribute to normative and cross-cutting goals

Satisfactory	3.00

This KPI examines the nature and scale of the results UNESCO is achieving against the targets it sets and its expectations of making a difference.

Despite positive reporting on implementing the output indicators, there is inconsistent monitoring of the contribution of development and normative activities to outcomes. Synthesis reviews between 2019 and 2023 indicate that most of UNESCO's interventions perform well against evaluation criteria at the output level, but effectiveness at the outcome level is not consistently measured. This is partly because some projects still lack a theory of change or a results framework that links outputs and outcomes. This "missing middle" prevents UNESCO from assessing the extent to which interventions contribute to outcomes.

As detailed in the section above in relation to KPI 7, different parts of UNESCO are implementing an RBM approach at different paces: some sections or programmes have, in response to intensive support from BSP, developed very robust results frameworks; others are shallower and still have a "missing middle". A consequence of this is that the evidence base that the results section can rely on relates more to the outputs UNESCO has achieved than the outcomes.

Overall, evidence indicates that UNESCO has been effective in making progress towards its development, normative, and cross-cutting goals. UNESCO's self-reporting reveals that it met almost all identified objectives at the output level during the assessed period. Significant achievements include the establishment of the Global Education Coalition to co-ordinate responses during the COVID-19 pandemic, the adoption of an international standard-setting instrument on Open Science and the integration of cultural policy dialogue into the G20 in 2021. UNESCO has also generally been effective in advancing gender equality, tackling climate change, promoting human rights, and supporting other cross-cutting issues such as crisis preparedness and response.

UNESCO has continued to prioritise and mainstream gender equality in the 2022-2029 Medium-Term Strategy, with evidence of impact. Self-reporting shows that nearly all objectives related to women's empowerment and gender equality were achieved between 2018 and 2022. UNESCO's interventions have improved gender equality across all five sectors. For example, the "Keeping Girls in the Picture" campaign reached 400 million people, promoting girls' return to school post-COVID-19. UNESCO has also trained around 200 journalists and 1 200 students on the safety of women journalists since 2019. However, challenges remain, such as the need to embed the Global Priority Gender Equality (GPGE) more deeply across all work and addressing the root causes of gender inequality. An increase in UNESCO's budget since 2023 is expected to enhance efforts towards gender equality.

UNESCO has consistently prioritised environmental sustainability and climate change mitigation and has made an important contribution to both programmatic and normative interventions. In the 2022-2023 biennium, nine out of 77 outputs targeted environmental sustainability or climate change effects, with progress measured in nearly 30 performance indicators. Projects have delivered significant outputs, such as training 3 000 participants to increase awareness and build capacity on water security and creating a curriculum for climate change resilience in Africa. UNESCO's internal efforts to reduce its climate impact include implementing an Environmental Management System (EMS) and promoting climate neutrality through offset purchases. A 2021 evaluation recognises UNESCO's contributions to climate change programming and its role in international norm-setting, though it also highlights areas for improvement, such as monitoring and gender mainstreaming.

Evidence from self-reporting and evaluations suggests UNESCO has contributed to human rights, particularly for vulnerable groups. For the 2020-2021 biennium, six expected results explicitly targeted human rights, with most assessed as on track by December 2020. Achievements include supporting 26 countries to advance inclusive education for persons with disabilities and increasing youth engagement in promoting human rights values. However, evaluations indicate that UNESCO's focus on those left behind needs sharpening, particularly for persons with disabilities. When initiatives are targeted at specific groups, they tend to be well-addressed.

The Committee on Conventions and Recommendations has continued to review reports of human rights abuses and mediate directly to seek resolution in the assessment period. Between 1978 and 2023, the Committee considered 618 cases and reported positive results against 414 cases, with more than half concerning victims who were released before completion of a prison sentence.

UNESCO has given greater attention to crisis preparedness and response in its current Medium-Term Strategy. For example, the Li Beirut initiative rehabilitated 95 schools, 20 vocational centres and 30 university buildings in 2022, allowing 85 000 students to return to school. UNESCO also supported personal safety training for 1 200 women journalists in Ukraine. Additionally, UNESCO organised a Water-related Disaster Reduction Workshop in Saint Lucia, fortifying its capabilities against hazardous climatic events.

