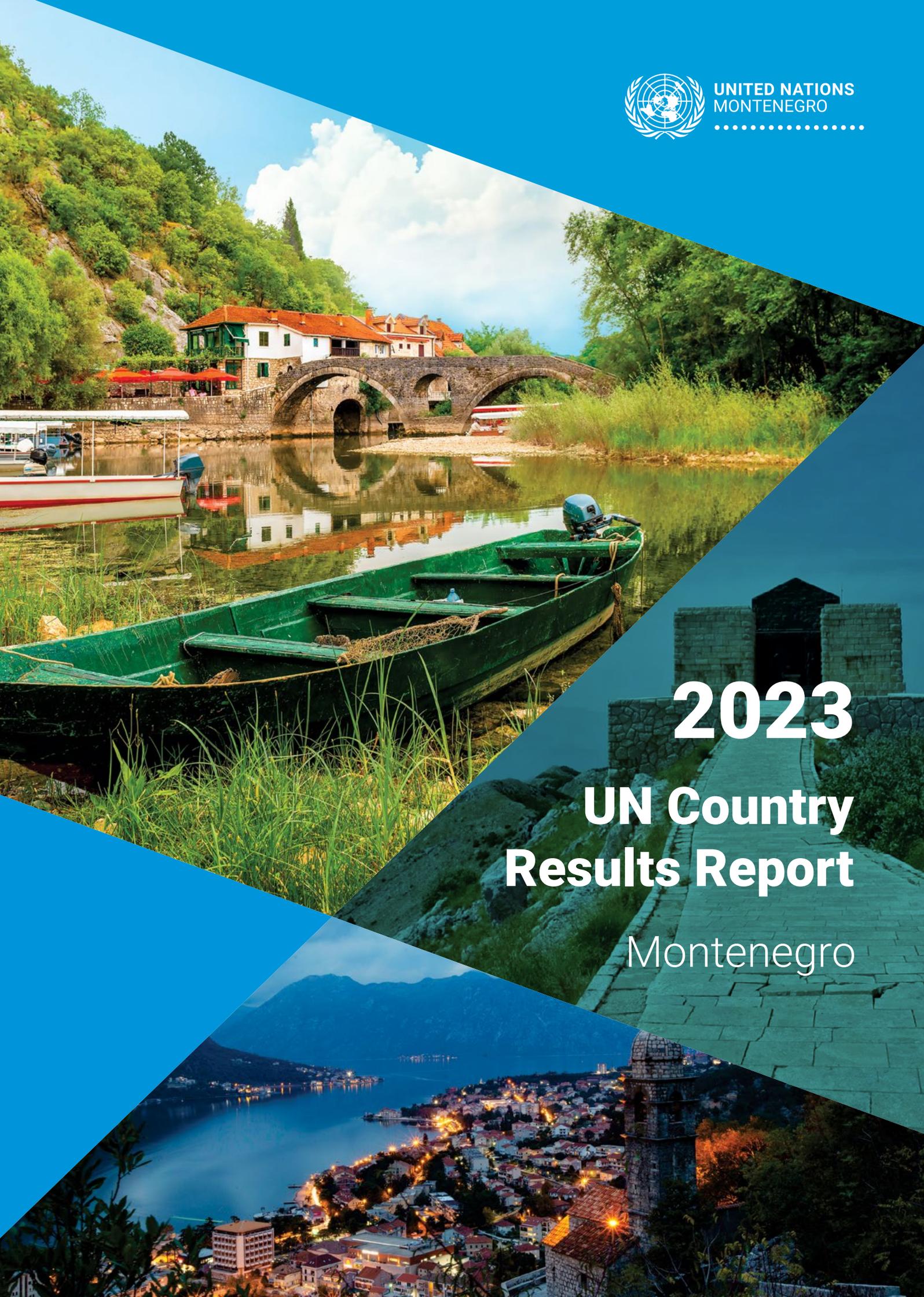




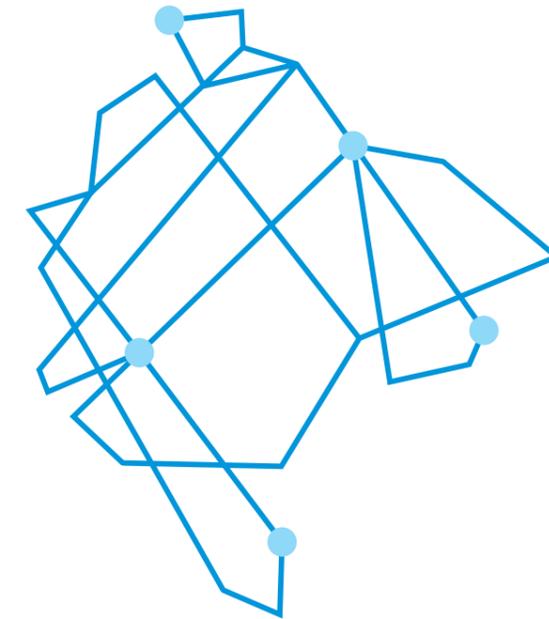
UNITED NATIONS
MONTENEGRO
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2023

UN Country Results Report

Montenegro



2023 UN Country Results Report

Montenegro

March 2024

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UN Country Team in Montenegro



The **UNCT configuration** is based on the country’s needs and is agreed with the Government of Montenegro, following assessed capacity to deliver on UNSDCF results. The UNCT in Montenegro consists of 8 agencies with an in-country presence (UNDP, UNOPS, WHO, IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF, ILO, OHCHR), and 10 without a physical presence (these are regionally based agencies, funds and programme carrying out operational activities for development in Montenegro- FAO, UNECE, UN Women, UNESCO, UNODC, UNDRR, ITU, IFAD, UNEP, UNIDO). UNDRR, IFAD, ITU and OHCHR are new UNCT members, following their signatures of UNSDCF 2023-2026, while two former agencies opted out. The configuration will be revisited on a needs basis.



Photo: IDM Montenegro

Vladimir Gjorgjiev
UN Resident Coordinator in Montenegro, a.i.

FOREWORD

Dear reader,

In my capacity as the UN Resident Coordinator a.i. in Montenegro, I am pleased to present the 2023 Annual Progress Report. The Report summarizes key collective achievements during the first year of implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), under three strategic areas: a) Inclusive economic development and environmental sustainability; b) Human capital development, reducing vulnerability and social inclusion; c) Social cohesion, people-centered governance, rule of law and human rights.

Despite fast-changing national political landscape and governance dynamics throughout 2023, but also regional and

global ones, the UN system, together with the Government, has managed to stay on course and deliver its mission, achieving significant results. This was facilitated by strengthening UN reform on the ground and operationalizing internal governance structures that helped boost synergies within the UNCT. The new generation of Joint Work Plans contributed to a more systematic presentation of results and availability of comprehensive data to track UNCT's collective contribution to three strategic priorities, including supporting Government vision for EU accession. Regular CCA updates were provided along with thematic policy briefs. Internal consultations as well as regular exchanges with the Government were enabled through three joint Results groups.

In 2023, the Montenegro SDG Acceleration Fund (MAF) became operational, with a coordination structure put in place and first calls for proposals issued resulting in three joint projects and the fourth, ad-hoc one at the request of the Government. So far, the fund has attracted 150% of its initially foreseen support, with Montenegro, Switzerland, Austria, Luxembourg, Ireland, and the European Union joining as donors. The Government of Montenegro's contribution of EUR 1 million makes it the highest per capita contribution in the region to such a funding mechanism by a government and it represents a proof of Government's dedication to sustainable development of the country.

Partnerships are steadily expanding, as evidenced with more than 100 partners on board from Government, non-governmental organizations, media, academia and private sector, without whom progress in accelerating 2030 Agenda would not be possible. At the most strategic level, thanks to UNCT's collective advocacy the Government formally decided to set up a mechanism for Strategic Partnership Coordination, within the Office for Sustainable Development, to enable permanent exchange, discussions, analyses and planning between development partners and national institutions.

UNCT support also helped Montenegro to join the group of only 40 countries globally, which presented their National Pledges towards acceleration of Agenda 2030, at the SDG Summit held in New York in September. Through analytical work and a nationwide consultative process, Montenegro came up with the list of national priorities and commitments along with indicators to accelerate national progress towards 2030 Agenda. The National Pledge was adopted by the Government and is expected to serve as a basis for the revision of the Action plan on National Sustainable Development Strategy implementation.

In 2024, under the framework of the new UNSDCF, 18 UN agencies and the Government continue to strengthen their partnership for achieving the vision of Montenegro with reduced poverty and accelerated progress towards sustainable, resource-efficient and innovation-based economy, with improved state of the environment and increased respect for human rights, social justice, and inclusion of the most vulnerable.

With my sincere thanks to the Government and all the friends of the UN for your whole-hearted support in making these results happen, I wish you a pleasant reading.



Key development partners and funds



UN agencies core and thematic funds



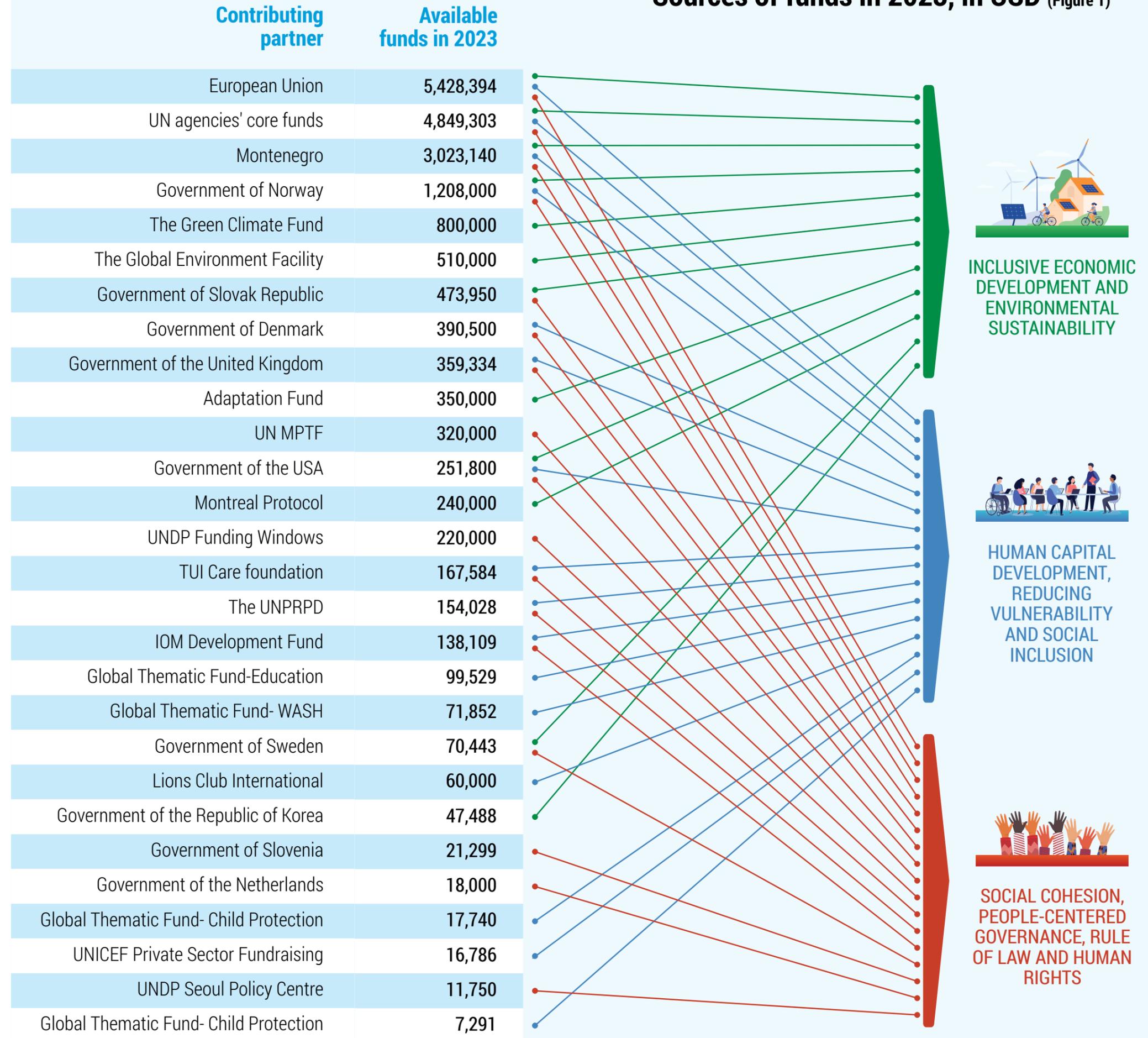
Other strategic partners



MAF contributors
(deposited amounts in USD)

European Union	Republic of Austria	Swiss Confederation	Montenegro	Grand Duchy of Luxembourg	Ireland
1,27 million	1,1 million	500,000	220,250	75,904	38,400

Sources of funds in 2023, in USD (Figure 1)



CHAPTER I

Key developments in the country and regional context

In general, Montenegro continued to progress on the SDGs while in some areas slower than in others. Most notably, the performance of the economy has supported lower levels of poverty¹ and risk of poverty, reducing the number of vulnerable households, leading to good progress in SDG 1 and enabling Montenegro to recover to its pre-pandemic levels. Montenegro has also made efforts to make society more inclusive for vulnerable groups. These efforts have led to positive results, such as increasing the school enrolment of Roma and Egyptian children, and some gender disparities narrowing.

The lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to hinder Montenegro's progress towards some SDGs. Despite the recovery and improving outlook, some outcome indicators, such as in education and health, are yet to fully recover to their pre-pandemic levels. The consequences of the war in Ukraine are further complicating the situation. When other factors, such as climate change, are added into the equation, it has created significant headwinds to progress. These factors are potentially changing the landscape in terms of vulnerability and the composition of vulnerable groups in Montenegro.

The political situation slowed progress on some of the SDGs, and the EU accession process. The EU accession, which, once achieved, would deliver around two thirds of the SDGs, has seen limited progress. There were both Presidential and Parliamentary elections in 2023. The continued political uncertainty until

the elections and protracted process to form the new Government have meant little progress on transitional justice and reforms that would accelerate progress on relevant SDGs.

While the overall picture suggests that Montenegro is making progress, it is now about accelerating progress in all areas and ensuring that everyone is benefitting from it. Even though employment has increased to record levels, better quality jobs are needed to lift incomes and productivity. Vulnerable groups still face multiple challenges and deprivations. The skills being developed in education are still not resolving the skills-jobs mismatch, as employers still struggle to fill certain positions.

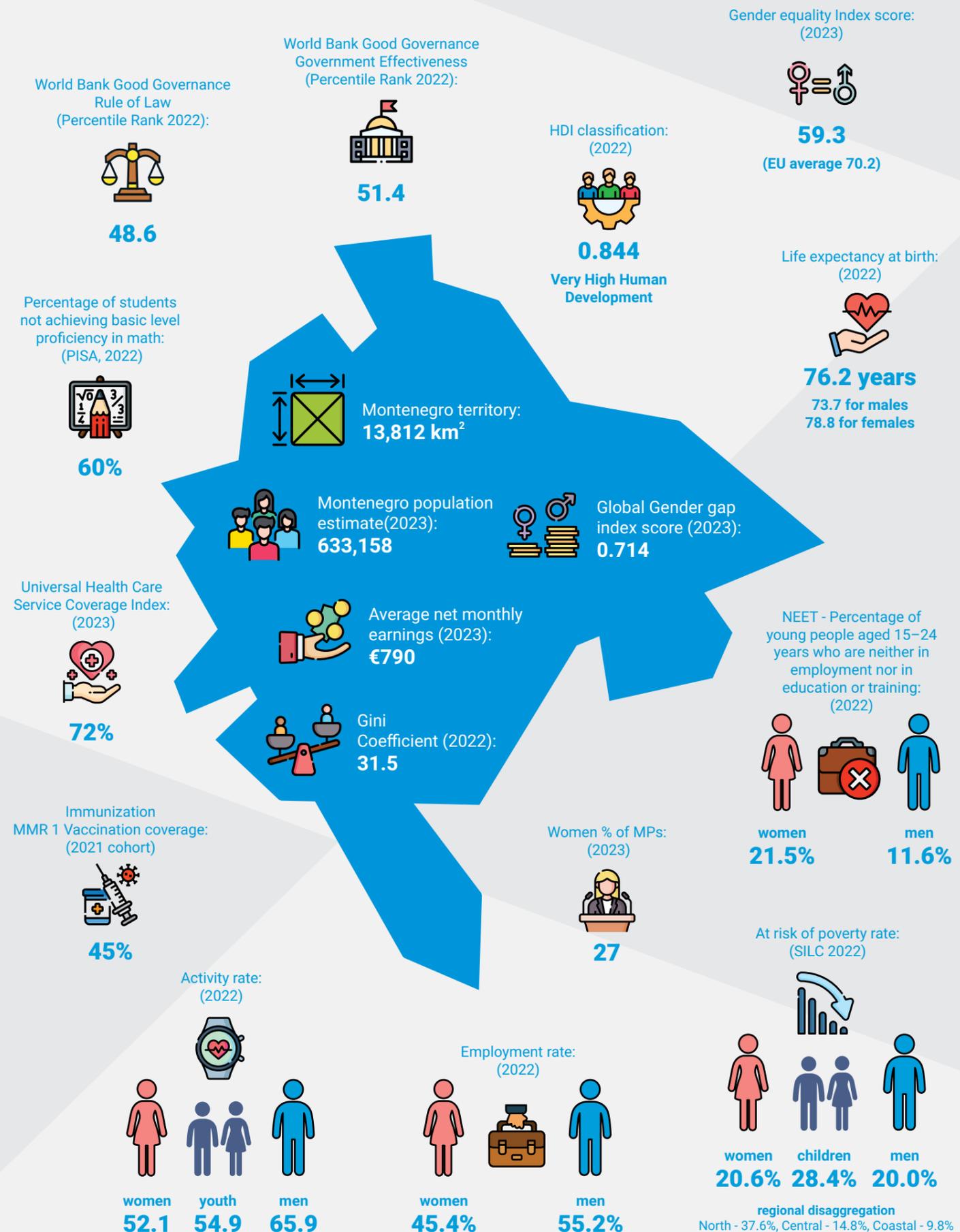
Vulnerability also appears to be concentrating among rural and Northern households. Plus, single parent households and parents with more than three children are more likely to be vulnerable than other household groups. Some pervasive issues remain, such as gender-based violence and violence against children. These are still exacerbated by cultural and social norms which lead to a high tolerance of these deprivations.

The UN system has published an update of Common Country Analysis (CCA) for 2023, that includes strategic considerations for UN programming, as a response to these identified challenges. These are important areas to address that could accelerate SDG progress and have been taken over by Results Groups for three strategic priorities of United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). They will also be the basis for prioritizing funding from the pooled Montenegro Acceleration Fund.

¹ World Bank, Regular Economic Report Fall 2023; Toward Sustainable Growth

MONTENEGRO

Key socio-economic data



CHAPTER II

UN development system support to national development priorities through the Cooperation Framework



2.1. Overview of Cooperation Framework Results

The new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), launched in January 2023, has three strategic priorities, agreed through a wide, inclusive, and consultative process: a) Inclusive economic development and environmental sustainability; b) Human capital development, reducing vulnerability and social inclusion and c) Social cohesion, people-centered governance, rule of law and human rights. The UNSDCF introduced two new elements. One is an integrated approach to economic development, job creation and environment protection (including the link between economic growth and environmental degradation) and thus merging these two areas under one strategic priority. The second new element is a strategic approach to human capital development through coordinated investments in education, health, and social inclusion, while simultaneously strengthening the social protection system. In addition to this, social cohesion and trust building aspects were integrated as a precondition for good governance, rule of law and sustainable development.

In parallel with the new UNSDCF – a national pooled fund: **The Montenegro SDG Acceleration Fund (MAF)** was operationalized in 2023. The MAF has already exceeded

its initially planned capitalization with 7 million USD fundraised so far. Through the first allocation round, three programs were approved in 2023, under each strategic priority area and one ad-hoc intervention was approved to support the new functions of the Office for Sustainable Development and Strategic Planning Unit in the General Secretariat of the Government. Besides, being an important fundraising mechanism, the Fund also serves as a platform for strategic exchange and joint identification of development priorities between the UN, Government and donor community, including political and policy level cooperation to address major social, economic, and institutional bottlenecks to EU accession. With this foundation in place, the Montenegro UNCT continued with **advancing 2030 Agenda**, starting at the strategic level. Montenegro’s Global Sustainable Development Report (SDG index) ranking improved by 19 places (from 86th in 2022 to 67th in 2023), and, as stated in the report by State Audit Institution on the preparedness of Montenegrin institutions for implementation of Agenda 2030, this progress is due, in large part, to the work of the Office for Sustainable development with the support of the UN.

With the UN’s advocacy and technical support, the **National Sustainable Development Council**, the highest structure governing sustainable development in Montenegro, has been significantly strengthened, and three

new working groups have been formed: Just transition, Sustainable Development Finance, and Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change. Montenegro’s commitment to implement Agenda 2030, has been reaffirmed at the SDG Summit, where Montenegro was one of forty countries that presented its **National Pledge towards the acceleration of Agenda 2030**. Through analytical work and a consultative process supported by UN system, Montenegro identified key national priorities and made clear commitments to accelerate progress towards 2030 Agenda. In the upcoming period, the UN system will support national partners to achieve these promises.

Strengthening the capacities of the Office for Sustainable Development and institutions in charge of producing and reporting against indicators is an integral part of the process. Moreover, systematic and coordinated actions were taken to strengthen SDG monitoring

system, through the upgrade of the national SDG dashboard, and initiating the process of prioritizing indicators to measure progress towards goals of 2030 Agenda.

The Government agreed to set up a mechanism for **Strategic Partnership Coordination**, within the Office for Sustainable Development to improve donor coordination at the national level, which the UN had strongly advocated for. The new structure will enable greater exchange, discussions, analyses and planning between development partners and national institutions. Moreover, the mechanism will link international financial support with national planning and policy development processes including those related to EU accession.

As shown in Figure 2, more than 50% of investments went to SDGs 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), 13 (Climate Action) and 3 (good health and well-being), while SDGs 4, 1, 10, 8 and 5, followed.

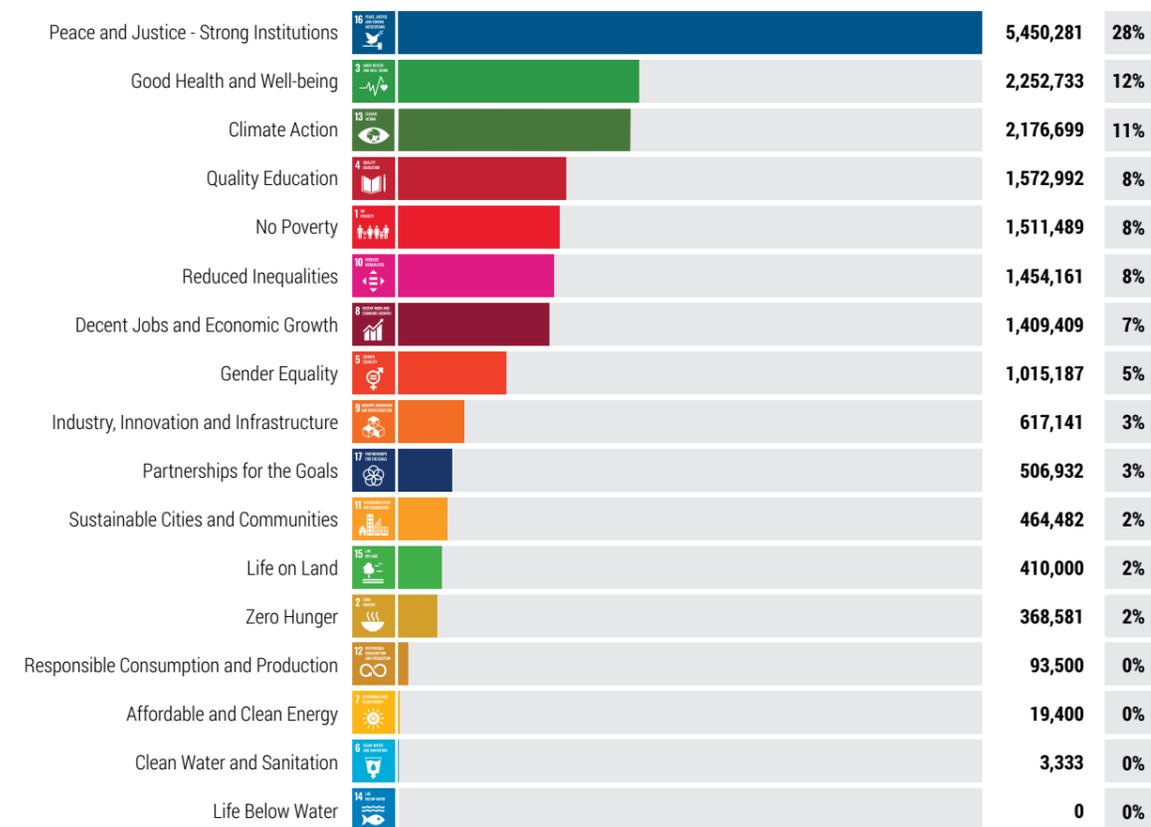


Figure 2: Distribution of funds available in 2023 per SDG (in USD)

Similarly, and in the view of synergies between Agenda 2030 and EU accession process, **30% of total available funding (5,7 mill USD) was invested into fundamental chapters 23 and 24**; at least 11% (2,1 mill) went to Green agenda (chapter 27), and 10% (1,9 mill) went to Consumer and health protection (Chapter 28). Social policy and employment (chapter 19) were also in focus with 8% of available funding. Chapters 26,11,10,8, 32, 20, 18 and 33 were supported as well (see **figure 3** below).

