

# **Inception Report**

## **Final Evaluation of the EU4Moldova: Focal Regions Programme**

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**Developed by:**

**Antonina Rishko-Porcescu**

**Octavian Lungu**

**Marius Bîrsan**

**Independent Evaluation Consultants**

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Evaluators	Antonina Rishko-Porcescu; Octavian Lungu; Marius Bîrsan	
Evaluator email address	maris.birsan@web.de	
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International External Evaluator: Marius Bîrsan

National External Evaluators: Antonina Rishko-Porcescu; Octavian Lungu

**UNDP staff focal point for the evaluation:**

**Alexandru Pelivan**, Program Manager, EU4MOLDOVA: Focal regions Programme,  
**Elena Laur**, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist / Child Rights Monitoring,  
 UNICEF Moldova

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## List of abbreviations and acronyms

AR	--	Annual Report
AWP	--	Annual Workplan
Covid-19	--	Coronavirus Disease - 2019
DoA	--	Description of Action
GDI	--	Gender Development Index
HDI	--	Human Development Index
NGO		Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	--	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
SF	--	Strategic Framework
ToC	--	Theory of Change
ToR	--	Terms of Reference (of the Evaluation)
UNDP	--	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	--	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNICEF	--	United Nations Children's Fund

## Introduction

This Inception Report responds to the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the assignment and is organized as follows:

Chapter 1 outlines the evaluation background and context

Chapter 2 outlines the evaluation objective, purpose and scope

Chapter 3 outlines evaluation criteria

Chapter 4 discusses the evaluability aspects of the current evaluation

Chapter 5 discusses the cross-cutting issues related to the evaluation

Chapter 6 outlines the methodological approach proposed for the evaluation, including stakeholder mapping

Chapter 7 outlines the evaluation matrix.

Chapter 8 discusses the revised schedule of key milestones, deliverables and responsibilities

The annexes include the Terms of Reference (ToRs), indicative list of stakeholders and key informants, and the general questions guideline to be addressed to them, the list of questions to be included in the online questionnaire, indicative list of the first interviews to be carried out, and the structure of the final evaluation report.

This final evaluation is conducted as the “EU4Moldova: Focal Regions Programme” nears its completion, providing an opportunity to assess its impact, sustainability, and alignment with Moldova’s regional development policies, being a summative evaluation. The evaluation builds on the findings of the mid-term review, ensuring that the final recommendations will guide future donor-funded interventions in Moldova’s regional growth strategy.

The key activities undertaken to prepare this Inception Report are building on elements outlined in the Evaluation Outline (analysis of background information, collection and analysis of core programme documents and policy frameworks) and on standard methodology in drafting inception reports as practiced in the UN Evaluation Group<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.iom.int/resources/uneg-quality-checklist-evaluation-terms-reference-and-inception-reports>

## Chapter 1: Evaluation background and context

### 1.1 County context

The Republic of Moldova, a landlocked lower middle-income country in Eastern Europe, has a population of approximately 2.6 million, with demographic shifts driven by high migration and a declining birth rate<sup>2</sup>. As of 2022, Moldova's Human Development Index (HDI) is 0.763, positioning it 86<sup>th</sup> out of 193 countries and territories<sup>3</sup>.

The Moldovan economy is primarily driven by services, manufacturing, and agriculture. The service sector accounts for over 50 per cent of GDP<sup>4</sup>, with a high concentration of women in education, healthcare, and retail, yet in lower-paid positions<sup>5</sup>. The manufacturing sector, including food processing, textiles, and automotive production, remains male-dominated, with women underrepresented in higher-paid technical roles. Agriculture, employing nearly 30 per cent of the workforce, is characterized by low productivity and high informal employment, disproportionately affecting women who have limited access to land, credit, and technology<sup>6</sup>.

Despite progress in gender equality, disparities persist in economic participation. Moldova's **Gender Development Index (GDI)** is **1.010**, indicating relatively balanced development between men and women, while its **Gender Inequality Index (GII)** of **0.245** highlights moderate disparities in health, empowerment, and labour market participation<sup>7</sup>. However, the **gender pay gap remains at 14 per cent**, with women earning **14.5 per cent less per month than men**, reflecting sectoral segregation and limited career advancement opportunities<sup>8</sup>.

The evaluation focuses on **Ungheni** and **Cahul focal regions**, two of Moldova's largest and most dynamic regions. **Ungheni**, located near the Romanian border, is a growing trade and logistics hub with increasing opportunities for women entrepreneurs through SME development. **Cahul**, in the south, has a strong agricultural base and emerging tourism sector, with local governance initiatives promoting inclusive economic participation. Both regions are recognized for their **progressive local governments**, making them strategic focal points for gender-responsive interventions<sup>9</sup>.

Despite ongoing challenges, these regions offer promising pathways for reducing gender disparities, enhancing women's economic empowerment, and fostering inclusive governance.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/country/MD>

<sup>3</sup> Human Development Report 2023-2024. UNDP, 2024.

<sup>4</sup> National Bureau of Statistics (2022).