UNESCO has made progress in implementing its Priority Africa objectives. Significant achievements in advancing this priority include supporting African member states in developing their first biosphere reserves and helping formulate policy frameworks for information access. Evaluations of the Operational Strategy for Priority Africa (OSPA) highlight successful interventions like the Biennale of Luanda and the Lake Chad initiative, which have contributed to significant change and sustainability efforts.

KPI 10: Interventions are relevant to the needs and priorities of partner countries and beneficiaries, as the organisation works towards results in areas within its mandate

Satisfactory	3.00

This KPI centres on the relevance of UNESCO's engagement given the needs and priorities of its partner countries and its focus on results.

Standard-setting activities show evidence of being effective at influencing global, regional and partner country policy. UNESCO has demonstrated a high degree of effectiveness in setting normative standards and influencing policies across its mandate areas, including social protection, cultural diversity, education, sustainable development, and freedom of expression. The organisation has supported the development of national legislation and policies in various fields, resulting in significant reforms aligned with national priorities, such as those related to the status of artists and artistic freedom. UNESCO has helped member states develop appropriate policies for the digital age, and helped them develop media and information literacy strategies, and open data policies. UNESCO has also demonstrated its convening power in the development and adoption of global standard-setting instruments, such as:

- The Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, which is the first global normative instrument in this area. UNESCO has worked with partners from the private sector, academia, and civil society to develop capacity-building tools for the implementation of the Recommendation, and organised a Global Forum on the Ethics of AI. Over 80 member states are engaged through the Group of Friends of the Recommendation on the Ethics of AI. So far, more than 12 member states, including five in Africa, are putting conditions in place to implement the Recommendation.

- In November 2019, the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education, brokered with leadership from UNESCO, was adopted by the 40th session of the UNESCO General Conference, becoming the first United Nations treaty on higher education with a global scope. The Global Convention received its 20th ratification on 5 December 2022 and entered into force on 5 March 2023. As of June 2024, 30 States have ratified it. The Convention is a way of creating more equitable and accessible tertiary education and supports the aspirations of SDG 4.3.

- The World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2022, where the MONDIACULT 2022 Declaration was widely supported by governments and stakeholders, reflecting ongoing efforts to integrate culture into sustainable development policies.

UNESCO's initiatives are generally relevant to the priorities and policies of member states, partners, and targeted beneficiary groups. Corporate evaluations published during the assessment period highlight UNESCO's responsiveness to the needs of member states and stakeholde rs. UNESCO aligns its initiatives with policies and commitments at both global and national levels, particularly with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Evidence indicates that some initiatives unevenly include marginalised and priority groups, such as women, young people, and ethnic minorities. This is largely due to inadequate consideration of local constraints or partners' capacities and resources in the design stage.

KPI 11: Results are delivered efficiently

Satisfactory	3.00

This KPI looks at the extent to which UNESCO is meeting its own aims and standards on delivering results efficiently.

Overall, evidence from evaluations and programmatic documents indicates that UNESCO is efficient at delivering results. UNESCO's efficiency was primarily assessed through value for money and the effective use of resources. Key indicators of efficiency include the timely completion of projects, adherence to planned budgets, and effective project management and co-ordination. Evidence suggests that projects are generally delivered on time.

Challenges do exist, related primarily to timely funding, staffing and disbursement issues. Insufficient resources have hindered the delivery of expected results, affecting project management, co-ordination, and the quality of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems. Operational issues such as late disbursements and administrative complexities within UNESCO present additional challenges, although recent positive shifts in funding have been noted.

KPI 12: Results are sustainable

Satisfactory	3.00

This KPI looks at the degree to which UNESCO successfully delivers results that are sustainable in the longer term.

UNESCO generally performs well in sustaining its interventions, especially its normative work. Official agreements uphold the norms and standards it develops. Governments seek to mainstream these into their policies and practices, with varying degrees of effectiveness.

However, assessing the sustainability of UNESCO's programmatic interventions is harder due to varied contexts and goals. Evaluations show that strong national ownership and active local participation are crucial for sustainability. Effective implementation, partnerships with civil society, and strong governance structures enhance this potential. Projects that empower local communities and create networks likely have longer-term impacts.