The guiding principles of Gender equality and women’s empowerment (GEWE) and human-rights based approach (HRBA) were strongly upheld. This is evidenced with the fact that **67% of funds available in 2023 were invested in programs that have gender equality as a significant (64%) or primary objective (3%), thus exceeding the originally set joint target by 7%. Similarly, the investment in the programs with a strong human rights component was at 61%.**

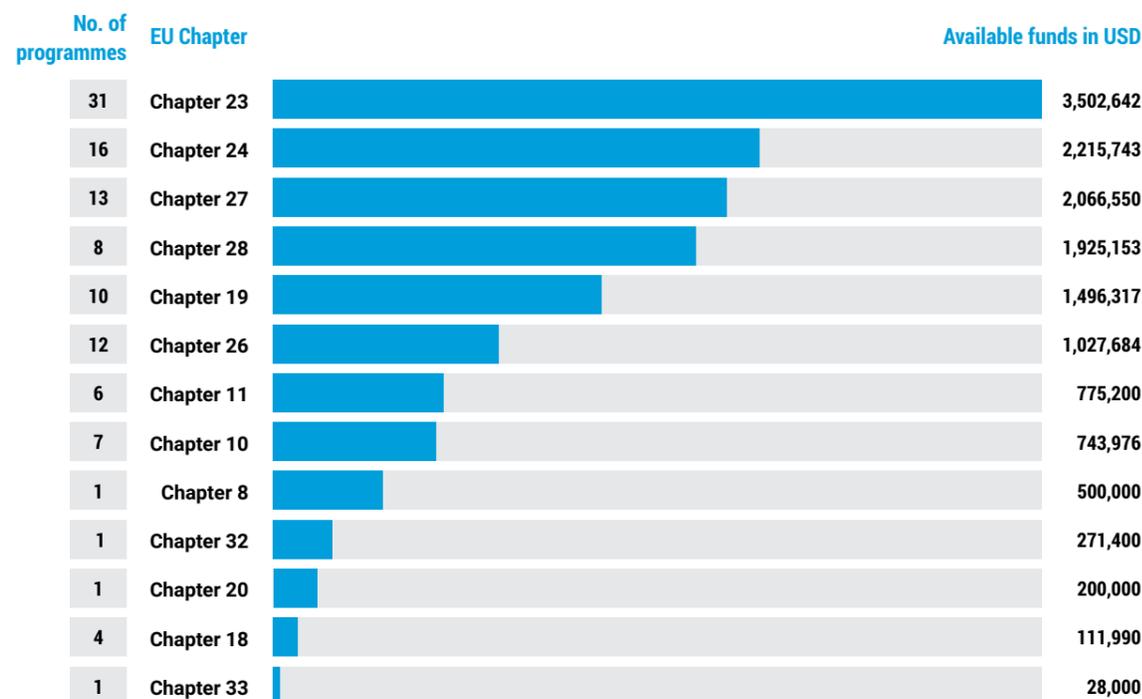


Figure 3: Distribution of funds available in 2023 per EU chapter (in USD)

The number of sub-outputs (programs) per Gender and Human Rights Marker is shown in the graph below.

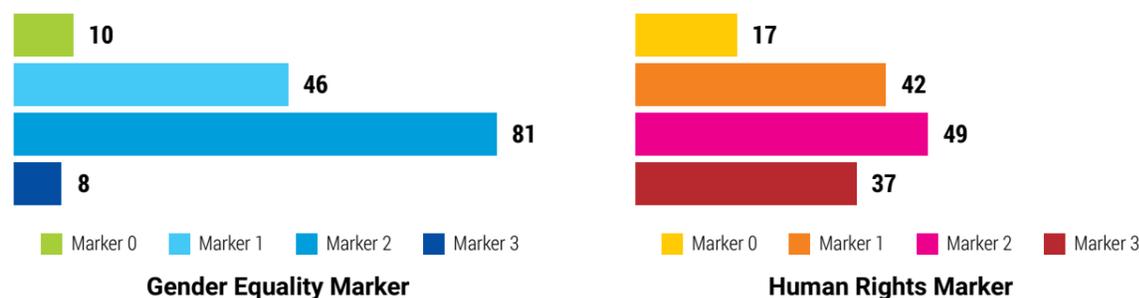


Figure 4: Number of sub-outputs per Gender and Human rights marker²

² 0 - Not expected to contribute; 1 - Contributes in a limited way; 2 - significant objective; 3 - principal objective

System-level changes have been introduced through an advanced normative framework, such as the Strategy on Development of MSMEs and Strategy on Early Childhood Development, while three other strategies from the area of social and child protection are in draft phase. The institutional framework was strengthened through the establishment of the Child Rights Council and an independent mechanism for promotion, protection, and monitoring of the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which strengthens the inter-sectoral approach to address the needs of some of the most vulnerable categories.

Measurable results have been achieved for the **groups at risk of being left behind**, such as zero children under the age of three in institutions; a decrease in the number of children in residential by 10%, and an increase in the number of children in foster care by almost 10% compared to 2022. The UN’s **commitment to youth** was translated into development of The National Youth Strategy 2023-2027 with an Action Plan for 2023-2024, which had an immediate follow-up, with local self-governments creating local youth action plans based on the national strategy, enabling a comprehensive development of national and local youth policy. The latest update of the CCA examines the structural barriers persons with disabilities face, providing entry points for further work on strengthening their status.

Furthermore, the UN demonstrated an **agile and adaptive approach to programming**, with the country facing a significant influx of Ukrainians, of over 180,000 persons, since the war started. By the end of September 2023, nearly 62,000 Ukrainians registered some legal status in the country, which represents 10% of the country’s population and the highest number of refugees per capita.

With the UN’s support, the Government provided Temporary Protection for nearly 6,000 Ukrainians. As for people at risk of statelessness, a milestone result has been achieved, in that nearly all 12,000 refugees who

fled the war in former Yugoslavia now have a secure legal status in the country, thus marking the final closure of the caseload.

The public financial management system was enhanced through coordinated analytical work and technical support. This was done in parallel with actions aimed at improving SDG financing at the national level - among others, leading to the increase of the budget for education by approximately 10% by the Mid-Term Expenditure Framework (2024–2026), including a tenfold higher allocation for teacher professional development compared to 2022. The capacities of the public administration were continuously supported to deliver more efficient and better-quality services.

2.2. Cooperation Framework Priorities, Outcomes and Outputs

The 2023 reporting year was the first year of implementation of the new UNSDCF. Programme implementation around three key strategic priorities was in line with UNSDCF guiding principles and cross-cutting strategies. The former includes Leave no one behind (LNOB) and gender equality and women’s empowerment (GEWE), while the latter includes synergizing with EU accession and others, as outlined in UNSDCF. Despite the continued challenges caused by changes in Government, **the utilization of funds was at 82%**. SDG indicators show that **the progress at the Outcome level is 72%** (the percentage of indicators with steady or upward trend out of all indicators for which data was available in 2023), **while the output-level progress was as much as 87%**. Only 3 output-level indicators were not achieved, due to the delay in Government operations, and will be moved to 2024.

Output Indicator Framework for Measuring the UN contribution towards the SDGs



Target 1.1

ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY



4 new or revised national social protection policies to extend coverage, enhance comprehensiveness and/or increase adequacy of benefits

Target 6.5

IMPLEMENT INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT



3 transboundary water bodies in which programs have been initiated to strengthen cooperation and joint management

Target 8.3

PROMOTE POLICIES TO SUPPORT JOB CREATION AND GROWING ENTERPRISES



7 cases in which business support institutions/organizations have increased their capacity to provide services to their clients/ members to promote economic development and decent work

Target 9.2

PROMOTE INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIALIZATION



68 private sector entities innovated their business practices, by mainstreaming environmental, social or economic sustainability elements

Target 2.3

DOUBLE THE PRODUCTIVITY AND INCOMES OF SMALL-SCALE FOOD PRODUCERS



19 institutions with increased capacity to design, implement and fund policies preventing and reducing malnutrition and promoting healthy diets

Target 3.1

REDUCE MATERNAL MORTALITY



7 national policies on health in accordance with human rights standards are developed and adopted

Target 3.3

FIGHT COMMUNICABLE DISEASES



Almost **16,000** people directly benefitted from UN-supported health services

Target 10.2

PROMOTE UNIVERSAL SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL INCLUSION



7 bilateral, national, and local development and sectoral policies that integrate migration and recognize migrants as contributors for sustainable development developed with UN support and implemented by the Government

Target 10.3

ENSURE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND END DISCRIMINATION



Almost **10,000** people who are internally displaced, migrants, refugees benefitted from integrated and targeted interventions, including on strengthening social cohesion



Target 4.3

EQUAL ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE TECHNICAL, VOCATIONAL AND HIGHER EDUCATION



More than **35,000** people directly benefitted from improved access to skills and lifelong learning programmes

Target 4.4

INCREASE THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WITH RELEVANT SKILLS FOR FINANCIAL SUCCESS



10 technical and vocational education and training institutions with improved capacity to deliver training and assessments

Target 12.1

IMPLEMENT THE 10-YEAR SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION FRAMEWORK



2 national policy instruments aimed at supporting the shift to sustainable consumption and production, developed with UN support



Target 13.3

BUILD KNOWLEDGE AND CAPACITY TO MEET CLIMATE CHANGE



Following expiry of the previous one, the new national DRR Strategy to be developed and adopted with UN support and implemented by the Government, in line with the Sendai Framework for DRR

Target 5.1

END DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS



3 laws and regulations, based on international human rights norms and standards, developed with UN support to eliminate violence against women and girls and promote access to sexual and reproductive health

Target 5.2

END ALL VIOLENCE AGAINST AND EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS



12 measures implemented with UN support to remove structural barriers to women's empowerment



Target 5.6

UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS



37 girls and women who have received services related to harmful practices, including child early and forced marriage

Target 5.8

ADOPT AND STRENGTHEN POLICIES AND ENFORCEABLE LEGISLATION FOR GENDER EQUALITY



More than **5,000** children and adults have gained access to a safe and accessible channels to report sexual exploitation and abuse

Target 16.3

PROMOTE THE RULE OF LAW AND ENSURE EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE



9 gender-responsive, conflict-sensitive development institutions, policies, plans, or cross-border initiatives in place, with UN support, that safeguard human rights

Target 16.6

DEVELOP EFFECTIVE, ACCOUNTABLE AND TRANSPARENT INSTITUTIONS



Almost **12,000** people were supported in access to justice

Target 16.7

ENSURE RESPONSIVE, INCLUSIVE AND REPRESENTATIVE DECISION-MAKING



Meaningful participation of rights-holders, especially women, youth and discriminated groups, in selected public processes **reached level 3 out of 4**

Target 16.9

PROVIDE UNIVERSAL LEGAL IDENTITY



More than **11,000** people registered with legal identity, with UN support

Target 17.1

MOBILIZE RESOURCES TO IMPROVE DOMESTIC REVENUE COLLECTION



3 policies developed or improved for the benefit of MSMEs with business sector input, and promulgated or implemented, with UN support

Target 17.19

FURTHER DEVELOP MEASUREMENTS OF PROGRESS



Support provided to **data collection and analysis mechanisms/initiatives providing disaggregated data** to monitor progress towards the SDGs

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #1:
**INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**



All people, especially the vulnerable, benefit from improved management and state of natural resources and increasingly innovative, competitive, gender-responsive and inclusive economic development that is climate resilient and low-carbon.

by 2027

Agencies:



SDGs:



EU Chapters:



Required budget
\$ 5,792,432



Available budget
\$ 5,658,854



Expenditure
\$ 4,584,012

15 output indicators: 80% average progress rate



Delivery rate: 81%
Overall output Indicator progress rate 80%

Private Sector Growth, Economic Transformation, and Decent Jobs

(UNOPS, UNDP, ITU, ILO, UNICEF, FAO, UNESCO)

The focus of the output was to create a favourable environment for development of SMEs, support to employment and decent jobs including in agriculture sector, while incorporating digitalization and innovations as a cross-cutting elements in the above development areas.

