**Executive Board of the
United Nations Development
Programme, the United Nations
Population Fund and the United
Nations Office for Project Services**

Distr.: General
25 June 2025

Original: English

Second regular session 2025
25 to 28 August 2025, New York
Item 16 of the provisional agenda
Regional programme documents, 2026–2029

Regional programme document for the Arab States (2026–2029)

Contents

Please recycle

I. Programme rationale

1.   The regional programme for the Arab States, 2026-2029, is aligned with the strategic goals and indicators of the UNDP Strategic Plan 2026-2029 and guided by UNDP regionality principles. It addresses the intersectional development consequences of ongoing and emerging global and regional challenges. Harnessing the region's potential helps unlock innovative solutions, drive economic diversification and foster resilience, contributing to a prosperous and sustainable future for the Arab States. The region's diversity and interconnectedness present an opportunity for UNDP to drive transformational, systems-level change across multiple dimensions, building on its trusted presence, technical depth and capacity to work across the humanitarian-development-peace continuum. The regional programme complements country-level efforts by connecting action across borders, generating evidence and innovation, and offering platforms for shared learning and coordination.

2.   The UNDP definition of the Arab States region comprises 20[1] high, middle,[2] low-income and the least developed countries, with highly diverse contexts, ranging from stable political systems to political transitions, and fragile and conflict-affected settings. These include oil-based economies such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States, Algeria, Libya and Iraq, and resource-scarce States heavily reliant on remittances. This is reflected in the 2022 human development index (HDI) scores, which range from 0.937 in the United Arab Emirates (one of the highest global rankings) to 0.380 in Somalia (the lowest global ranking). While the region has made progress in human development, several conflict-affected countries have experienced a decline in their HDI rankings in recent years.[3]

3.   Despite their diversity, the Arab States face common structural challenges, including high urbanization, limited economic diversification, private-sector-led growth, low regional economic integration, gender inequality, water scarcity and vulnerability to climate change. These challenges play out differently across countries. Conflict-affected states struggle with protracted crises, displacement and fragile institutions. More stable, middle-income countries face pressures around economic diversification, governance reforms and environment resilience. Across all contexts, governance backsliding, environmental shocks, deepening socioeconomic inequalities and rapid technological transformation are reshaping development trajectories.

4.   At the same time, the Arab States hold immense opportunities. Several countries have made notable development gains over the past decade, advancing in digital transformation, infrastructure, education and renewable energy. Gulf countries have launched ambitious economic diversification strategies, accompanied by investments in renewable energy, while others have made strides in innovation, women's empowerment and public sector reform. The region's predominantly young population presents a powerful demographic dividend if matched with the right skills, jobs and civic engagement investments. Expanding regional cooperation, increasing access to innovative financing, and growing interest in green and digital transitions further position the region to harness emerging opportunities.

Socioeconomic vulnerability: rising economic instability, inequalities, unemployment and limited fiscal space

5.   According to the *Arab Sustainable Development Report 2024*, the region's economy has been strained by recurring global crises, high debt and slow growth. Real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita declined by 3.7 per cent between 2015 and 2022, and labour productivity increased by only 1 per cent regionally. In 2023, per capita GDP varied sharply, higher in GCC countries and significantly lower and highly volatile in crisis-affected states. Despite these challenges, some middle-income countries have adopted reforms, pursuing broader development strategies to strengthen their economies and promoting environmental resilience, digital transformation and green and inclusive finance. However, fiscal constraints remain a common issue, with an average tax-to-GDP ratio normally below the international benchmark of 15 per cent, and significantly lower than global averages. These challenges reflect structural

---

[1] The 20 countries are League of Arab States members; Mauritania and Comoros fall under the Africa Bureau of UNDP.
[2] World Bank income classifications for 2024-2025.
[3] UNDP Human Development Index

constraints – such as low productivity, inequality and limited fiscal space – that, if addressed, could unlock sustainable development.

6. The Arab region has made uneven progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with improvements in health (SDG 3) and water and sanitation (SDG 6), but challenges in poverty reduction (SDG 1), decent work (SDG 8) and climate action (SDG 13). Monitoring efforts remain constrained by significant data gaps, especially for women's empowerment (SDG 5), inequality (SDG 10) and environment (SDGs 12-14).[4]

7. Regional integration remains limited, with intraregional trade accounting for only 14.8 per cent of Arab exports in 2023. The Arab region accounted for just 7.4 per cent of global trade in 2022, highlighting room for more economic integration. Between 2012 and 2021, intraregional exports grew by just 2 per cent, excluding oil products, while service trade remained stagnant, contributing only 4 to 6 per cent of global services trade over the past two decades.[5]

8. Unemployment in the Arab States remains one of the highest globally, at over 11 per cent (2024). Youth unemployment is 2.5 to three times higher than adults, and young women face twice the rate of young men.[6] These figures are even more notable in the context of low labour force participation – only 25 per cent of young people are active in the labour market, compared to the global average of 42 per cent.