The evidence also shows that programmes designed with attention to context and strong local stakeholder and government ownership show promising sustainability, especially when aligned with national policies. Key factors for sustainability include stakeholder buy-in, institutionalising changes, scalability, resource access, and capacity building. Integrating projects with frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) further enhances long-term sustainability.

Resource gaps and limited engagement have threatened project continuity and sustainability. Some evaluations found that a lack of national commitment and resource constraints hindered sustainability. Insecure or declining funding impacted UNESCO's ability to support projects consistently and ensure sustainability conditions before project completion. Enhanced cooperation among UNESCO entities could improve sustainability.

ABOUT THIS ASSESSMENT

THE MOPAN APPROACH

The approach to MOPAN assessments has evolved over time to adjust to the needs of the multilateral system. The MOPAN 3.1 Approach, applied in this assessment, is the latest iteration. Additional information can be found on our website www.mopan.org.

Starting in 2020, all assessments have used the MOPAN 3.1 Methodology,[1] which was endorsed by MOPAN members in early 2020. The framework draws on the international standards and references points, as described in the MOPAN Methodology Manual. The approach differs from the previous 3.0 approach in the following ways:

- Integration of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda into the framework.

- Two new micro-indicators (MIs) for the prevention and response to SEA/SH.

- The incorporation of elements measuring key dimensions of reform of the United Nations Development System (UNDS Reform).

- A reshaped relationship management performance area, with updated and clearer key performance indicators (KPIs) 5 and 6, which better reflect coherence, and which focus on how partnerships operate on the ground in support of partner countries (KPI 5), and how global partnerships are managed to leverage the organisation's resources (KPI 6).

- A refocused and streamlined results component.

- A change to how ratings (and their corresponding colours) are applied, based on scores defined for indicators. Compared to the previous cycles conducted under MOPAN 3.0, the threshold for a rating has been raised to reflect the increasing demands for organisational performance in the multilateral system. The underlying scores and approach to scoring are unaffected. This approach was already implemented in MOPAN 3.0* (2019 cycle).

Table 1 lists the performance areas and indicators used in MOPAN 3.1.

APPLYING MOPAN 3.1 TO UNESCO

This assessment used the MOPAN 3.1 methodology, but with some adaptation to ensure it was appropriate to UNESCO's mandate. As was the case in the previous MOPAN assessment, there is a high degree of fit between the MOPAN methodology and UNESCO's mandate. However, the assessment made changes to reflect UNESCO's "dual" role as an entity with both a normative and programmatic/intervention mandate, and to reflect UNESCO's recent cross-cutting focus on "crisis preparedness and response".

The following substantive changes were made to the standard MOPAN assessment framework:

- KPI 2 – One Micro-Indicator was changed: 2.4 "Structures and mechanisms in place and applied to support the implementation of global frameworks for cross-cutting issues at all levels…"' was replaced to reflect UNESCO's current cross cutting priority: "crisis preparedness and response", as set out in the Medium-Term Strategy (2022-2029).

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1. MOPAN 3.1 Methodology Manual, 2020 Assessment Cycle, http://www.mopanonline.org/ourwork/themopanapproach/MOPAN_3.1_Methodology.pdf

TABLE 3. **PERFORMANCE AREAS AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Performance area	Key performance indicator (KPI)
Strategic management	**KPI 1:** Organisational architecture and financial framework enable mandate implementation and achievement of expected results
	KPI 2: Structures and mechanisms support the implementation of global frameworks for cross-cutting issues at all levels in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda principles
Operational management	**KPI 3:** Operating model and human and financial resources support relevance and agility
	KPI 4: Organisational systems are cost- and value-conscious and enable financial transparency and accountability
Relationship management	**KPI 5:** Operational planning and intervention design tools support relevance and agility in partnerships
	KPI 6: Working in coherent partnerships directed at leveraging and catalysing the use of resources
Performance management	**KPI 7:** Strong and transparent results focus, explicitly geared towards function
	KPI 8: Evidence-based planning and programming applied
Results	**KPI 9:** Development and humanitarian objectives are achieved, and results contribute to normative and cross-cutting goals
	KPI 10: Interventions are relevant to the needs and priorities of partner countries and beneficiaries, as the organisation works towards results in areas within its mandate
	KPI 11: Results are delivered efficiently
	KPI 12: Results are sustainable

Source: MOPAN 3.1 Methodology Manual, 2020 Assessment Cycle,

http://www.mopanonline.org/ourwork/themopanapproach/MOPAN_3.1_Methodology.pdf

- KPI 9 – To reflect the fact that the results UNESCO works towards are normative/standard-setting as well as developmental, the word "normative" was added to KPI 9, so the focus is as follows: "**Normative**, development and humanitarian objectives are achieved, and results contribute to normative and cross-cutting goals".