With UN's support, the Government adopted the **National MSME Strategy**. The Strategy

strengthens the MSME sector as a leader in the transformation of the national economy. It also focuses on strengthening MSMEs capacities, digitalization and enabling environment for better access to finance, in alignment with the OECD SME Policy Index for the Western Balkans and Turkey, the EU SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe, as well as the European Green Deal for Western Balkans. In addition, the UN-supported national **information system for the competitiveness programme** greatly contributes to increased transparency and evidence-based decision making related to allocation of funds to SMEs.



Wondering how digitalization helps Vladimir, an agricultural producer, increase agricultural efficiency? [Read here.](#)

As part of this intervention, the network of stakeholders supporting MMSE development was strengthened by establishing and operationalizing the Business Info Center in four local self-governments: Tivat, Danilovgrad, Kolašin and Žabljak.

The UN also supported the **innovation eco-system** in the country. The national Innovation Fund, established with UN support, funded 85 projects, out of received over 270 innovation project proposals valued at around 7 million euros. Capacities of the Science and Technology Park (STP) to provide high-quality services for tenants in business management, fundraising, market research and sales are strengthened through the initial implementation of the STP Action Plan.

The national Innovation Fund, established with UN support, funded **85** projects, out of received over **270** innovation project proposals valued at around **7** million euros.

The Technology Transfer Office was formally established within the University of Montenegro based on the analytical study and the operations model developed by the UN, aiming to facilitate the effective transfer of innovation from academic institutions to the commercial sector.



Smart Specialization Strategy helps the country strengthen the link between science and economy. [Here's Milena's story.](#)

The **Digital Development Country Profile** for Montenegro was finalized, providing a framework for digital development that includes the three building blocks of digital transformation: access (robust ICT infrastructure), adoption (digital skills), and value creation (citizens' access to government services).

The **operational capacities of the Employment Agency (EAM)** were strengthened to deliver the active policy on employment in Montenegro through digitalization, introducing a data-based profiling system in the workflow of the EAM. This will speed up the workflow and allow for timely allocation of unemployed to

the open vacancies or available Active Labour Market Policies. Furthermore, the Government **planning and policymaking on decent jobs generation and an enabling environment** for sustainable enterprises has also been supported through targeted analytical work. Namely, the gender pay gap has been calculated in Montenegro for the first time, together with an evaluation of Montenegro's 2022 Minimum Wage and Income Tax reform.

Decent jobs were promoted through continuous advocacy for private sector engagement to implement **family-friendly policies**, which resulted in introducing the first family-friendly workplace award in the country.



How does a family-friendly working environment contribute to better work-life balance? [Read here.](#)

To support the sustainable development of agriculture and further diversification of the Montenegrin economy, the UN system built the capacities of dairy producers in the north through the initiative for **Farmers Field Schools for dairy production**. Over 30 dairy producers from three municipalities benefited from this initiative – a step that aligns with the ongoing efforts to support sustainable livestock production in the region.



Interested in how Montenegrin dairy farmers take ownership over the local development? [Read here.](#)

Going beyond agriculture and MSME development, intercultural dialogue was also fostered through **financial support to cultural and creative sectors** for increased socio-economic impact. The support provided to four public and private institutions, and civil society organizations contributed to the promotion of mobility of artists, circulation of creative goods and services, and protection of cultural heritage.

Mitigation and Adaptation for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

(UNDP, UNICEF, UNDRR, UNECE)

The national institutional framework for adapting to climate risks has been strengthened through development of the draft **National adaptation plan**. The plan provides a comprehensive review of climate risks related to the four priority sectors (water, agriculture, health, tourism) and evidence needed for identification of effective mitigation measures.



How to merge youth and creativity for action on climate urgency? [Find out here.](#)

Progress has been made towards Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) in the context of **climate change institutionalization**, advocating to reflect the MRV system in Montenegro's new Law on Protection from the Negative Effects of Climate Change. The Law contributes to achieving climate neutrality by 2050 and the long-term temperature goal set in the Paris Agreement.

In addition, **the 2020-2021 Greenhouse Gas (GHG) inventory** and the National Inventory Report (NIR) 2023, covering 1990 to 2021, have been prepared and submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), outlining the primary sectors contributing to GHG emissions. These data hold particular importance for the Government, particularly in the context of preparing for NDC3, the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP), and other climate and energy policies.

The **Just Transition** has also been placed highly on the country's agenda through the UN's advocacy, resulting in the establishment of the Working Group for Just Transition under the National Council for Sustainable Development. The Socio-economic study on the situation in the coal region Pljevlja, contributed to the development of the baseline for addressing the challenges of the **process to phase out coal** in Montenegro. This approach ensures that the transition is not only environmentally sustainable but also socially just, prioritizing the needs of workers and communities. Furthermore, inclusivity and gender responsiveness has been ensured through targeted research carried out to assess the needs, concerns, and viewpoints of women and youth. As a final output, the final draft of the Just Transition Roadmap of Montenegro was successfully developed.

The Co-Creation Hub in Pljevlja empowered **30** young people (**60%** girls) in the fields of engineering, sustainable development, entrepreneurship, and media literacy.

To further support **energy transition** in Pljevlja, the town with one the most polluted air in Europe, the UN system continued with implementation of energy efficiency programmes, particularly targeting households that are most dependent on coal-based industry. The Co-Creation Hub in Pljevlja empowered 30 young people (60% girls) in the fields of engineering, sustainable development, entrepreneurship, and media literacy.



UNOPS Montenegro / Dorđe Cmiljanić



Management of Infrastructure, Cultural and Natural Resources

(UNECE, UNESCO, UNDP, UNEP, FAO, ITU)

With the view to accelerating implementation of SDG 11 and other urban-related SDGs, the UN has developed the **Smart Sustainable Cities Profile** for Podgorica - the capital city of Montenegro. Besides evidence, the Podgorica Profile provides analyses and specific recommendations for transition towards more climate-neutral housing and inclusive, circular, smart, and sustainable city including urban planning and mobility.

Significant steps have been made towards fulfilling commitments outlined in international conventions and multilateral environmental agreements, enabling proper **management and safeguarding of cultural and natural heritage**. The revision of the institutional framework and capacities for the protection and the management of cultural heritage helped shape policy recommendations and a capacity-building program for cultural heritage institutions. The Monument Ganica Kula in Rožaje was reconstructed as one of the most

important heritage facilities. More effective management of protected areas was also achieved through development of management plans for the new marine protected areas (Katic, Stari Ulcinj and Platamuni) and through capacity building activities.

Sustainable Forest Management has also been enhanced through the assessment of the capacities of the National Forest Administration and a review of the methodology for developing forest management plans. Protection of Biodiversity Hotspots was also strengthened through the development of nature protection studies for biodiversity hotspots, considering tourism, spatial planning, forestry, and agriculture sectors.

Chemical waste management was in focus, with improvement in national legislation concerning international frameworks on mercury sources and storage and managing POPs waste. Sustainable solutions are aimed to garner policy momentum in addressing e-waste challenges in the Western Balkans region, following up on the development of the Regional E-Waste Monitor for the Western Balkans Report.

1,630 adolescents and youth were empowered for civic engagement in programmes and policies affecting air quality, through Air Quality in the Western Balkans programme.



Why is it important for local communities to convene creative, progressive young people? [Watch here.](#)

The UN also helped facilitate **digitized solutions** for energy efficiency measures, through development of the software for the Eco Fund, particularly targeting households and small to medium-sized enterprises.

In the area of **DRR**, the INFORM subnational risk index was published for Montenegro. It provides a quick overview of the underlying factors leading to disaster risk, supporting a proactive disaster risk management framework, including compliance with the implementation of the Sendai Framework for DRR, SDGs, and other global initiatives.

The UN also helped improve the **flood forecasting system** within the Institute for Hydrometeorology and Seismology by

upgrading the database for storing and processing climatological data. In addition, the disaster recovery system has been enhanced by preparing the Law on Recovery after Natural Hazards, in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior - Rescue and Protection Directorate.

Furthermore, the **UN's Water Convention's** Implementation Committee responded to a request made by Montenegro related to its concerns about the possible transboundary impact of planned small hydropower plants on the Cijevna/Cem River in Albania. The two countries are now implementing the Committee's legal and technical advice developed through a series of consultations and accepted by both countries.





STRATEGIC PRIORITY #2:
**HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT, REDUCING
VULNERABILITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION**

2 **OUTCOME**

All people, especially the vulnerable, increasingly benefit from equitable, gender-responsive and universally accessible social and child protection system and quality services, including labour market activation and capabilities

by 2027

3 **OUTCOME**

All people, especially the vulnerable, benefit from strengthened human capital including early childhood development, and more resilient, gender-responsive, and quality healthcare and education

by 2027

Agencies:



SDGs:



EU Chapters:



Required budget
\$ 7,558,792



Available budget
\$ 6,857,567



Expenditure
\$ 5,804,455

19 output indicators: 87% average progress rate



Delivery rate: 85%
Overall output Indicator progress rate 87%

Fully achieved Partially achieved

Social and Child Protection

(UNICEF, UNDP)

Within this area, the focus was on improving the **strategic and normative framework**, and institutional capacities to provide child and culturally sensitive, disability inclusive and gender-responsive quality social and child protection. Key policy documents, including the Strategy for the Development of the Social and Child Protection System 2024-2028 and Strategy on Deinstitutionalization 2024-2028, were drafted with UN support, and inputs provided to the new Law on Social and Child Protection. In addition, a new legal framework and methodology for disability assessment aligned with a human rights-based approach and the UN CRPD, is in the final stage of development. The ongoing reforms will bring Montenegro closer to EU accession priorities and to the goals set in Agenda 2030.

Extensive and continuous support for **accelerating deinstitutionalization** and developing family-based care for the most vulnerable children yielded remarkable results in 2023: the country recorded zero children under 3 years of age in institutions; the number of children in residential care decreased by 10%, and the number of children in foster care increased by almost 10% compared to 2022.

Reforming foster care system and establishing the first Centre for Foster Care has been initiated with UN expert support.

Besides legislative reform, the UN system **supported capacities of 430 professionals** across six sectors. They gained stronger skills and knowledge on cross-sectoral cooperation, response to violence against children, prevention of deinstitutionalization of children with disabilities, case management in cases of children exposed to violence and exploitation, and child-friendly justice principles in work with children victims of violence. The Institute for Social and Child Protection was also supported in providing 16 certified training programs for 200 participants for licensing/license renewal of professional workers in social and child protection, thus raising capacities and improving the quality of social services.

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How important are social services for Muhammed, a single father from Roma and Egyptian community in Montenegro? [Find out here.](#)

Continued support to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare for upgrading and maintaining the **e-Social Information System** resulted in processing over 230 million EUR in 2023 for social protection entitlements, with over 200,000 individual payments per month, targeting 180,000 beneficiaries. At the same time, newly introduced functionalities enabled legal change enforcement, including newborn allowance, increased personal disability allowance and one-time financial assistance,

as a part of the EU support package, as well as unified Administrative Reporting.

The UN system also supported the construction of a **Day Care Centre** for Elderly in Zeta municipality as well as several ongoing initiatives on improving facilities for the provision of social and childcare services. Additionally, up to 150 users benefited from the support provided by 12 Day Care Centres for elderly in 10 municipalities. In response

to the urgent requirement of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare to establish **temporary shelter for children victims of human trafficking**, UN system has initiated the

necessary procedures, offering collaborative assistance to the Government in promptly addressing the immediate issue, while intensifying collaboration with OSCE and Council of Europe on this matter.

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Capacities of the NGO sector to support some of the most vulnerable persons were strengthened: 214 women, girls, and boys received information on accessing GBV risk mitigation, prevention, and response interventions. Special focus was on refugee **children from Ukraine** – 389 Ukrainian refugee children and caregivers received psychosocial support and 505 Ukrainian children, enrolled in formal education system, benefited from activities implemented by the Ministry of Education with UN support.