9. Multidimensional poverty affects 14.7 per cent of people in the region, many of whom live in areas where poverty rates exceed 50 per cent.[7] On average, female-headed households experience higher poverty rates than male-headed households – 18.5 per cent compared to 15.5 per cent.[8] Only a third is covered by at least one social protection benefit.[9]

10. The Arab States face persistent development challenges related to inequality between men and women. In 2022, the gender development index stood at 0.877, and the gender inequality index at 0.523.[10] Economically, women's labour force participation averages 20 per cent, compared to 70 per cent for men and 47 per cent globally.[11] In 2022, women's gross national income per capita was 24 per cent of men's. On average, women in the region dedicate 5 to 6 times more time to unpaid care work than men.[12]

11. The region is witnessing its largest youth cohort in history, with approximately 110 million people aged 15 to 29 years. Notably, 60 per cent of the population is under 30, underscoring the importance and potential of youth-centred development to create lasting momentum for inclusive growth.[13] Data shows that 90 per cent of young workers are active in the informal sector. Transitioning from school to work is complex, with 32.4 per cent of youth not engaged in employment, education or training. This rate among young women is over twice that of young men.[14]

Multifaceted governance challenges

12. The Arab States face some of the most acute governance challenges globally, as reflected in indices such as the world governance indicators and Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. Several countries consistently rank among the lowest globally regarding government effectiveness, rule of law, voice, accountability and corruption. Governance deficits are characterized by weak public institutions, limited civic participation, widespread corruption risks and fragmented authority. In some countries, overlapping and competing state and non-state actors contest legitimacy and control over

---

[4] United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) (2025), "Progress towards the SDGs in the Arab region."

[5] Economic Research Forum (2024), Ghoneim. https://theforum.erf.org.eg/2024/11/05/participation-of-arab-countries-in-global-value-chains/2024

[6] Statistics on youth, ILOSTAT.

[7] 2024 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index

[8] UNDP (2023), *Second Arab Multidimensional Poverty Report*.

[9] Statistics on social protection, ILOSTAT

[10] UNDP (2024), *Human Development Report.*.

[11] World Bank (2022).

[12] International Labour Organization (ILO) (2019), Charmes J., "The Unpaid Care Work and the Labour Market"

[13] United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2024. https://arabstates.unfpa.org/en/topics/youth-participation-leadership?utm_source=chatgpt.com

[14] ILOSTAT.

service delivery and resource management. Comparative insights from the 2023 Ibrahim Index of African Governance illustrate the uneven governance landscape. While some countries show relatively stronger performance – with scores exceeding 55 – others demonstrate fragile institutions and limited state capacity.[15]

13. Politically, women's average participation in lower houses of parliaments is 17.4 per cent in 2025,[16] below the global average of 27.2 per cent, and their share in top leadership in the public sector is low at an estimated 12 per cent.[17] The 2023 Arab Youth Survey revealed that 54 per cent of youth believe their voices do not matter to their country's leadership.[18]

14. Many countries face persistent challenges in ensuring judicial independence, equal access to justice and legal accountability. The 2023 World Justice Project 2023 Rule of Law Index places most Arab countries rank in the lower half globally, with low scores on government constraints, corruption and fundamental rights. Women continue to face legal inequalities.[19]

15. Digital transformation offers unprecedented opportunities for transparency, accountability and inclusive governance across the Arab States. However, progress is uneven due to gaps in digital readiness, regulatory frameworks and inclusion. Only 64 per cent of women use the internet, compared to 75 per cent of men with rural access (50 per cent) lagging behind urban areas (83 per cent). Expanding e-governance and digital services holds significant untapped potential.[20]

Crisis, conflicts and state fragility

16. The region continues to experience some of the world's most intersecting crises – a convergence of protracted conflicts, political instability, economic shocks, political transitions, environmental stress and social unrest – creating a state of continued uncertainty. Conflicts and political instability remain widespread, affecting approximately 163 million people, with 30 per cent of the population living in conflict-affected areas.[21] These systemic vulnerabilities reflect root causes – such as inequality, ecosystem degradation, marginalization and institutional erosion – that, if addressed, could unlock broader regional progress.

17. The region remains the least peaceful globally, with five countries ranking among the bottom ten. Over the past year, global peacefulness has deteriorated by 0.56 per cent. The vulnerabilities to violence and conflict are multifaceted, exacerbated by weak governance, limited statehood, the proliferation of non-state armed actors, competition over natural resources and substantial arms procurement. Military expenditure as a percentage of GDP is the highest globally, further straining resources.[22] The region also includes four of the ten lowest-scoring countries.[23]

18. The region continues to grapple with new and long-standing displacement challenges and hosts around 40 per cent of the world's internally displaced due to conflicts and disasters (approximately 28.3 million),[24] and 28 per cent of the world's refugee population (approximately 10.7 million).[25]

Environmental shocks and stresses, with severe water scarcity and ecosystem land degradation

19. The Arab region holds vast natural resources and strong renewable energy potential, particularly solar, yet faces growing environmental pressures—from water scarcity and land degradation to climate change. Fragile ecosystems limited regional cooperation, and underinvestment in sustainable

---

[15] Ibrahim Index of African Governance Data Portal.
[16] Inter-Parliamentary Union.
[17] UNDP (2022). *Gender Equality in Public Administration Report.*
[18] ASDA'A BCW (2023), Fifteenth Annual Arab Youth Survey.
[19] UNDP, Gender Justice and the Law Portal.
[20] International Telecommunication Unit (ITU) (2024), "*Measuring digital development: facts and figures 2024".*
[21] UNDP (2022). *Demanding Greater Solidarity: New Threats to Human Security in the Anthropocene.*
[22] Global Peace Index, 2024.
[23] Women, Peace and Security Index, 2023.
[24] Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.
[25] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2024: https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics

infrastructure worsen these stresses. Key challenges include declining precipitation in the Maghreb, shrinking water sources in the Levant, sea-level rise in the Nile Delta, and drought-driven displacement. These strains, compounded by economic vulnerabilities and gender inequalities, act as "risk multipliers" that threaten stability and hinder SDG progress. At the same time, several oil-exporting countries are diversifying energy sources and expanding renewables, creating green jobs. With integrated policy and targeted investment, the region could lead in sustainable energy and environmental resilience.