- KPI10 – A new MI 10.1 was introduced to assess UNESCO's contribution to normative results. This MI, number 10.1, states: "Standard-setting activities are effective at influencing global, regional and partner country policy."

Lines of evidence

This assessment relies on three lines of evidence: a document review, a partner survey, and staff interviews and consultations. The assessment team collected and reviewed a significant body of evidence:

- **A document review:** This comprised publicly available documents published between mid-2018 and the end of April 2024 and guidelines and policies that are "current and in force". They were primarily in final form (i.e., not draft versions), recognised by management, and available in English. UNESCO shared 553 documents with the assessment team. The assessment drew directly on 282 of these in its analysis (see Annex A). The assessment drew on all relevant evaluations and the annual synthesis of evaluations.

- **An online survey:** Partners surveyed included the following groups: governing partners/Executive Board members; Financing partners; Implementing partners; Coordination partners.***** A total of 323 partners

responded to the survey, a 33% response rate. The survey was conducted between 21 May and 7 June 2024 (for more details, see Annex C).

- **Interviews and consultations:** These were undertaken primarily in person, with some meetings (mainly country-level meetings) conducted virtually. The headquarters mission took place at the end of April 2024, with two weeks of additional online interviews in May 2024. Over the course of the assessment, the team held 73 unique meetings and spoke to 156 interviewees.

- Discussions were held with the institutional lead of the UNESCO assessment as part of the analytical process. These served to gather insights on current priorities for the organisation from the perspective of MOPAN member countries. The assessment team also presented and discussed emerging findings with UNESCO's senior management twice.

- The assessment team carried out an inception mission to UNESCO headquarters in Paris from 22-25 January 2024. There was a total of 21 meetings with 35 individuals (representing UNESCO senior management, the Executive Board, the two Institutional Leads, and UNESCO's focal points). A briefing meeting with members of UNESCO's Executive Board was also carried out at the end of the inception phase.

  - The headquarters mission took place at the end of April 2024, with two weeks of additional online interviews in May 2024. During this period, 52 interviews with 121 interviewees were undertaken.

    o 39 Headquarter interviews with 100 interviewees:
    - 37 interviews with 81 Staff and management from HQ
    - 1 Geneva Group discussion with 17 EB members
    - 1 interview with Ethics and PSEAH Focal Point

    o 13 Country/regional level interviews with 21 interviewees:
    - 12 interviews with 14 mid- to senior-level staff
    - 1 interview with 7 PSEA Focal Points.

General information about the sequence and details related to these evidence lines, the overall analysis, and the scoring and rating process as applied to UNESCO can be found in the MOPAN 3.1 methodology.

ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The phases and timeline of the assessment were as follows:

Inception: between December 2023 and March 2024. This phase included an inception mission to UNESCO in mid-January with four days of meetings, and the subsequent refinement of the MOPAN assessment framework.

Evidence collection: March 2024 to the end of April 2024. This included a second round of interviews during a mission to UNESCO's HQ in April, two weeks of additional online interviews, an ongoing document review, and responses to the partner survey. The agreed cut-off date for the assessment of UNESCO's performance was the end of April 2024. The assessment team has reviewed some documents published after this date that are related to critically important issues only.

Analysis and report writing: A draft of Technical Annex ("Annex A") was produced and reviewed in mid-2024, with comments provided in September. A draft of the main report and a revised version of Annex A were produced in January 2025.

METHODOLOGY FOR SCORING AND RATING

The approach to scoring and rating under MOPAN 3.1 is described in the 2020 Methodology Manual[2,] which can be found on MOPAN's website. The MOPAN website also presents additional information about how the MOPAN framework was adapted for private sector operations.

Each of the 12 KPIs contains several micro-indicators (MIs), which vary in number. The KPI rating is calculated by taking the average of the ratings of its constituent MIs.