Refugee children bear serious trauma from their homeland. That is why psychosocial support is critical for them. [Read more here.](#)

The National Action Plan for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention was developed through the Regional Programme on **ending violence against women**. Four new support services for women with experience of violence were established and licensed.



How Roma and Egyptian women were empowered to resist violence and prevent child marriages? [Read here.](#)

School to Work Transition and Employability

(UNDP, UNICEF, ILO, UNHCR)

The **National Youth Strategy 2023-2027** with an Action Plan for 2023-2024 was developed through an inclusive process. This had an immediate follow-up, with local self-governments creating local youth action plans based on the national strategy, enabling a comprehensive development of national and local youth policy.

A **school-to-work transition programme “Prilike”** supported 450 adolescent girls and boys across four schools and two regions through on-the-job training and career guidance, with the aim of integrating this into the official school curriculum.



How did David, a high-school student, benefit from practical learning as a part of his regular education? [Find out here.](#)



UNDP Montenegro

Through an **activation measure to promote the inclusion of women** (aged 25-34) who are inactive due to care and family responsibility, but who are willing to work, thirty-seven women with preschool children from the registry of unemployed at the Employment Agency of Montenegro (EAM) were activated to transition to the labor market.

and use lessons learnt for future Active Labour Market Policy developments under the upcoming Youth Guarantee.

As many as 40% of the refugees currently owning businesses in Montenegro benefited from UN’s technical, legal or consultancy support to their entrepreneurial pursuit.

The measure included a monthly non-contributory activation allowance, a lump sum contribution towards the costs of child-care, a lump-sum contribution towards transport costs (if needed). A subsidized on-the-job training to increase employability was provided for a period ranging from three to six months. The implementation of an innovative activation measure allowed the EAM to gain experience

As many as **40%** of the refugees currently owning businesses in Montenegro benefited from UN’s technical, legal or consultancy support to their entrepreneurial pursuit.

Management of mixed migrations

(IOM, UNHCR)

In the area of **return and reintegration**, 1142 migrants were reached through 173 counseling sessions, while 4584 migrants received information on Assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR). The UN facilitated the return of 12 migrants to their countries of origin, and reintegration of 4 migrants to Montenegro.

Technical capacities at both **reception centers** (Bozaj and Spuz) were strengthened, and investments made in site improvements and upgrading facilities for migrants. Out of the total number of new arrivals in 2023 (4,986 migrants), the UN supported the transport of

In the area of return and reintegration, **1,142** migrants were reached through **173** counseling sessions, while **4,584** migrants received information on **Assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR)**.

Out of the total number of new arrivals in 2023 (**4,986** migrants), the UN supported the transport of **959** beneficiaries, provided information to **4,047** persons, psychosocial support to **278** persons and interpretation to **2,171** persons in the Reception center Bozaj.

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Fifty-four frontline officers of Reception centers, Border Police, and Centers for Social Work have **better knowledge** in the domain of human rights and gender equality, while 18 officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are now able to detect forged documents/visas and profile passengers in line with FRONTEX Curriculum.

A Western Balkans **Regional Group of Readmission Specialists** was established, which will serve as an informal collaborative platform enabling knowledge sharing on return and readmission in the region. An Assessment of policy, institutional and service gaps related to sustainable socio-economic reintegration of returnees in Montenegro has been prepared and presented at Western Balkans Peer Exchange Event.

More than 7,000 individuals benefited from **community-based initiatives**, including through the provision of furniture and technical equipment in Ukrainian cultural centers in Podgorica, Bar, Budva, and Herceg Novi as well as materials for occupational therapy, among other things.

The Law on Foreigners was drafted with the UN support to ensure improved access to socio-economic rights for stateless persons, a visa regime for persons arriving in Montenegro through family reunification procedure, and access to the labor market for persons granted international protection. Asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless persons and those at risk of statelessness benefited from supporting line institutions to **implement the Roma and Egyptian Inclusion Strategy** and **Migration Strategy**.

Healthcare

(WHO, UNICEF)

Steps have been made to strengthen **emergency preparedness** through setting up Public Health Emergency Operating Centre, while access to **Universal Health Coverage** has been improved through UN's technical assistance to upgrading TB diagnostic treatment and strengthening the routine immunization system.

MMR (measles) vaccination coverage increased from 24% to 43% through a massive callback campaign, development of procedures and capacity building in various crucial areas (trained 390 professionals), procurement of cold chain equipment, and community engagement, alongside upgrading the immunization registry by adding gender disaggregation. Furthermore, in partnership with the Ministry of Health, the **quality of maternal and neonatal services** in health facilities in Montenegro was assessed, noting that, despite some progress, quality of care for both mothers and babies needs further improvement.

The UN also helped the country shape its policies on improving health and **nutrition**, following the Montenegro Nutrition Survey (MONS), measuring micronutrient deficiencies among children 6-59 months and women of reproductive age, pregnant women, and metabolic syndrome.

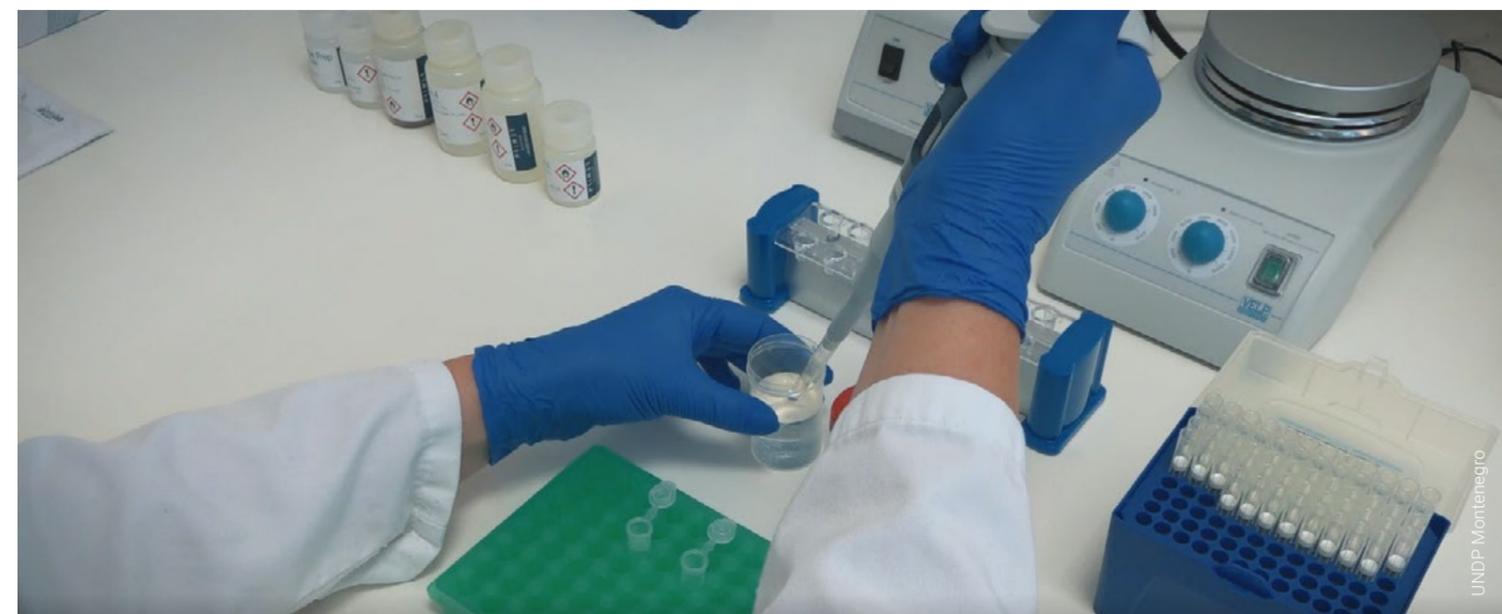
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Over 100 parents and caregivers benefited from the first Parenting for Lifelong Health for Teens program as part of developing innovative, accessible, and diversified adolescent-friendly **mental health and well-being services**.

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One third of Ukrainian refugees decides to stay in Montenegro, making a staggering 10% of the country's population. [Read more here](#).



children attending preschool education increased by 11%, although is still not at a satisfactory level. The percentage of children with disabilities attending preschool education increased by only 0.6%.

Monitoring and implementation of integrated ECD policies were enabled through UN support for the development of the **first national ECD Strategy**, adopted by the Government of

Montenegro in 2023, and already followed by local protocols on intersectoral collaboration on ECD in Bijelo Polje, Cetinje and Kotor.

Almost 700 children benefited from contemporary screening and early intervention methods, delivered by 46 professionals trained in transdisciplinary, family-centered early intervention across the country.



Why is it important for child-supporting institutions to have a human face?
[Learn from Zeljka's experience, here.](#)

Preschool enrollment rates for ages 3 to 6 improved by **1%** since the school year 2019/2020, reaching **78%**, while a significant increase was observed for ages 0-3 (**49%** vs. **28%** two years back). The number of Roma children attending preschool education increased by **11%**, although is still not at a satisfactory level. The percentage of children with disabilities attending preschool education increased by only 0.6%.

The number of parents benefiting from parenting support, using the Bebbio mobile app, exceeded **12 thousand**, while more than **400** parents were recruited in the face-to-face Caring Families program, delivered by **41** trained professionals.

Preschool teachers and directors are capacitated to use **digital tools** in everyday learning and collaboration. Over 119 courses with 635 lessons are now available to children, parents, and professionals on a digital platform. During 2023, 20% of all preschool teachers used the "Digital school". Support was also provided to Ukrainian children attending preschool education.



What gathered mothers from Montenegro and Ukraine around caring parenting?
[Read their story here.](#)

In partnership with the Red Cross of Montenegro, forty parents of refugees born in Montenegro, were supported **to overcome language, cultural, and administrative barriers to access services**, paving the way for the development of an enabling environment for their children.





**STRATEGIC PRIORITY #3:
SOCIAL COHESION, PEOPLE-CENTRED
GOVERNANCE, RULE OF LAW
AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

4 OUTCOME

All people, especially the vulnerable, benefit from improved social cohesion, increased realization of human rights and rule of law and accountable, gender-responsive institutions

by 2027

Agencies:



SDGs:



EU Chapters:



Required budget
\$ 7,158,539

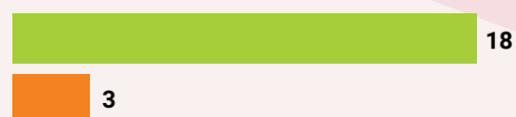


Available budget
\$ 6,809,899



Expenditure
\$ 5,391,731

21 output indicators: 93% average progress rate



Delivery rate: 79%
Overall output Indicator progress rate 93%

■ Fully achieved ■ Partially achieved

Rule of law and human rights

(UNICEF, OHCHR, UNHCR, UNDP)

Several important milestones were achieved at the system level: in line with Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations for Montenegro (2010, 2018), the **Child Rights Council**, as a high-level cross-sectoral body, was set up, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister with the participation of relevant ministers, CSOs, and youth representatives. The Council has adopted two-years Action Plan with UN's technical assistance. The definition of a child was amended in the **Criminal Code** and aligned with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Finally, an **Independent Monitoring Mechanism (IMM)** for the promotion, protection, and monitoring of the implementation of the UN CRPD was established. The mechanism consists of the Protector for Human Rights and Freedoms and 10 organizations and associations of persons with disabilities.

With UN's assistance, the Parliament has been increasingly using its role as a key Child rights monitoring stakeholder to question the Government and key line ministries on child rights situation.

The capacity and knowledge of line Ministries, the Protector for Human Rights and Freedoms and civil society to engage with UN human rights mechanisms were enhanced. About 150 Montenegrin officials from the executive, legislative, and judiciary, the Protector's Office and civil society were actively engaged with the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Montenegro in May and in the visit of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers in September. For the first time, a member of the Roma community conducted advocacy with diplomats in Geneva

before the UPR, facilitated with UN support.

Furthermore, Montenegro made a [human rights pledge](#) at the Human Rights Council, in commemoration of the 75th anniversary for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the 2023 Global Refugees Forum event, Montenegro submitted 3 new pledges to improve protection of stateless persons, primarily related to socio-economic rights and regional cooperation on statelessness. The Administrative Court of Montenegro, Bar Association, and the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms were **capacitated to work with asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless persons/persons at risk of statelessness**, through UN's technical and expert support. The Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms was supported to undertake 22 visits to the most important border areas, to assess the quality of procedures with asylum seekers and refugees and a set of recommendations for their improvement were provided.

Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare and the Employment agency were supported to include temporary protection holders in the law that regulates services of the Employment agency and access to the rights and services during unemployment. In addition, better access to labour market was enabled through extended duration of their work contracts to three-month period.

The UN helped improve the performance of the rule of law institutions regarding the **handling of war crimes** through developing the draft Strategy for War Crimes Investigation. At the policy level, support was also provided to prepare the new **Anti-discrimination Law and the Law on gender recognition based on self-determination**.



Young people push boundaries: Find out [here](#) about new culture and quality standards for social action.

Public Administration, Data, Digitalisation and Public Finance Management

(ITU, UNDP, UNICEF, UN WOMEN)

Recognizing digitization as one of the mechanisms for human development, strengthening societal resilience, and ensuring transparency and equal opportunities for all citizens, the UN actively contributes to the **digital transformation of Montenegrin institutions**. To support this process, an

Internet Protocol version 6 Laboratory was created at the country level to provide the foundation for educational programs in third-level education, and re-skilling and upskilling trainings. Digital public infrastructure has been further developed, through setting up of national digital platforms like the **Single information system for electronic data exchange** and the e-Government portal for electronic services. Six interoperable electronic services of the highest level of sophistication were developed, while five more will be considered as a priority in the next phase.



As “digital natives”, young people easily adopt new technologies and knowledge prioritizing digital skills. Jelena enrolled at the Faculty of Sports & Physical Education in Nikšić via the www.upisi.edu.me platform, which was developed with UN support. Watch the video story [here](#).



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Furthermore, the UN supported **digitalization of the Health System** through development of an information system for the Clinical Center of Montenegro, aiming to enable easier, better, and more efficient access to healthcare services. This was followed by the preparation of the strategic and regulatory framework for the efficient functioning of the Integral Health Information System and e-health.

Significant steps have been made in equipping women with the necessary skills and creating a supportive network for their professional growth when it comes to **leadership in cybersecurity**, through six hands-on training for 75 attendees.

Transparent and Accountable **Public Finance Management** has been strengthened, most notably through the development of Montenegro’s Economic Reform Programme 2024-2026, leading to an anticipated 5.8% economic growth. The creation of the Program for Suppression of the Informal Economy 2024 – 2026 to reduce the informal sector’s impact on the economy was also supported. The UN established stronger partnership with the Ministry of Finance to implement Child Rights Budgeting in Montenegro, in line with recommendations of the CRC, and Child Budgeting Analysis was developed to assess the gap between strategies and budget allocations for children in the state budget, with a view of improving linkages between laws, policies, and budgeting.

Special focus was given to data disaggregation, taxonomy of disability-focused social spending, and mapping of disability-related programs through technical assistance to the Ministry of Finance. In addition, the UN jointly developed CRPD-Compliant Disability-Inclusive Budgeting Guidelines, to provide guidance and tools to the line ministries and authorities to effectively address inequalities that persons with disabilities face and reduce or remove barriers to their full inclusion in society. The capacity of 27 officials was built on how to use the guidelines to reflect the needs of children, youth, and adults with disabilities within sectoral budgets at national and local level.

A step towards improving the institutional framework for SDG implementation has been made through the UN-supported **audit of the Government’s implementation of the SDGs, particularly SDG 5**, and fulfilling other commitments to gender equality. The initiative was conducted by State Audit Institution.

Citizens’ participation

(UNICEF, OHCHR, UNDP)

Youth was the focus of several UN programmes and activities aiming at supporting citizens’ participation.

UNICEF Montenegro Young Reporters led a **youth political campaign**. It culminated in a live two-hour dialogue two days before the elections with representatives of all political lists.

Furthermore, ten adolescent and youth teams were trained in human-centered design and design thinking methodologies to develop their community initiatives and projects, reaching a further 1,200 indirect beneficiaries in the follow-up.

More than 80 children and youth drafted and signed a **human rights pledge**, presented at the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in Geneva.

A large number of children, young persons, parents and others learned about the UDHR as they took part in the online **‘Your Rights’/‘Tvoja Prava’ campaign** by the UN.

More than **33,000** persons saw the posts, while more than **2,700** interacted with the campaign.

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[Bringing Human Rights Declaration to children and youth.](#)

The UN strengthened the **capacity of local governments to build partnerships with civil society and youth** in Montenegro through the Second Public Calls in five Clusters of municipalities, resulting in signing 39 new NGO Projects.

Under the youth component, around 400 youth from 14 local self-governments enhanced their skills through trainings and mentoring support, while 34 youth community actions were selected for funding. 116 representatives of 65 NGOs learnt about project cycle management to improve their knowledge and ability to apply for Public Calls in 14 municipalities.

See how some of the funded actions benefitted communities at large:



- » [Mobilizing art for urban transformation.](#)
- » [Making forests preservation a hype.](#)
- » [Women as the guardians of craft and tradition.](#)
- » [Milica turned her beekeeping hobby into a business.](#)

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The UN continued its work with media.

Fourteen journalists gained better knowledge how to use UN human rights mechanisms to protect the freedom of expression and safety of journalists. They subsequently used the Universal Periodic Review to conduct advocacy, contributing to UN Member States making sixteen recommendations related to media. More than 100 journalists from Montenegro joined by colleagues from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia made a human rights pledge to respect and promote human rights, committing to ethical and professional journalism, and ensuring that their outlets would not serve as platforms for discrimination and hate speech.



[Check out journalists' pledges for greater human rights protection.](#)



Hear the voices of youth on media literacy:

- » [on beauty standards pressure](#)
- » [on screen addiction](#)

GBV and violence against women, children, and the elderly

(UN WOMEN, UNICEF, UNDP)

The Ministry of Justice was capacitated to implement a protection measure – **the bracelet for victims and perpetrators system** (EMS). Support to the CSO Centre for Roma Initiatives resulted in the establishment of **two new licensed services**: a psychological counseling service and the National SOS line for victims and potential victims of child marriage. The draft of the new **Strategy on**

Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence 2024-2028 was developed, focusing on strengthening prevention and cross-sectoral cooperation. Inter-sectoral coordination was supported through increased capacities of 259 professionals from social and child protection, health, education, judiciary and law enforcement sectors. In addition, a large scale research project Disrupting Harm was initiated in 2023. Data from the research will provide unique insights on how online child sexual exploitation and abuse is manifesting. The research is coordinated by the Ministry of Interior and supported by the UN.



Women with disabilities shared experiences of violence and actions needed to tackle violence as part of a series of Gender Equality Talks. [Read here some of their inspiring testimonies.](#)



Countering hate speech

(OHCHR, UNDP, UNESCO)

The UN Country Team continued to implement its action plan designed under UN's Global Strategy and Action Plan on Hate Speech.



On the occasion of marking the International Day for Countering Hate Speech, young people sent clear messages on their experience with hate speech at every step of the way. [Read more here.](#)

Local dialogue platforms in 10 towns enabled dialogue and collaborative action for countering hate speech and bridging divides. This initiative raised awareness and capacities, explored the causes and consequences of sexism and sexist hate speech, and proposed recommendations to prevent and combat these manifestations of gender inequality. It engaged 200 participants and enhanced the capacities of 37 journalists from 13 media outlets, 14 local self-governments, 14 CSOs, and 70 young people.



How is the next generation building a culture of equality? [Find out here.](#)



Recognizing the importance of regional cooperation in addressing negative narratives, capacities of 149 young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro were built to tackle negative narratives and to actively engage in the fight against harmful content, misinformation, and manipulative content, through the UN's **Regional Youth Academy on Constructive Narratives**. The Academy was also an opportunity for academic collaboration and knowledge exchange among regional experts in the field of Media and Information Literacy (MIL).

Combatting corruption and organized crime

(UNODC, IOM, UNDP)

With UN's efforts on enhancing the criminal justice system's response to organized crime and illicit firearms trafficking, the **Law amending and supplementing the Criminal Code** was adopted, aligning domestic criminal legislation with the UN Firearms Protocol. Firearms trafficking has also been countered by enhanced capacities to track those through postal parcels, institutionalized through Standard Operating Procedures adopted by Montenegrin Customs Administration and Designated Postal Operator.

Border control has been enhanced, and **capacities strengthened to effectively detect and counter the trafficking of drugs and prevent illicit cross-border activities** through identified partnerships and network initiatives linking the Port of Bar with customs and police administrations of the EU and other countries. The UN strengthened state capacities to fight trafficking in persons (TIP) and smuggling of migrants (SOM), through national and regional capacity building activities and cooperation initiatives for 102 professionals. The Criminal Police Department received technical and tactical equipment for identification and investigation efforts in TIP and SOM.

The **analysis of trafficking cases** was developed, and led to actionable

Local dialogue platforms engaged **200** participants and enhanced the capacities of **37** journalists from **13** media outlets, **14** local self-governments, **14** CSOs, and **70** young people.

recommendations, addressing gaps and challenges in Montenegro. In addition, an analysis of legislative framework against applicable EU and international standards regulating online and technology-facilitated trafficking in human beings was developed, while relevant institutions have been capacitated on online facilitated TIP.

Substantial progress was achieved in enhancing the **protection and support system for victims of trafficking** in Montenegro, by facilitating the establishment of the only shelter for victims. Significant efforts were made to raise public awareness on the phenomenon and the dangers of trafficking in human beings. Two campaigns were conducted- the campaign in 15 local communities in Montenegro, with 2000 leaflets handed out and an online campaign which was promoted on social media, four radio stations and TV, reaching almost 100,000 people.

Capacity for **Crime Scene Investigation** has been enhanced through equipping specialized laboratories with to process evidence from the

Two campaigns against trafficking in human beings were conducted - the campaign in **15** local communities in Montenegro, with **2000** leaflets handed out and an online campaign which was promoted on social media, four radio stations and TV, reaching almost **100,000** people.

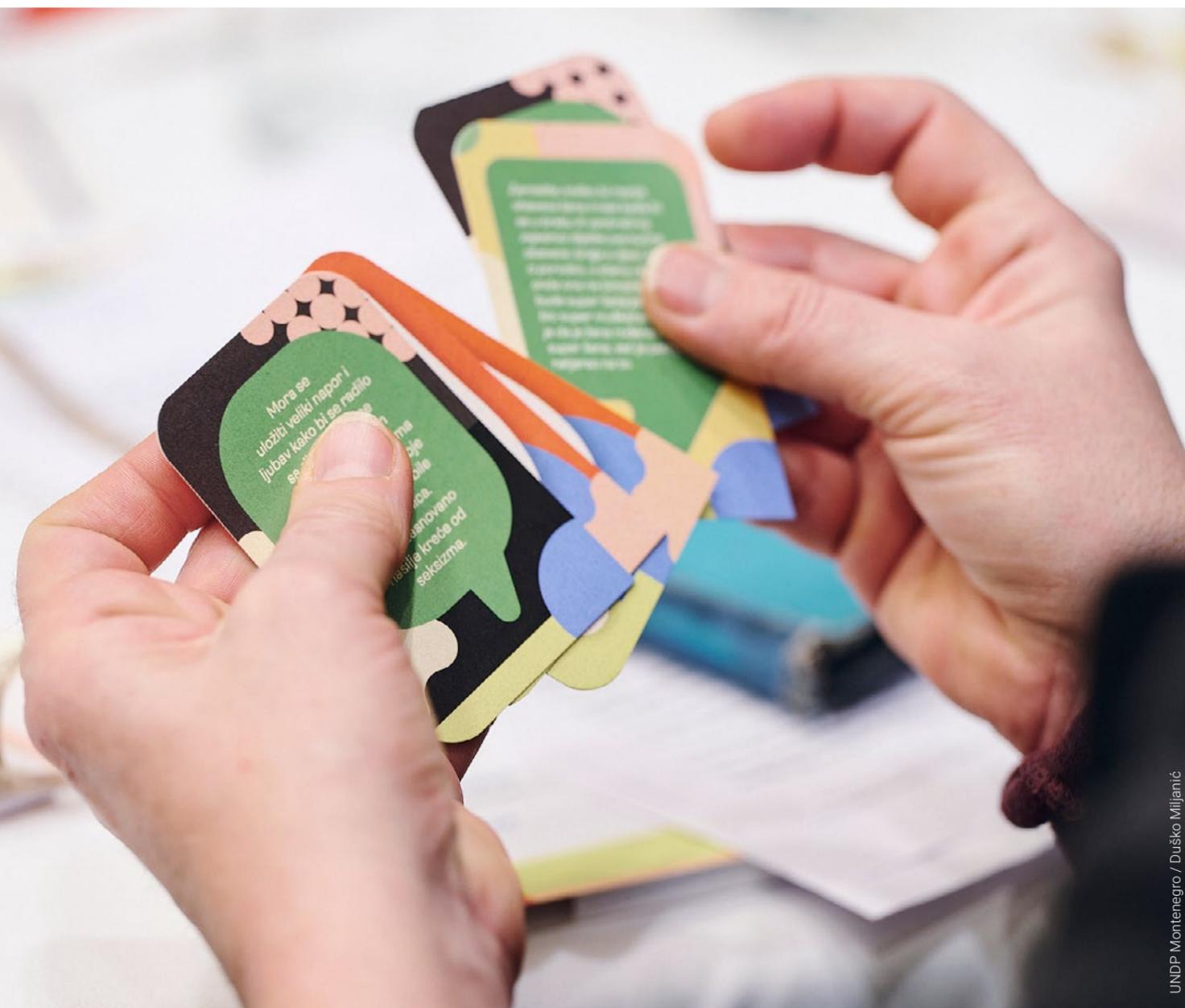
crime committed by explosives. Standard operation procedures were developed for the Forensic Center and professionals were trained to use the equipment and on ISO Standards 17025.