20. The Arab States are warming at twice the global rate and consuming natural resources at double their biocapacity, hosting 13 of the world's twenty most water-stressed countries. Environmental pressures – such as 85 per cent of freshwater being used for agriculture and 45 per cent of agricultural land affected by degradation – are exacerbated by conflicts in some countries.[26]

21. The most significant gaps in energy access are found in the least developed and conflict affected countries, particularly those with access rates below 70 per cent. Even in countries with high average access rates, energy may still be unreliable and unaffordable. For example, Iraq and the State of Palestine report official average access rates above 97 per cent, yet this fails to reflect the lived reality in many areas, which experience prolonged and repeated power outages, with some communities going days or weeks without electricity.[27]

22. Natural gas and oil are still the region's largest energy sources. Natural gas is the principal fuel used for electricity generation, with a share of 72 per cent, followed by oil at 25 per cent. With heavy dependence on fossil fuels, electricity and heat generation accounted for 39 per cent of total carbon emissions.[28] Moreover, approximately 47 million people lack access to clean cooking fuels and technologies,[29] with implications specifically on women's health. The access rate to clean cooking fuels and technologies was around 87 per cent in 2020.[30]

Results, lessons learned and comparative advantages

23. The regional programme is based on: (a) a synthesis of the region's development challenges and opportunities; (b) lessons learned and recommendations from the midterm review of the regional programme, 2022-2025, and project evaluations; (c) extensive consultations with Member States, regional and global partners and UNDP country offices; and (d) stocktaking of gains made in previous programming cycles.

24. Throughout the 2022-2025 cycle, results were achieved in four priority areas: poverty and inequality; governance accountability; environmental resilience; and women and youth empowerment. While financing constraints challenged efforts to reduce poverty and inequality, noticeable progress was made in promoting youth engagement and economic empowerment. Digital transformation supported accountable governance across countries, contributing to inclusive digital societies, helping bridge the digital divide and strengthening institutional capacities. The programme promoted transparency by implementing measures under the United Nations Convention Against Corruption in five countries and helped introduce 116 anti-corruption measures. Environmental resilience and sustainability efforts benefited 11.9 million people through climate security, water management and clean energy initiatives. Women and youth were empowered through tech literacy initiatives.

25. The independent midterm review of the regional programme, 2022-2025, of October 2023 – using criteria from the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and UNDP guidelines – confirmed the programme's relevance to the region's challenges and alignment with the SDGs. The programme demonstrated promising effectiveness, underpinned by adequate funding, solid implementation structures and strong alignment with partner priorities – all critical for achieving results. However, greater investments are still needed. Efficiency was deemed adequate, despite financial and capacity constraints. Early signs of impact were

[26] UNDP (2023), *Climate Change, Environmental Degradation, Conflict, and Displacement in the Arab States Region*.
[27] ESCWA – Advancing SDG 7.
28 The Arab Future Energy Index, 2023.
29 Calculated from UNDP and RCREEE AFEX 2023 Report.
30 Advancing SDG 7 in the Arab Region: policy briefs in support of the United Nations High-level Political Forum 2023, UN.

observed, particularly in areas such as climate security and bridging the digital divide. While sustainability shows potential, it will depend on stronger institutional ownership and improved resource mobilization.

26.   The midterm review proposed five key recommendations: introducing portfolio approaches to break silos; adjusting governance and implementation; introducing dynamic management; systematizing programming principles; and strengthening communication and partner engagement. It also found that while gender, inclusion, and conflict sensitivity were integrated during implementation, their application could be more systematically embedded.

27.   Building on these findings and identified opportunities, the new programme cycle will reinforce strategic coherence, institutional effectiveness and regional principles. It leverages the long-standing presence, trusted partnerships, and country-level engagement of UNDP to drive transformative regional and cross-border solutions. By combining global policy expertise with local expertise, UNDP acts as a credible convenor and trusted interlocutor, fostering dialogue and cooperation among governments, civil society and the private sector across the Arab States. Anchored in its regionality principles, the programme aligns integrated regional solutions with national priorities, while tailoring interventions to the specific needs of diverse subregional contexts to advance sustainable development.

II. Programme priorities and partnerships

28.   In response to these complex challenges and vast potential, the regional programme aligns its scope, focus, delivery approaches and results reporting with the overarching goal of accelerating progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is aligned with the four strategic objectives of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2026-2029:

(a) **Prosperity for all**
(b) **Effective governance**
(c) **Crisis resilience**
(d) **Healthy planet**

29.   These objectives are deeply interconnected and reflect strongly on the different development agendas across the region. The programme will be grounded in a theory of change that posits: *if* new pathways in the region are unlocked to support countries in enabling, protecting and transforming societies *through* reduced inequalities, more effective, inclusive governance and crisis-resilience systems, and *if* regional there is cooperation on critical environmental issues, *then* the region will be better equipped to manage risks, foster resilience and accelerate sustainable human development. By making targeted investments in private sector engagement, women's and youth empowerment, green and digital economic transformation and regional integration – underpinned by innovation and inclusive finance – the programme will unlock systemic transformation.

30.   The programme will align with the goals of the 2030 Agenda and the development aspirations of the Arab States. Recognizing that eight Arab States are situated on the African continent, the programme will also be anchored in the Agenda 2063 of the African Union. Considering the range of national capacities and conditions, support will be tailored to meet the specific priorities of each country from a regional perspective, combining thematic interventions with subregional approaches to ensure impact across the region's diverse landscapes.

31.   Aligned with the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2026-2029, the regional programme will apply systems thinking and portfolio approaches to navigate rapid change and avoid short-term, sector-based fragmentation. The regional programme will adopt the three accelerators of the UNDP Strategic Plan as cross-cutting enablers: (a) digital and artificial intelligence transformation – leveraging technologies to create benefits for people and planet; (b) gender equality – advancing equal rights, opportunities and participation of men and women to overcome structural inequalities and help achieve social, political and economic objectives; and (c) sustainable finance – expanding financial systems and resources to accelerate sustainable development.