Scoring of KPIs 1-8
The scoring of KPIs 1-8 is based upon an aggregated scoring of the MIs. Each MI contains several elements that vary in number and represent international good practice. Taking the average of the constituent scores per element, a score is then calculated per MI. The same logic is pursued at aggregation to the KPI level, to ensure a consistent approach. Taking the average of the constituent scores per MI, an aggregated score is then calculated per KPI.

Scoring of KPIs 9-12
The scoring of KPIs 9-12 is based upon a meta-analysis of evaluations and performance information, rated at the MI level and aggregated to the KPI level. KPIs 9-12 assess results achieved as assessed in evaluations and annual performance reporting from the organisations. Other sources of information are reviewed and included as needed.

Rating scales
Whenever scores are aggregated, rating scales are used to translate scores into ratings that summarise the assessment across KPIs and MIs. The rating scale used under MOPAN 3.1 is shown below.

🟩 **Highly satisfactory** (3.51-4.00)	🟦 **High evidence confidence**	
🟨 **Satisfactory** (2.51-3.50)	🟦 **Medium evidence confidence**	
🟧 **Unsatisfactory** (1.51-2.50)	🟦 **Low evidence confidence**	
🟥 **Highly unsatisfactory** (0.00-1.50)		
⬜ **No evidence / Not applicable**		

2. MOPAN 3.1 Methodology Manual, 2020 Assessment Cycle, http://www.mopanonline.org/ourwork/themopanapproach/MOPAN_3.1_Methodology.pdf

FIGURE 11: **UNESCO'S PERFORMANCE RATING SUMMARY FOR 2025 ASSESSMENT WITH APPLICATION OF MOPAN 3.0 RATING SCALE**

How to read these charts

Micro-indicator

Key Performance Indicator

- **Highly satisfactory** (3.01-4.00)
- **Satisfactory** (2.01-3.00)
- **Unsatisfactory** (1.01-2.00)
- **Highly unsatisfactory** (0-1.00)
- **No evidence / Not applicable**
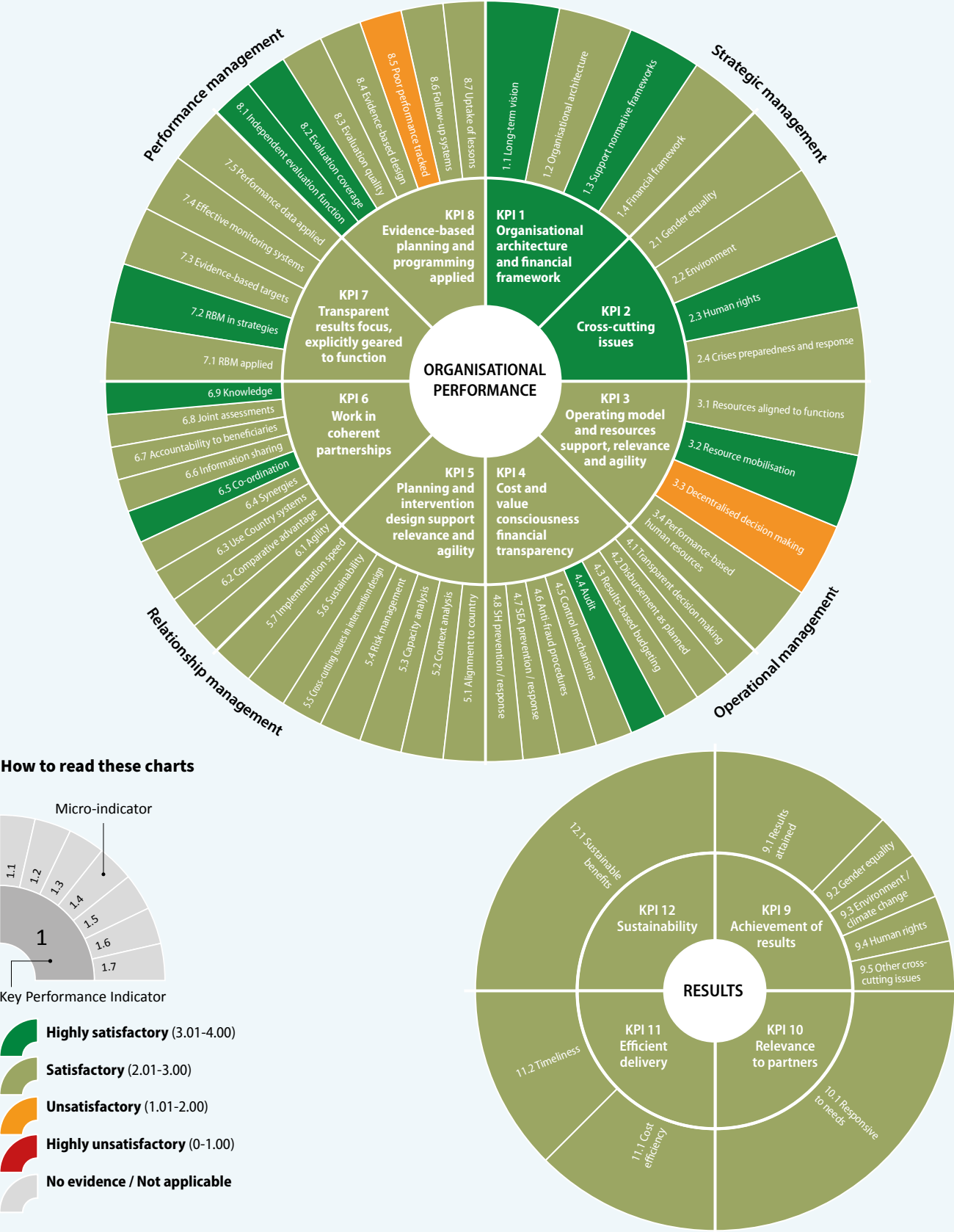
A score of "N/E" means "no evidence" and indicates that the assessment team could not find any evidence but was not confident of whether there was evidence to be found. The team assumes that "no evidence" does not necessarily mean that the element is not present (which would result in a zero score). Elements rated N/E are excluded from any calculation of the average. A significant number of N/E scores in a report indicates an assessment limitation (see the Limitations section at the beginning of the report). A note indicating "N/A" means that an element is "not applicable". This usually owes to the organisation's specific nature.