The country progresses towards the latest standards in forensics, as stated by the Head of national Forensic Center. [Find out how.](#)

Capacity to recover proceeds of crime was strengthened through the development of a fast action response guide on **asset recovery** for Montenegrin criminal justice practitioners.

In the area of **corruption**, the UN support led to enhanced **implementation and monitoring of anti-corruption measures in public institutions** following an assessment of anti-corruption measures of all 45 authorities in the judiciary. Furthermore, as members of the Global Operational Network of Law Enforcement Authorities (**Globe**), Montenegrin institutions (e.g. Ministry of Interior, Special State Prosecution Office) joined the regional component of this network, which was launched in 2023 to facilitate regional and transnational cooperation on corruption cases.



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Below is the non-exhaustive list of the most commonly identified challenges that somewhat hindered implementation of particular programme interventions, as well as recommendations and lessons learnt from their implementation:



CHALLENGES

The operational environment marked by government changes and parliamentary elections affected the regular pace of operations. Additionally, frequent changes at technical level hindered continuity of the reforms and caused delays in the implementation of international commitments.

- Limited capacities for operationalizing cross-sectoral coordination
- Insufficient data for evidence-based planning
- Insufficient allocation of funding for implementation of commitments from the national strategies
- Limited capacities for operationalizing cross-sector and central vs. local level coordination- the need for merit-based administration
- Insufficient technical and IT skills in the public sector institutions



RECOMMENDATIONS/LESSONS LEARNT

- Volatile political environment, which includes changes in national and local government structures can be mitigated by strengthening cooperation with the institutional mid-management, to minimize obstacles to programme implementation. Stability is a pre-condition for implementing systemic reforms in the areas of social welfare, employment, health and education.
- More direct engagement with the Parliament as a fundamental custodian of political accountability is critical to achieving sustainable results of development initiatives.
- There is the need to continue accelerating and strengthening cross-sectoral cooperation through policy dialogue, analytical products, platforms for multi-sectoral work and financing.
- Consensus on key development priorities should only be reached through dialogue with citizens, children, youth, women, and representatives of all groups whose voice is not being heard.
- Great potential of public-private partnerships should be capitalized upon.



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2.3. Support to Partnerships and Financing the 2030 Agenda

The United Nations System in Montenegro preserved the position of trusted and a partner of choice for a broad range of stakeholders in the society, despite the vibrant political developments in the last year. Primarily, this refers to the national and local governments, as well as the independent state institutions (Ombudsperson, Statistical Office, and others), as well as the broad, trusted, and strong partnership with the civil society. The latter focuses on cooperation with the groups at risk of being left behind: women, people with disabilities, Roma and Egyptian community, human rights organizations, and similar. The UN Montenegro continues to play a pivotal role in establishing the **Strategic Partnership Coordination** – a mechanism for enhancing coordination among the international development partners working in Montenegro, and coordination of international development partners with the Government of

Montenegro. The key achievements in 2023 include institutionalization of this initiative under the Office for Sustainable Development in the General Secretariat of the Government. The amendments to the Law on Budget and Fiscal Responsibility ensured that the process of exchange of information on international cooperation and the EU within the Government is streamlined and anchored with the Office for Sustainable Development. Close cooperation with the Strategic Policy Unit of the Government and the Ministry of European Affairs ensures that this partnership platform lays a foundation to grow the space for policy, programme, and financial deliberations among the strategic partners.

2023 was also the first year of operations of the **Montenegro SDG Acceleration Fund**, an innovative and strategic platform for partnerships to address key issues of the EU accession process, implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Montenegro and the country-level UN Reform, under the overarching Cooperation Framework priorities. The Fund is a pooled funding mechanism established with the

UN's Multi Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) that is currently capitalized with approximately 7 million USD (more than 7% of the forecasted financial value of Cooperation Framework).

The Fund is based on **three windows**: (i) traditional/institutional, (ii) EU Window, and (iii) private sector window. Through **the institutional window** the UN facilitates development partnership among Montenegro, who itself contributed 1 million EUR to the Fund, Switzerland, Austria, Luxembourg, and Ireland. Through **the EU Window**, the UN Montenegro closely cooperates with the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and the European Union itself, on implementation of the EU Reform Facility. Finally, within **the private sector window**, the UN established close ties with Montenegrin diaspora expecting to operationalize their support to the country

through the Montenegro SDG Acceleration Fund on the basis of match-funding modality. To do this, but also to reach to the individual donors, the UN has developed a stand-alone fundraising platform in cooperation with the UN Foundation and the UN Office for Partnerships. The fundraising platform was inspired by positive examples of the humanitarian system of the United Nations. The private sector window also established partnership with the National Electricity Company – EPCG who promotes the Fund through their electricity bills. Through this marketing vehicle, the Montenegro SDG Acceleration Fund reached to every household and every entity, private and public, in Montenegro.

Sounding boards are convened, including with women entrepreneurs, and they play an active role in the society through targeted UN advocacy.

Some examples of strong and multiple-layered partnerships:

- » Under the auspices of the Council for Sustainable Development, a comprehensive dialogue on **Just Transition** was initiated in 2023, leading to the establishment of a society-wide coalition for Just Transition. This coalition brings together leaders and practitioners from national, local, and international institutions and civil society organizations, trade unions, financial institutions, as well as experts, representatives of the private sector, academic community, media, and the public, including specific groups like women, youth, and marginalized populations. Through this coalition, diverse perspectives and expertise come together to address the comprehensive challenges of transitioning away from coal dependence. (UNDP)
- » In partnership with Duke University and BIT (Biheavioral Insights Team), two innovative behavioral insights (BI) interventions for immunizations and improved responsiveness of the cash benefits to the children's needs were introduced. The BI intervention has been used to help shape the strategies that will optimize the use of child allowances. Also, RCT (randomized controlled trial) has been implemented related to low immunization coverages. These innovative interventions contributed to gaining social and behavioral change specific knowledge and laid the foundation for better integration of SBC in this intervention. (UNICEF)
- » The Business Council on Child Rights brings together representatives of the private sector to combine efforts and resources for socially responsible initiatives that will lead to concrete, sustainable and positive changes in children's lives. The 2023 initiative resulted in procuring the equipment for the Neonatology Centre, including incubators, ventilators and armchairs for kangaroo care, accompanied by tailored training of personnel. (UNICEF)

2.4. Results of the UN more and better together: UN coherence, effectiveness and efficiency

The new UNSDCF is governed by a jointly agreed revitalized management structure. Separate inter-agency groups were established on Monitoring, evaluation and learning, Gender equality and women's empowerment, Human rights & LNOB and on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), aiming at further strengthening of system efficiency in these areas.

Innovations have been introduced in the area covered by the new **MEL/SDG Policy group** such as internal documents repository aiming at strengthening knowledge management, both internally, but also with Government partners. The system of MEL focal points for results groups also led to increased efficiency and effectiveness of the Joint Work Plan review and reporting process.

The **Gender Thematic Group** continued to ensure a coordinated UN system approach to promote gender equality and empowerment of girls and women, and the results of UN SWAP (Gender Scorecard exercise) of 100% of indicators either meeting or exceeding the required criteria speak for themselves.

The UN Montenegro Task Force on **PSEA** continued to lead inter-agency work to ensure an organizational culture of zero tolerance and establishment of safe and trusted reporting mechanisms. A brochure on Sexual Harassment – Recognize, React, Report – was developed by the PSEA Task Force. A 24/7 system for reporting alleged cases of SEA is operationalized and NO EXCUSE cards disseminated to all contractual partners to UN.

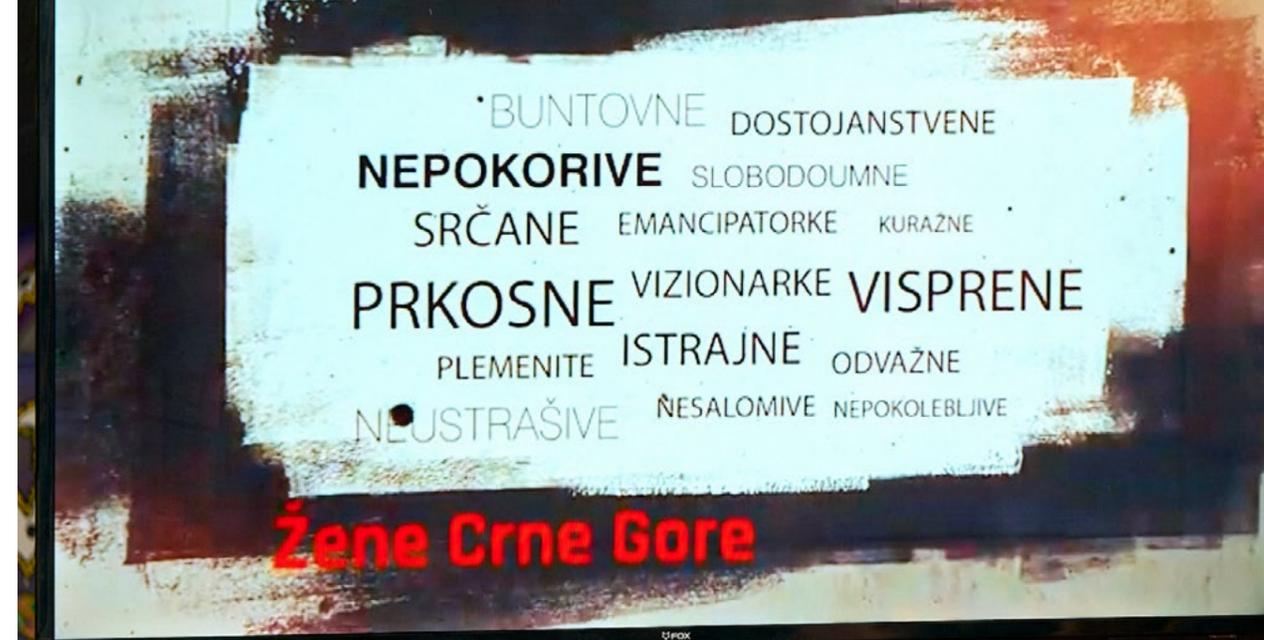
UNCT intensified the engagement on **disability inclusion** in general, and with organizations of persons with disabilities, throughout the year. Staff gained better knowledge and capacity to better integrate disability in operations and

programming through focus group discussions led by Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) to assess the level of participation of persons with disabilities in the work of the UN in Montenegro. Eighty-one staff members (58 women, 23 men) subsequently took part in training on disability inclusion facilitated by OPDs in June. Recommendations by OPDs to further enhance disability inclusion in the UN made will inform UN agency action from 2024. UN Eco House's **accessibility for persons with disabilities**, especially with visual impairments, was further improved.

The Business Operations Strategy served as a platform for business and operational coordination among OMT members and UN RC Office. The OMT completed the annual review of BOS and Common country premises plan, identifying opportunities for greater efficiency. The annual review reinstated the good quality of common services, showing good scoring by all indicators.

The UN joint approach to programming was intensified in 2023. Montenegro acceleration fund approved four joint initiatives while a comprehensive joint programme on strengthening social cohesion was approved by **UN Peace Building Fund**. The last will support national partners in addressing growing challenges of contemporary societies among others, addressing divisive narratives and hate speech as a precondition to global peace and security.