32.   Given the region's large and growing youth population, youth engagement will be a cross-cutting priority, with youth engaged as change agents in shaping governance, innovation, green and digital transitions, and peace and stability.

A.   Priority 1. Prosperity – Economic transformation

33.   The programme will promote economic transformation and regional cooperation to reduce poverty and inequality by expanding employment opportunities, particularly for youth, women and vulnerable groups. Achieving sustainable, inclusive growth in the Arab States requires systemic change – linking digital and green transformation, smart cities, regional trade and investment, a shift to inclusive economies, a conducive business environment and financing ecosystem, adequate social protection and quality social services. As part of this, the programme will support regional solutions for strengthening health systems to enhance resilience and equity. It will leverage economic modelling to inform policy choices and simulate the potential impact of reforms, helping countries identify effective pathways for inclusive growth.

34.   Strengthening human capital and skills development is central to create resilient economies capable of generating quality employment and driving long-term economic change. Introducing a regional knowledge and skills index will help track progress and guide evidence-based human development policies. The programme will also continue to advance thought leadership on human development through the annual *Arab Human Development Report*, providing in-depth analysis and policy recommendations.

35.   In collaboration with regional and international partners, UNDP will promote an enabling business environment by improving market regulation, enhancing competitiveness and fostering public-private dialogue on private sector development, regional integration and value chains. Enhancing labour mobility and trade in services through improved regional policy frameworks will further unlock economic opportunities and strengthen the private sector. These efforts also support inclusive social protection systems by promoting decent work and sustainable livelihoods. Global and regional investments in reconstruction, transport and digital connectivity infrastructure will be promoted to support economic resilience.

36.   The transformation of economies in the Arab States will require targeted interventions in high-potential sectors, including through the Green Growth and Jobs Accelerator project, supporting micro, small and medium-size enterprises (MSMEs) that promote green job creation for youth. Targeted and integrated programmatic interventions will address the barriers youth face in employment and entrepreneurship. Focus will also be on scaling and financing women-led businesses through targeted regional support modules, identifying regional financing solutions, promoting regional networking and fostering policy reform, using the global UNDP Equanomics offer[31]. Promoting green growth and expanding sustainable value chains – particularly in agribusiness – will enhance food security and reduce vulnerabilities to global trade disruptions. One immediate priority will be investment in wheat value chain. This work will be grounded in research, regional integration, trade facilitation and institutional capacity-building.

37.   UNDP will also support the scaling of sustainable and regional finance, including Islamic finance, by mobilizing public and private investments, leveraging blended finance and introducing de-risking mechanisms, integrating them into a resilience fund – including *Takaful*-based financial solutions – to enhance economic resilience. With official development assistance (ODA) under pressure, the programme will strengthen partnerships to position countries as solutions leaders and co-investors. This includes building on the significant financing capacities to catalyse structured government cost-sharing, pooled funding arrangements and partnerships with international financial institutions and private sector actors. Initiatives like the Green Financing Platform will help drive innovative financing solutions and unlock new development capital.

38.   The regional programme will also prioritize the development of cross-border digital infrastructure and connectivity as a catalyst for economic integration. By strengthening digital public infrastructure and

---

[31] https://stories.undp.org/equanomics

trade corridors and by supporting digital transformation, artificial intelligence-driven industries and future skills development, UNDP will help build the foundations of knowledge-based economies. These efforts will reduce poverty and inequality, expand economic opportunities and promote long-term stability and prosperity across the region.

B.   Priority 2. Governance – Strengthening governance, participation and institutional resilience

39.   The regional programme will promote participatory, inclusive, rights-based governance that is transparent, accountable and responsive to citizen's evolving needs across the Arab States. It will support developing and adopting regionally shared standards for public participation, focusing on empowering youth, women and persons with disabilities. Dedicated initiatives will institutionalize youth participation in governance, expand civic space and strengthen civil society engagement. UNDP will also promote women's leadership and participation in decision-making, alongside rule of law, human rights and gender justice through regional advocacy and legal reform to enhance women's access to justice.

40.   Complementing these efforts, the programme will strengthen national and regional institutions by advancing legal and policy frameworks that enhance institutional effectiveness, transparency and accountability. Building on anti-corruption efforts to date, a project on transparency and integrity in policymaking will foster evidence-based governance, reduce corruption risks and restore public trust. This initiative will encourage dialogue, knowledge exchange and systems thinking through normative and sectoral entry points, while de-risking investment and enabling innovation and inclusive growth. By positioning governance as a driver of inclusive recovery and sustainable development, the programme will emphasize how institutional reform, public financial management and anti-corruption can unlock financing, improve investor confidence and expand equitable service access, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings. UNDP will also strengthen its economic governance offer to help channel public and private financing toward expanded development opportunities.

41. UNDP will also support co-creating inclusive digital public infrastructure and regulatory frameworks aligned with human rights standards and digital safeguards. This includes developing regional blueprints for smart public sector transformation and rolling out regional policy standards on digital governance, artificial intelligence use, and data responsibility. Building on these efforts, the programme will strengthen the capacities of civil servants and public institutions to manage digital transitions responsibly while improving equitable service delivery and institutional performance.

42.   Regional networks of human rights and security institutions and practitioners will be supported to exchange practices on civic protection, responsible governance and the ethical use of technology in public administration.

C.   Priority 3. Crisis – Stability and resilience reinforced through prevention, crisis response and recovery

43.   UNDP will support the creation of sustainable and inclusive pathways toward stability, recovery and long-term development that reduce reliance on humanitarian assistance and enable a return to normalcy for crisis-affected populations, including displaced and displacement-affected communities. In alignment with its global crisis offer and the 10-point action agenda for advancing gender equality, the approach provides a comprehensive framework for development in crisis contexts. This framework focuses on breaking the cycle of fragility, preventing crises through proactive measures, and sustaining development by bridging humanitarian needs with long-term recovery and resilience efforts.