LIMITATIONS

UNESCO has an extraordinarily broad and diverse mandate, with multiple affiliated bodies. The assessors spoke with representatives of five of UNESCO's ten Category 1 institutes, and due to time and resource constraints were not able to speak to its other affiliated entities or to its Category 2 institutes. The assessment is also limited by the fact that the assessors interviewed select staff and UNESCO partners from only four of the organisation's regional and field offices.
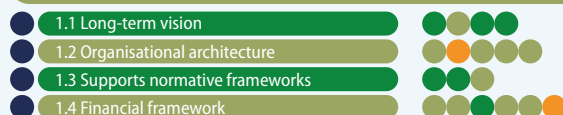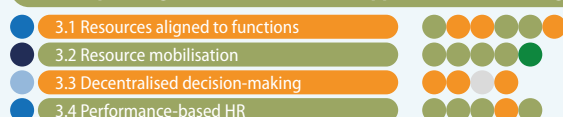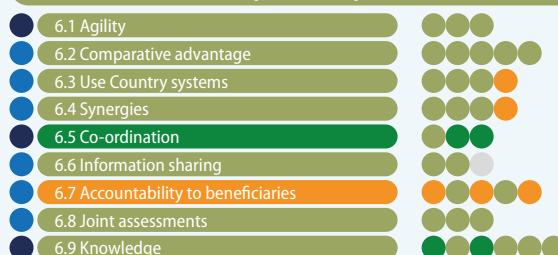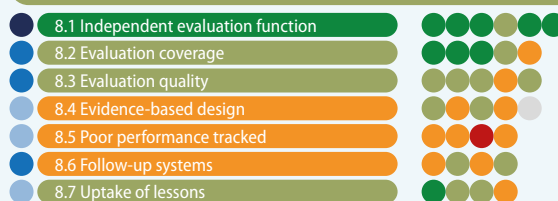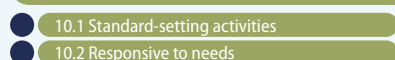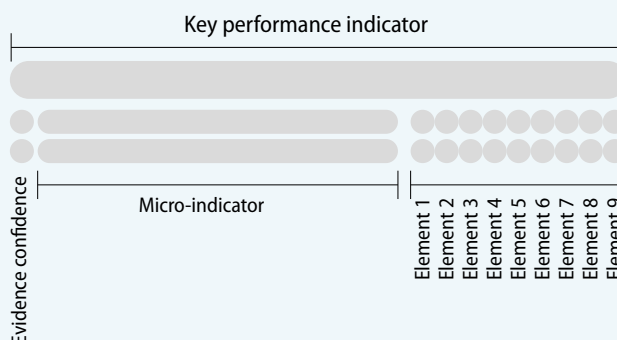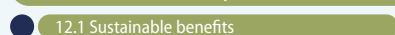
It is also the case that the MOPAN methodology was designed principally for multilateral organisations engaged in country programming rather than normative work. UNESCO does both, but