The UN Country Team also provided **space throughout the year to representatives of discriminated groups** to publicly raise awareness of the challenges these groups face. As examples, members of the Roma and Egyptian community, the LGBTI community, persons with disabilities briefed the diplomatic community based in Montenegro and in Geneva, in anticipation of the May 2023 Universal Periodic Review by the UN Human Rights Council. Activities continued to implement the second year of the UNCT's **Hate Speech Action Plan**.



The United Nations in Montenegro introduced a knowledge product – **policy briefs**. In 2023, two policy briefs were produced: (i) on SDG Financing and (ii) on development of the North of Montenegro. The policy briefs add value to the development and policy discussion in the country. The briefs gathered partners such as the civil society, IFIs, academia, and state administration. **The policy brief on SDG Financing** already triggered programmatic response through the SDG Financing Working Group of the UN Montenegro, where topics such as gender-based budgeting, budget tagging, child-based budgeting, public finance reform, and others are being discussed and translated into action.

The policy brief on the north highlighted disparities based on geographic location, in

the areas of the economy, service delivery and human capital outcomes, suggesting that the population in the north is significantly behind those living in Montenegro's central and southern region and that some the disparities were widening. The policy brief makes recommendations to tackle the disparities and as such presents a step forward in identifying how different groups that are at risk of being left behind benefitting from development, in the context of inadequate data, and limited disaggregation of data in particular.

The UN continued the implementation of System-Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's empowerment, the Disability Inclusion Strategy and Youth 2030 Strategy. All three respective scorecards show a steady or increasing trend, as shown below:

	2021	2022	2023	trend
 Youth scorecard Moving forward/at milestone	85%	88%	88%	↔
 Gender scorecard Meeting/Exceeding	80%	80%	100%	↑
 Disability scorecard Meeting/Exceeding	50%	64%	71%	↑

Figure 5: Progress on Youth, Gender and Disability Scorecard indicators

2.5. Financial Overview and Resource Mobilization

2023 was the first year of implementation of the Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2023-2027. The multi-year Funding Framework, an exercise that mapped the financial needs of respective UN Organisations suggests that the UN Organisations need 83.3 million USD to implement the programmatic priorities of the Cooperation Framework. Approximately, 49% of this amount was already secured when the Cooperation Framework was signed, while 48.3 million USD shall be mobilised during programme implementation.

In 2023, UN Organisations required 20.5 million USD for programme implementation, with 94.2% of this amount available at the beginning of the year. Out of the available 19.3million USD, the UN Montenegro delivered 15.7 million USD or 82%. More than a third of this delivery was attributed to UNDP, as the largest agency of the Montenegrin UN Country Team, with close to 6 million USD, followed by UNICEF's investments of 2 million USD. Other UN Organisations with country presence (UNHCR, IOM, ILO, WHO, UNOPS, OHCHR) delivered 5,4 million USD, while the remaining 2.3 million USD was delivered by the UN Organisations without country presence (figure 6).

Thematically, the UN Montenegro dedicated the most resources to strategic priority on human capital development, reducing vulnerability, social inclusion (5.8 million USD, or 37% of the total expenditure), followed by strategic priority on social cohesion, people-centered governance, rule of law and human rights (5.4 million USD, or 34% of total expenditure). The remaining 4.5 million was invested in the strategic priority on inclusive economic development and environmental sustainability (figure 7).

The most significant partner of the United Nations in Montenegro in 2023 remained the European Union with investment of 5.4 million USD in programmes of the United Nations, or 28 % of all the funding available in 2023. This

was matched by core and thematic funds of UN Organisations in the same amount of 5.4 million USD, and vertical and pooled funds in the amount of 2.3 million USD cumulatively. From its central and local level³, Montenegro invested 3 million USD in the programmes of the UN, followed by additional 2.8 million USD invested by bilateral donors. Private sector provided quarter of a million USD for interventions supported by the UN (figure 8).

Finally, the Montenegro SDG Acceleration Fund managed to attract 7 million USD of non-earmarked funding in 2023 alone. The main source of funding was the European Union, Montenegro, and bilateral donors led by Switzerland and Austria. In the first year of operations, the Fund dispersed 1.3 million USD to support implementation of three joint programmes, one for each strategic priority of the Cooperation Framework, and one ad-hoc intervention.

³ Including municipalities of Pljevlja, Zeta, and the Union of municipalities

UN Agency	2023 Required Resources	2023 Available Resources	2023 Expenditure
UNDP	8,203,151	7,652,648	5,947,418
UNICEF	3,626,605	3,310,900	2,052,674
UNHCR	2,080,000	1,910,265	1,797,690
IOM	1,665,297	1,591,897	1,576,401
WHO	931,217	931,217	867,854
UNODC	904,815	814,815	767,815
IFAD	532,159	532,159	532,159
UNESCO	503,220	503,220	503,220
UNOPS	500,000	500,000	396,313
ILO	496,359	496,359	496,359
OHCHR	300,000	300,000	300,000
UNIDO	261,299	261,299	101,002
FAO	253,041	253,041	193,360
UN Women	43,000	99,000	90,407
UNECE	95,000	95,000	95,000
ITU	59,600	45,500	33,526
UNDRR	55,000	29,000	29,000

Figure 6: Funding framework per UN organization, in USD

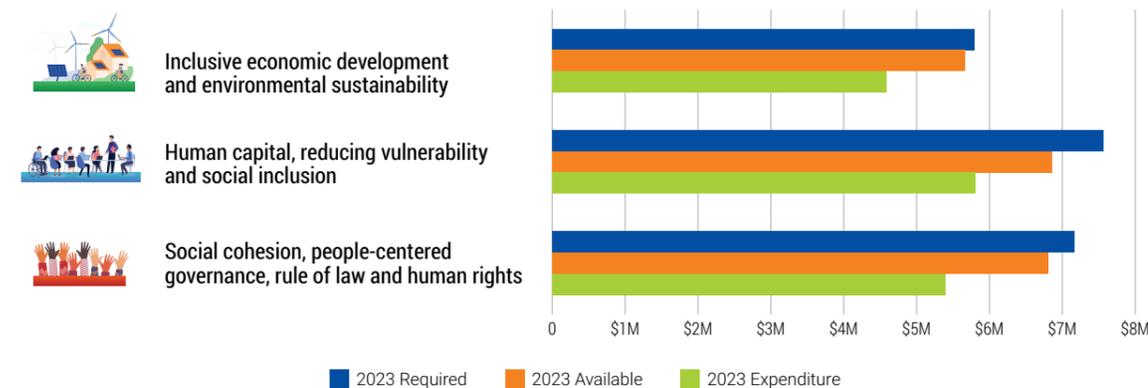


Figure 7: Financial breakdown per Strategic Priority

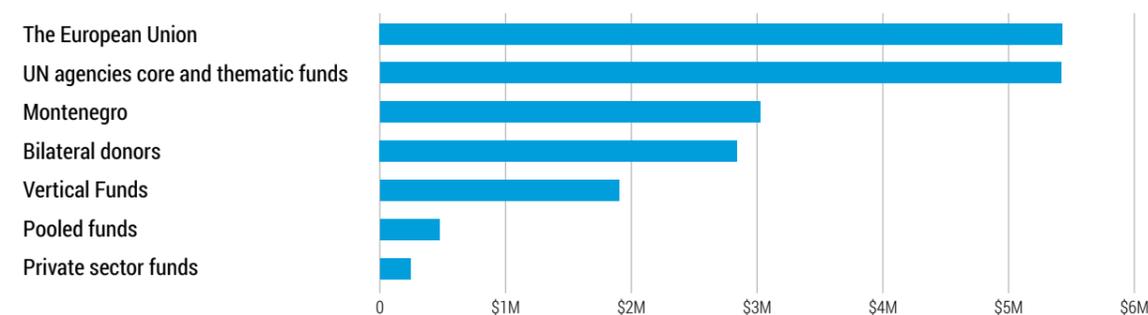


Figure 8: Total available funds, per funding modality

CHAPTER III

3

UNCT key focus for next year



Figure 9: Financial framework for 2024, in USD

In 2024, the UN system and the Government of Montenegro will continue with its joint work towards achieving priorities of the 2023-2027 UNSDCF gathered around **three strategic priority areas**: a) Inclusive economic development and environmental sustainability; b) Human capital development, reducing vulnerabilities and social inclusion; c) Social cohesion, people-centered governance, rule of law and human rights. This will be operationalized through existing bi-annual Joint workplans and the work of three Results groups – a joint UN and Government platforms for exchange, coordination, monitoring and assessing implementation of the programme and its progress. In 2024, special focus will be given to continued **monitoring of indicators** (including those from the global list) and introduction of traffic lights as a real time “alerting system” for UNCT. Coordination structure will be additionally strengthened through two inter-agency groups on: Digitalization and SDG Financing – a cross cutting areas and emerging national priorities where more concentrated UN engagement is expected.

In 2024, the UNCT will identify opportunities for more strategic investments in **six transition areas including through strengthened**

partnerships with EU and IFIs. Local SDG Fund - Montenegro Acceleration Fund (MAF) provides exceptional opportunity for innovative SDG financing through three different investment windows: Traditional donors; EU window and Private sector window. Moreover, it will provide a platform for development partners and the Government to: a) jointly prioritize reforms and actions with transformative effect and b) jointly agree focused investments in the areas with highest multiplayer effects across development spectrum.

To increase its transformative and catalytic impact, the UN system in Montenegro will additionally strengthen its joint approach. In total, it is expected to have **up to 10 UN joint projects in 2024**, through which the country’s key development challenges will be addressed in synergetic and innovative manner.

UNCT will aim to provide more coordinated support for improved Public Finance Management through the newly established **SDG Financing group**. This will be built upon the work already conducted on mapping the state budget allocations towards SDGs and will be followed by targeted analytical work and support in specific sectors.

Through joint support to the **National Council on Sustainable Development**, the UNCT will collectively influence national policies and strategies towards achieving SDGs targets including through consultative processes at local level. Further support will be provided to the **Office for Sustainable Development** in operationalization of the SDG dashboard and in strengthening national data collection capacities. UNCT will also support the country to enhance coordination of the development assistance through operationalization of nationally led coordination mechanism. Moreover, support will be provided to build up national capacities to monitor reform processes and to report on its progress.

Finally, the UN system in Montenegro will continue synergizing its work with **EU accession agenda** and it remains available to support the Government Reform Agenda.

When it comes to global initiatives, acceleration of Agenda 2030 will be operationalized through development of the Action plan for implementation of the commitments from the **National Pledge** presented at SDG Summit in September 2023.

UNCT collective knowledge will be strengthened through regular production of joint analytical documents such as CCA update and thematic policy briefs, in addition

to individual agencies knowledge products. The UNCT Depository will continue to gather all relevant knowledge products in one place, enabling access to all UNCT participating agencies and the Government.

Through joint communications, the UNCT will communicate its position and key messages while bringing UN’s work closer to the public and targeted audience.

A Business Operation Strategy will be implemented and opportunities to increase efficiency and effectiveness will be continuously explored.

The UNCT will continue to strengthen its work in gender mainstreaming through the **Gender thematic group, enabling this** core principle to be strategically mainstreamed across programmes and operations. Furthermore, work to strengthen the UN Montenegro’s internal organizational culture will continue in two more areas: Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) and Human rights/LNOB, including disability inclusion. Each area has an accompanying Action Plan as a framework for efficient and effective inter-agency work. The UNCT will also continue to coordinate its support to refugees from Ukraine and provide assistance to national authorities through the UN’s Ukraine Crisis Task force.



List of acronyms and abbreviations

AVRR	Assisted voluntary return and reintegration
BOS	Business Operations Strategy
CCA	Common Country Analysis
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil society organization
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EAM	Employment agency of Montenegro
ECD	Early childhood development
EU	European Union
GBV	Gender-based violence
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women`s Empowerment
GHG	Greenhouse gas
HRBA	Human-rights based approach
IFI	International financial institutions
IMM	Independent Monitoring Mechanism
LNOB	Leave no one behind
MAF	Montenegro SDG Acceleration Fund
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MIL	Media and Information Literacy
MoESI	Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation
MRV	Monitoring, Reporting and Verification
MSMEs	Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises
OMT	Operations Management Team
OPD	Organisation of Persons with Disabilities
PSEA	Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
RCO	Resident Coordinator`s Office
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SOM	Smuggling of Migrants
STP	Science and Technology Park
TIP	Trafficking in persons
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNCT	UN Country Team
UNPRPD	UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frame-work
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene





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