44.   The regional programme will advance and facilitate regionally coordinated responses, stabilization, recovery and reconstruction efforts. It will prioritize strengthening regional partnerships to drive analysis, policy guidance, advocacy and implementation, as well as capacity-building for crisis prevention and response, dialogue and support for financing mechanisms and receptacles. A multifaceted approach will link regional-level activities with national-level support and policy work.

45.   UNDP will also enhance regional platforms and standards for peacebuilding and conflict prevention, including efforts to prevent violent extremism, in close partnership with the Regional Bureau for Africa.

This will enable countries to collectively tackle transboundary risks, mitigate conflict spillover and strengthen regional peacebuilding infrastructures. UNDP will support the expansion of peace practitioner networks, strengthen insider mediation capacities, promote women's agency and empower local actors to play a key role in conflict resolution and sustainable peace.

46. UNDP will also explore regional approaches to human mobility, focusing on crisis-induced displacement, protection and reintegration. Efforts will align with humanitarian-development-peace continuum principles, aiming to create regional frameworks for effective responses to human mobility challenges while promoting sustainable reintegration, resilience and social cohesion.

D. Priority 4. Planet – Environment-energy governance and ecosystem resilience

47. UNDP will support the region in addressing its complex environmental challenges through people-centred and nature-positive solutions that promote sustainability, resilience and regional cooperation. The programme aims to foster environmental resilience and unlock the potential to address shared environmental challenges across the Arab States. UNDP will align actions with global policies, including the three Rio conventions: the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), as well as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. UNDP will leverage technical expertise, global best practices and financial partnerships to support governments in advancing global environment commitments, including nationally determined contributions, national adaptation plans, land degradation neutrality targets, and national biodiversity strategies and action plans.

48. The programme will promote integrated, equitable and sustainable approaches to water and land management by enhancing efforts to address scarcity across the water-energy-food-ecosystem nexus. Strengthening governance and equitable access to shared water resources will be central to reducing vulnerability and enhancing environmental and human security.

49. This will come alongside regional approaches for prevention, preparedness and response to extreme weather events. To respond to such growing risks, UNDP will foster regional approaches to climate security, adaptation and energy through the Arab Climate Adaptation Partnership and enhance the nexus with the United Nations Women, Peace and Security Agenda. As one key component, countries will be supported in expanding access to renewable energy, improving energy efficiency and enabling energy transitions to reduce emissions.

50. Desertification, land degradation and drought will be tackled through regional solutions supporting country-level, large-scale ecosystem restoration efforts, using landscape approaches to promote agrobiodiversity, biodiversity conservation and sustainable land management. To support the commitments made through the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership, UNDP will support sustainable regional approaches to managing droughts and collaboration to reverse land degradation trends and enhance environmental cooperation.

51. Supporting countries in aligning environmental investments with national priorities and global commitments remains a regional priority. As part of its commitment to advancing green investments, the programme will help scale national environmental resilience projects through the Green Financing Platform's common approaches and investments. UNDP will also foster urban community resilience by promoting risk-informed planning and circular economy models to reduce environmental stress, build local capacities and drive sustainable transformation.

Leveraging partnerships and financing

52. Strategic partnerships and innovative financing are central to the regional programme. Across the four priorities, the programme will deliver through: (a) regional collaboration on key thematic priorities; (b) operationalization of the subregional strategies for the GCC, the Maghreb and the Levant, as well as joint engagement with the Regional Bureau for Africa on shared priorities in the Horn of Africa; (c) a renewed approach to knowledge and thought leadership for actionable analysis; and (d) expanding the

resource based through innovative financing – such as impact investment, blended finance and public-private partnerships.

53.   The regional programme will leverage partnership platforms such as the Green Financing Platform, the Digital for Sustainable Development initiative and the NextGen Youth Platform. These represent a shift toward a new generation of partnerships, bringing together finance, knowledge, networks and innovation. They reinforce the convening role of UNDP, foster collective intelligence and generate actionable insights. To enhance collaboration and align with the global approach, UNDP will refine its partnership modalities based on insights from its business model review.

54.   Addressing complex regional challenges requires strong partnerships across bilateral, multilateral, private sector and civil society actors to scale solutions and maximize limited resources. The regional programme will build on UNDP global, regional and national partnerships, partnering with governments to build broad coalitions, unlock untapped resources, and mobilize investments that match the complexity of long-term challenges. It will leverage the integrator role and convening power of UNDP to strengthen regional and subregional approaches and promote coordinated responses to transboundary challenges. As the only United Nations organization with a system-level policy instrument, UNDP will help shift from traditional inter-agency coordination to systemic responses by, for example, operationalizing integrated policy advice on climate-security linkages and supporting integrated recovery and reconstruction frameworks. The programme will also leverage South-South cooperation to enhance regional capacity-building and knowledge-sharing.