its country programming operational system is still evolving, and its systems are not developed – and do not yield the evidence – that an agency with a field and development focus would have.
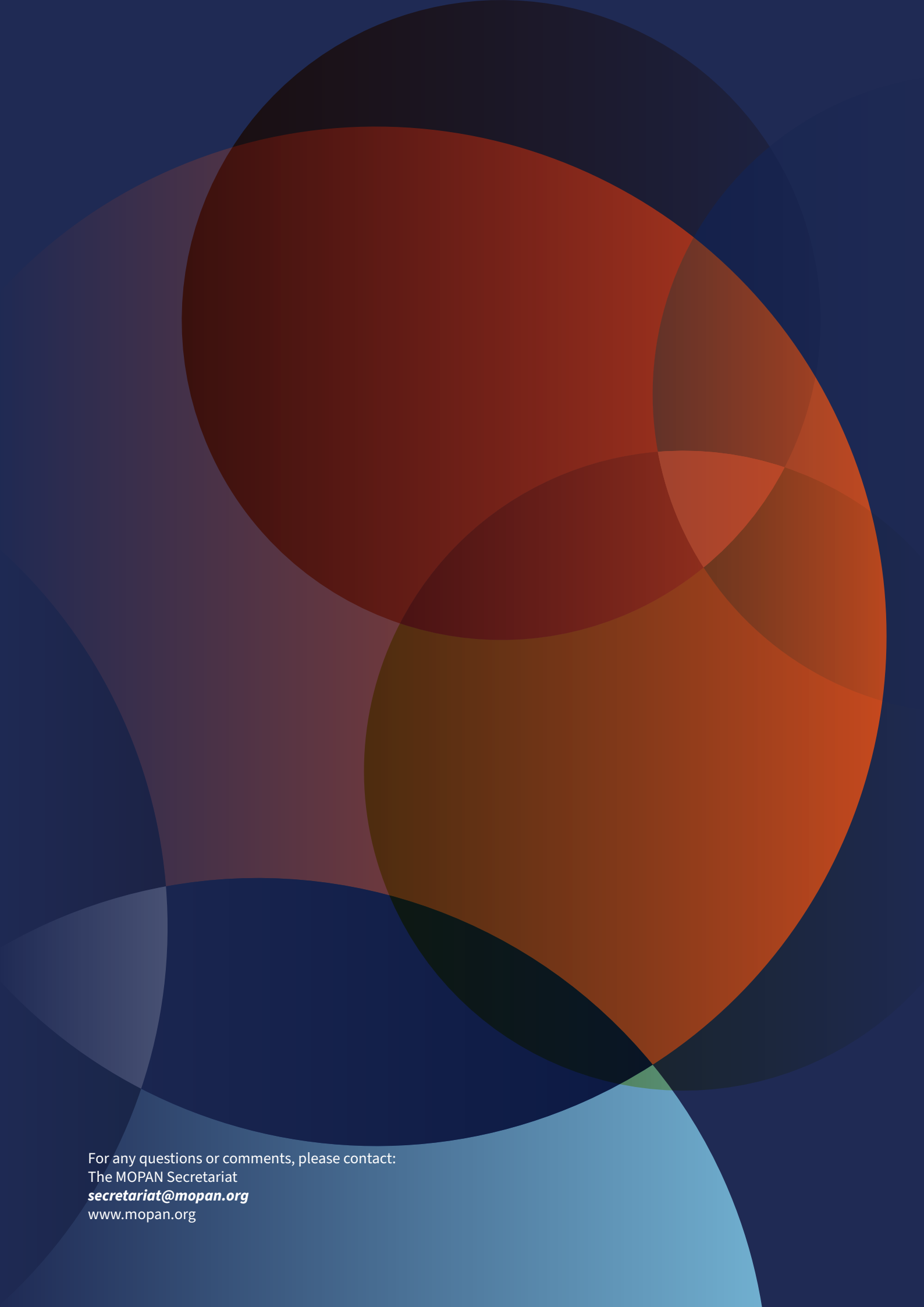
Compared to the last MOPAN assessment, there was a stronger body of evaluative evidence to draw from, including annual synthesis reviews. However, in contrast to the last assessment, the assessment team could not draw on the external auditors' performance audits: external audits were limited to financial audits during the assessment period. This meant the assessors did not have an important and external commentary on UNESCO's performance. The assessment did draw on the reflections of the Oversight Advisory Committee where applicable, however. The team tested and validated evidence from the documentary review by conducting interviews, studying reports and triangulating these with the survey analysis results.