55.   Given the changing development landscape, the programme will develop a comprehensive strategy that outlines how UNDP can go beyond traditional project-based partnerships and strengthen engagement and co-investments with a broader partner ecosystem, including:

(a) **Regional partner countries**: positioning countries such as Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates as convenors in environmental, digital and financing agenda, and as contributors to key development priorities through targeted collaboration, knowledge exchange, strategic engagement and co-investors in solutions.
(b) **Private sector**: partnering with businesses, industry associations and financial institutions to advance inclusive business models, circular economy initiatives, responsible technology deployment and sustainable investment practices.
(c) **Regional organizations, financing institutions, banks and funds**; shifting from funding to financing by promoting catalytic investments in public goods and adopting robust impact measurement systems, in collaboration with regional development partners including sovereign wealth funds, philanthropic foundations, intergovernmental financial institutions, and specialized development funds.
(d) **United Nations entities**: Drawing on the system-wide integrator role of UNDP and in close collaboration with relevant United Nations agencies, funds, and programmes engaged in areas such as climate, migration, labour, trade, digital transformation, human rights, gender equality, and sustainable development.
(e) **Traditional and bilateral donors and established development partners**: building on collaborations with partners such as Denmark, France, Germany, the Republic of Korea, Norway and Sweden, UNDP will seek to deepen joint programming and pooled funding efforts while exploring new ways to leverage ODA to scale innovations and support regional priorities;
(f) **Regional civil society networks, philanthropies, think-tanks, academic institutions and community organizations**: recognizing their critical role in human development and the region, the programme will focus on strengthening civic participation, promoting accountability and fostering innovation. Emphasis will be placed on youth networks, women's organizations and environmental advocates to ensure that diverse voices shape regional programming.

III. Programme and risk management

56.   This regional programme document outlines UNDP contributions to regional results and serves as the main accountability tool to the Executive Board for results alignment and resource use. Accountability

of managers at country, regional, and headquarters levels are defined in UNDP programme and operations policies and internal control framework.

57. In designing the programme, outcomes, outputs and indicators have been selected that: (a) are directly relevant to its priorities in the next four years; (b) aligned with the integrated results and resources framework of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2026-2029; (c) embody regionality principles and have a regional value added; and (d) can be efficiently measured and monitored.

58. The programme will be implemented through the direct implementation modality. The Director of the Regional Bureau for Arab States will provide oversight and accountability, in line with UNDP structure. The Regional Hub Advisory Board, comprising of resident representatives from the region and senior management from central bureaux, will offer overall guidance, quality assurance, and risk monitoring. Regional appraisal committees and project boards will oversee project design and implementation, with quality assurance using UNDP tools. A dedicated management team within the regional hub, supported by policy teams, will ensure programme management and oversight.

59. The successful implementation of the regional programme depends on managing interconnected risks, including resource mobilization challenges and uncertainty around core and non-core funding. Mitigation requires a strategic, systemic approach that leverages strategic funding and financing mechanisms, including private sector engagement, partner country contributions, and investment funds. A comprehensive partnership and resource mobilization strategy will be developed to diversify funding sources and partnerships (including South-South cooperation), supported by communication and visibility efforts. Core funding will be prioritized for innovation and rapid response.

60. In a volatile environment, programmatic risks include political instability, governance challenges, human rights impact and ongoing conflicts. Unforeseen global or regional shocks could threaten development progress and regional cooperation. To address this, the programme will adopt an adaptive management approach grounded in continuous learning, trend monitoring, and risk analysis, while generating development insights and allowing flexibility. Risks will be regularly assessed using corporate tools and updated per the risk management policy. Due diligence will be thoroughly conducted and monitored for compliance. All activities will follow UNDP social and environmental standards and the screening procedure, ensuring environmental and social risks are systematically assessed and managed. Where relevant, this includes disasters, extreme weather, pandemics, and conflicts. Power analysis will inform the design and implementation of activities aligned with social and environmental standards.

61. The harmonized approach to cash transfers will be used to manage financial risks when responsible parties are involved in implementing regional projects. In accordance with Executive Board decision DP/2013/9, all direct costs associated with project implementation should be charged to the concerned projects.

IV. Monitoring and evaluation

62. The management, monitoring and evaluation of the regional programme is grounded in the arrangements set out in the UNDP programme and operations policies and procedures, document DP/RPD/REC/5 12/21, including learning and adaptive programming, regionality principles, social and environmental standards and quality assurance. Progress against planned results and resources will be monitored through quarterly and annual planning, budgeting, monitoring and reporting. Reports will be published in line with the UNDP commitment to the International Aid Transparency Initiative, including financial data and results. Annual milestones will be measured through the results-oriented annual report.

63. In today's complex and uncertain environment, traditional results-based management approaches must evolve. The interconnected nature of the SDGs and the unprecedented challenges facing human development necessitate continuous learning and adaptation. The programme will use complexity-aware and adaptive methodologies in planning, evaluation and decision-making to stay effective.

64. To reduce transaction costs, reporting, monitoring, and evaluation will be streamlined for a more coherent and efficient approach, minimizing duplication. The evaluation plan ensures accountability,

learning, and improvement, covering priority areas based on UNDP mandatory evaluation requirements. A final programme evaluation will assess contributions to the four outcomes. Together with project evaluations, it will provide objective assessments of impact and help refine the theory of change, in line with UNDP policy.

65. To ensure adaptability, a dynamic management function will generate insights to track emerging changes and inform policy, drawing on programme lessons, partner analyses, and data. It will support ongoing reflection across implementation, engaging the regional programme and Global Policy Network.

66. The programme will allocate at least 15 per cent of the country programme budgets for targeted women's empowerment and equality interventions. Analysis will inform all interventions to ensure positive contributions to equality between men and women. The programme will apply the gender marker to improve planning and monitor results for greater accountability.

Annex. Results and resources framework

Related SDGs: 1, 5, 8, 9, 10				
REGIONAL PROGRAMME OUTCOME #1 / RELATED STRATEGIC PLAN OUTCOME: By 2029, prosperity is increased for all, strengthening people's agency, capabilities and dignity to thrive.				
OUTCOME INDICATOR(S), BASELINES, TARGET(S)	**DATA SOURCE AND FREQUENCY OF DATA COLLECTION, AND RESPONSIBILITIES**	**INDICATIVE REGIONAL/GLOBAL PROGRAMME OUTPUTS** *(including indicators, baselines targets)*	**MAJOR PARTNERS/ PARTNERSHIPS FRAMEWORKS**	**INDICATIVE RESOURCES BY OUTCOME**
Annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person (%) *(1.4)* Baseline: ~0.5% Target: 0.1 Number of countries adopting economic empowerment initiatives or policies developed by/promoted by the programme Baseline: 0 Target: 2 Number of countries adopting policy recommendations related to human development Baseline: 0 Target: 2	Data source: SDG 8.2.1 Frequency: Annual Responsibility: ILO Data source: UNDP, government SDG reports Frequency: Annual Data source: UNDP, government SDG reports Frequency: Annual	**Output 1.1: Economic opportunities expanded for people and enterprises to access decent jobs, finance, trade, productive assets, including training/human capital and human mobility** *(Adapted G.1.1)* 1.1.1. Number of MSMEs and tech-based start-ups supported for business development, access to finance, and registration (male-led, female-led, and youth-led (male/female)) *(Adapted G.1.1.4)* Baseline: 180 Target: 5,000 [50% women/ 60% youth-led] Source/Frequency: UNDP/annual 1.1.2. Number of countries supported with policies or fiscal reforms to advance women's economic empowerment *(A.1.1.2)* Baseline: 0 Target: 5 Source/Frequency: UNDP/annual 1.1.3. Number of people completing job-relevant training or skills development programs (sex/age) *(Adapted G.1.1.1)* Baseline: 100 Target: 10,000 (50% women – 50% men/ 60% youth) Source/Frequency: UNDP/annual 1.1.4. Number of employment initiatives implemented targeting: women, youth, persons with disabilities, migrants	Statistical institutions, United Nations Agencies, Arab Coordination Group, League of Arab States, Ministries, MSMEs, academia, institutional investors, impact investors, banks, and non-bank financial institutions	**Regular** **$2,235,000**

		(G.1.1.2) Baseline: 1 Target: 35 Women: 15 Youth: 16 Persons with disabilities: 2 Migrants: 2 Source/Frequency: UNDP/annual 1.1.5. Amount in United States dollars of public and private financing leveraged for the SDGs *(A.3.2.1)* Baseline: 0 Target: public: $5 million; private: $7 million Source/frequency: UNDP/annual 1.1.6. Number of countries with strengthened governance and gender alignment in the integrated national financing frameworks *(I.3.1)* Baseline: 0 Target: 17 Source/frequency: UNDP, Ministry of Finance/annual		
		Output 1.2: Social services, social protection, and health services strengthened with higher inclusion of women and youth *(Adapted G.1.2)* 1.2.1. Number of countries benefiting from regional solutions for health systems strengthening Baseline:0 Target: 3 Source/frequency: UNDP/annual 1.2.2. Number of countries benefitting from social protection support Baseline: 0 Target: 3 Source/frequency: ILOSTAT, Global SDG indicators database/annual **Output 1.3: Inclusion and well-being advanced through thought leadership and knowledge generation**		**Other** **$43,000,000**

| | | 1.3.1. Number of thought leadership products (*Human Development Report* and initiatives) to advance human development
Baseline: 7
Target: 10
Source/frequency: UNDP/annual | | |

Related SDGs: 16, 17

REGIONAL PROGRAMME OUTCOME #2 / RELATED STRATEGIC PLAN OUTCOME: By 2029, governance systems are more effective, inclusive, and accountable, enabling people, societies and economies to thrive.

OUTCOME INDICATOR(S), BASELINES, TARGET(S)	DATA SOURCE AND FREQUENCY OF DATA COLLECTION, AND RESPONSIBILITIES	INDICATIVE REGIONAL/GLOBAL PROGRAMME OUTPUTS *(including indicators, baselines targets)*	MAJOR PARTNERS / PARTNERSHIPS FRAMEWORKS	INDICATIVE RESOURCES BY OUTCOME
Proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by gender *(2.1)* Baseline: 20-25% Target: 30-40% Number of countries that have made positive progress on readiness to enable responsible and inclusive adoption of artificial intelligence *(2.7)* Baseline: 0 Target: 5 Corruption Perception Index Baseline (2024): 34.3 Target: 36	Data source: SDG 16.7.2 Frequency: Annual Responsibility: Arab Barometer Data source: Government Artificial Intelligence Readiness Index by Oxford Insights Frequency: Annual Data source: Transparency International Frequency: Annual	**Output 2.1*: Public sector institutions strengthened to deliver services with greater equity, effectiveness, efficiency, and responsiveness, underpinned by systems that institutionalize inclusive public engagement.** *(Adapted G.2.1)* 2.2.1. Number of countries implementing measures to enhance the equity, effectiveness, accountability and/or agility of public sector institutions and core government functions, including in fragile and post-crisis contexts *(G.2.1.1)* Baseline: 10 Target: 17 Source/Frequency: Global Data Barometer/annual 2.2.2. Number of public institutions that have benefited from targeted measures designed to enhance digital, data, and/or artificial intelligence capacities *(A.2.1.1)* Baseline: 0 Target: 6 regional	Arab Anti-Corruption and Integrity Network, anti-corruption agencies, financial and administrative oversight bodies, justice institutions, ministries, civil society, United Nations agencies, electoral management bodies, youth networks	**Regular** **$2,235,000**

		Source/frequency: UNDP/annual		
		Output 2.2: Institutions and communities are enabled to advance people-centred access to justice, civic space, the protection of human rights and gender equality. *(Adapted G.2.2)* 2.2.1. Number of regional, national and subnational initiatives, policies and strategies to: *(G.2.2.4)* a) protect and promote civic space; b) foster youth empowerment; c) advance women's empowerment. Baseline: 5 (4 youth, 1 equality) Target: 10 (a-1 /b-7 /c-2) Source/Frequency: UNDP/annual 2.2.2. Number of regional initiatives promoting human rights and increasing access to more efficient security and justice institutions Baseline: 0 Target: 1 regional Source/frequency: UNDP, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)/annual 2.2.3. Number of collaborations with women-led civil society organizations and other bodies/networks to advance women's leadership, participation and gender equality *(A.1.2.2)* Baseline: 0 Target: 1 regional, 3 civil society Source/frequency: UNDP, League of Arab States (LAS)/annual		**Other** **$24,547,525**