Just as with the last assessment, this one was carried out over a period of transition. Some critical changes were being rolled out at the time of the assessment, but evidence is not yet available to fully analyse their impact. The field office network reform is a case in point.

FIGURE 12. **UNESCO PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW CURRENT RATING**

Strategic management

KPI 1: Organisational and financial framework
- 1.1 Long-term vision
- 1.2 Organisational architecture
- 1.3 Supports normative frameworks
- 1.4 Financial framework

KPI 2: Cross-cutting issues
- 2.1 Gender equality
- 2.2 Environment
- 2.3 Human rights
- 2.4 Crises preparedness and response

Operational management

KPI 3: Operating model and resources support relevance and agility
- 3.1 Resources aligned to functions
- 3.2 Resource mobilisation
- 3.3 Decentralised decision-making
- 3.4 Performance-based HR

KPI 4: Cost and value consciousness, financial transparency
- 4.1 Transparent decision making
- 4.2 Disbursement as planned
- 4.3 Results-based budgeting
- 4.4 Audit
- 4.5 Control mechanisms
- 4.6 Anti-fraud procedures
- 4.7 SEA prevention / response
- 4.8 SH prevention / response

Relationship management

KPI 5: Planning and intervention design support relevance and agility
- 5.1 Alignment to country
- 5.2 Context analysis
- 5.3 Capacity analysis
- 5.4 Risk management
- 5.5 Cross-cutting issues in intervention design
- 5.6 Sustainability
- 5.7 Implementation speed

KPI 6: Work in coherent partnerships
- 6.1 Agility
- 6.2 Comparative advantage
- 6.3 Use Country systems
- 6.4 Synergies
- 6.5 Co-ordination
- 6.6 Information sharing
- 6.7 Accountability to beneficiaries
- 6.8 Joint assessments
- 6.9 Knowledge

Performance management

KPI 7: Transparent results focus, explicitly geared to function
- 7.1 RBM applied
- 7.2 RBM in strategies
- 7.3 Evidence-based targets
- 7.4 Effective monitoring systems
- 7.5 Performance data applied

KPI 8: Evidence-based planning and programming
- 8.1 Independent evaluation function
- 8.2 Evaluation coverage
- 8.3 Evaluation quality
- 8.4 Evidence-based design
- 8.5 Poor performance tracked
- 8.6 Follow-up systems
- 8.7 Uptake of lessons

Results

KPI 9: Achievement of results
- 9.1 Results attained
- 9.2 Gender equality
- 9.3 Environment / climate change
- 9.4 Human rights
- 9.5 Other cross-cutting issues

KPI 10: Relevance to partners
- 10.1 Standard-setting activities
- 10.2 Responsive to needs

KPI 11: Efficient delivery
- 11.1 Cost efficiency
- 11.2 Timeliness

KPI 12: Sustainability
- 12.1 Sustainable benefits

Legend:
- High confidence
- Medium confidence
- Little to no confidence
- Highly satisfactory
- Satisfactory
- Unsatisfactory
- Highly unsatisfactory
- No Evidence/Not Assessed

Key performance indicator

Evidence confidence

Micro-indicator

Element 1
Element 2
Element 3
Element 4
Element 5
Element 6
Element 7
Element 8
Element 9