Related SDGs: 16, 17				
REGIONAL PROGRAMME OUTCOME #3 / RELATED STRATEGIC PLAN OUTCOME: By 2029, institutions and people are better prepared to prevent, respond to and recover from crises while sustaining long-term development.				
OUTCOME INDICATOR(S), BASELINES, TARGET(S)	**DATA SOURCE AND FREQUENCY OF DATA COLLECTION, AND RESPONSIBILITIES**	**INDICATIVE REGIONAL/GLOBAL PROGRAMME OUTPUTS** *(including indicators, baselines targets)*	**MAJOR PARTNERS / PARTNERSHIPS FRAMEWORKS**	**INDICATIVE RESOURCES BY OUTCOME**
Number of countries whose vulnerability to crisis and disaster risk has improved *(3.2)* Baseline: 0 Target: 6 Percentage of countries in the region with a functional system[32] for crisis preparedness, response and recovery that integrate long-term development planning. Baseline: 0 Target: 3	Data source: INFORM Risk Index European Commission Frequency: Annual Data source: Ministry of Planning and Interior Frequency: Annual	**Output 3.1: Stabilization, (early) recovery, and reconstruction efforts leveraging South-South and regional cooperation platforms enabled to support community resilience and development** *(Adapted G.3.2)* 3.1.1. Number of cross-border and regional platforms, policies and strategies developed for stabilization, recovery, resilience and reconstruction Baseline: 2 Target: 5 *Policy: 2* *Platforms: 1* *Strategies: 2* Source/Frequency: UNDP, ESCWA, LAS/annual **Output 3.2: Effective practices for peacebuilding and sustaining peace promoted and scaled through regional cooperation, with a focus on addressing root causes, and strengthening social cohesion** 3.2.1. Number of institutions with enhanced capacities in peacebuilding, preventing violent extremism, and insider mediation *(Adapted I.2.2)* Baseline: 13 Target: 17 Source/frequency: UNDP, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/annual	Governments, LAS civil society, women's groups, foundations, private sector, academia, regional networks, office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Organization for Migration (IOM), ESCWA, Issue-Based Coalition on Nexus, Recovery and Reconstruction	**Regular** **$2,235,000** **Other** **$25,400,000**

---

[32] Clearly defined institutional roles and responsibilities, updated contingency or preparedness plans, coordinated financing mechanisms, and regular simulations or reviews to ensure operational readiness.

		3.2.2. Number of strategies, policies and action plans supported for risk-informed and gender-responsive regional prevention, social cohesion and peacebuilding *(I.2.1)* Baseline: 0 Target: 3 Source/frequency: UNDP/annual		

Related SDGs: 6, 12, 13, 14, 15

REGIONAL PROGRAMME OUTCOME #4 / RELATED STRATEGIC PLAN OUTCOME: By 2029, international environmental agreements are mainstreamed into national development frameworks to drive sustainable development.

OUTCOME INDICATOR(S), BASELINES, TARGET(S)	**DATA SOURCE AND FREQUENCY OF DATA COLLECTION, AND RESPONSIBILITIES**	**INDICATIVE REGIONAL/GLOBAL PROGRAMME OUTPUTS** *(including indicators, baselines targets)*	**MAJOR PARTNERS / PARTNERSHIPS FRAMEWORKS**	**INDICATIVE RESOURCES BY OUTCOME**

International and domestic financial flows to developing countries in support of climate and environment action *(4.1)*
Baseline: 0
Target: $100 billion
 	
Number of countries using their integrated national financing framework to channel resources towards climate and environment action
Baseline: 0
Target: 12
	Source: Global SDG Indicators Database
	Frequency: Annual
	Responsibilities: OECD, International Renewal Energy Agency
	
	Source: Ministry of Finance
	Frequency: Annual
		Output 4.1: National commitments of global environmental agreements embedded within policies, institutions, and budgetary frameworks *(G.4.1)*
		
		4.1.1. Number of countries that have new or strengthened policy tools in place to enable the enhancement and/or implementation of new commitments under the Paris Agreement, the Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Framework, the United Arab Emirates Energy Consensus or the UNCCD Strategic Framework, 2018-2030, including: *(G.4.1.2)*
		  (a) nationally determined contributions;
		
		  (b) national adaptation plans;
		
		  (c) national biodiversity strategy and action plan;
			Global Environment Facility, ESCWA, the World Bank, Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), United Nations Office for Disaster Risk reduction (UNDRR) World Food Programme (WFP), UNCCD, UNFCCC, Islamic Development Bank, International Union for Conservation of Nature, Centre of Excellence for Water and Sanitation, LAS	**Regular**
				
				$2,235,000

		(d) land degradation neutrality targets. Baseline: 0 Target: 17 Source/frequency: UNDP, UNFCC/annual		
		Output 4.2: Finance for climate actions, nature-based solutions, and energy transition is accelerated and upscaled to promote prosperity and equality while protecting the planet *(G.4.2)* 4.2.1. Number of people benefitting from public and private mechanisms/programs for biodiversity, water, land, oceans, energy and climate solutions (disaggregated by sex) *(Adapted G. 4.2.4)* Baseline: 0 Target: 100 million [50% women] Source/Frequency: UNDP, nationally determined contributions, national biodiversity action plan/annual		**Other** **$21,000,000**