<sup>5</sup> International Labour Organization. "ILO modelled estimates database" ILOSTAT. Accessed January 07, 2025. [ilostat.ilo.org/data](http://ilostat.ilo.org/data).

<sup>6</sup> International Labour Organization. "ILO modelled estimates database" ILOSTAT. Accessed January 07, 2025. [ilostat.ilo.org/data](http://ilostat.ilo.org/data).

<sup>7</sup> 2023/24 Human Development Report (HDR)

<sup>8</sup> National Bureau of Statistics, 2023

<sup>9</sup> Freedom of information Index: Measuring Transparency of Public Institutions in Moldova. 2024

Targeted interventions in these key economic sectors can further bridge gender gaps and strengthen Moldova's overall development trajectory.

## 1.2 EU4Moldova: Focal Regions. Programme overview

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Moldova, together with the United Nations Children's Fund - UNICEF Moldova, implemented the "EU4Moldova:Focal Regions" programme, which aimed to strengthen economic, territorial, and social cohesion in the Republic of Moldova, focusing on the Ungheni and Cahul regions. The project has a budget of EUR 23,300,000 (500,000 EUR contribution from UNDP)<sup>10</sup>, and was set to run for 60 months, with an 8-month extension to maximize the impact of successful activities and include new initiatives.

The *overall objective* of the programme was to strengthen the economic, territorial and social cohesion in the Republic of Moldova through facilitating inclusive, sustainable and integrated local socio-economic growth and improving the standards of living of the citizens in the focal regions (Ungheni and Cahul focal regions ~~provinces~~).

The Description of Action (DoA - project document) formulated specific *objectives* to contribute to achieving the overall objective:

1. To strengthen transparency, accountability of local public authorities and citizen participation in local governance processes in the focal regions;
2. To improve citizens' access to quality public services and utilities in the focal regions;
3. To create employment opportunities for men and women in the focal regions and improve the attractiveness of the focal regions for investors and entrepreneurs;
4. To promote the smart specialization of the economy in the focal regions through the development of clustering and value chain approach in key economic sectors.

The programme's objectives should be achieved through the following *key components*:

Component 1: Governance and Transparency – Strengthening the capacity of local authorities, increasing public engagement in local decision-making, and enhancing digital governance.

Component 2: Public Services and Infrastructure – Expanding access to essential services, improving regional infrastructure, and supporting municipal cooperation for service delivery.

Component 3: Economic Development – Enhancing the investment climate, supporting small businesses, and integrating local economies into national and international value chains.

Component 4: Smart Specialization & Innovation – Supporting the development of industry clusters and promoting value-added economic activities.

The programme is implemented jointly by UNDP and UNICEF. UNDP leads regional economic development and governance components, while UNICEF focuses on social services and child-friendly infrastructure.

The programme involves a wide range of national and local stakeholders, including:

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<sup>10</sup> Additionally, in 2004, Government of France allocated 210,000 USD for a specific component (to be further detailed in the Evaluation analysis and Report).

- Government institutions – Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and Regional Development Agencies.
- Local Public Authorities (LPAs) – Municipalities and local councils in Cahul and Ungheni.
- Public institutions like education and health establishments;
- Private sector and civil society organizations – Supporting entrepreneurship and regional economic integration.

The activities are aligned with national, regional, and international policy frameworks, including:

- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Moldova 2030 Development Strategy, which emphasizes inclusive economic growth.
- Regional Development Strategy 2022-2027, focusing on balanced territorial development.
- National Programme for Growth Pole Cities 2021-2027, promoting regional competitiveness.
- EU-Moldova Association Agenda, reinforcing Moldova’s integration with the European Union.

By the end of the programme, expected enduring changes should include:

- Stronger local governance, with increased transparency and civic participation.
- Enhanced infrastructure and access to services, benefiting urban and rural communities alike.
- A more dynamic regional economy, with improved conditions for investment and entrepreneurship.
- Institutionalized approaches to smart specialization, ensuring long-term sustainability.

This final evaluation provides an opportunity to assess programme achievements, lessons learned, and areas for future improvement, ensuring the sustainability of its interventions beyond the funding period.

## **Chapter 2: Evaluation objective, purpose and scope**

The Final Evaluation is conducted as part of the Evaluation Policies and Plans of UNDP and UNICEF, ensuring adherence to international evaluation standards and best practices. It is scheduled towards the end of the initial implementation period, allowing for a comprehensive and objective assessment of the EU4Moldova:Focal Regions Programme, thus being a summative evaluation.

This evaluation aims to assess the programme's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability within Moldova’s national and regional development framework, with a focus on the Cahul and Ungheni regions. It will cover the entire implementation period from November 2019 to the time of evaluation (early 2025), incorporating insights from previous assessments, including the Mid-Term Evaluation, while also examining the effects of the programme’s no-cost extension until July 2025.

As outlined in the Terms of Reference (ToR), the final evaluation aims to assess the Programme by examining its design, implementation, and results, ensuring accountability and extracting key lessons for future programming. The evaluation will provide evidence-based findings and recommendations to guide future interventions and support Moldova's regional development agenda.

***The main objectives of the evaluation are to:***

- Ensure *accountability* by evaluating the Programme's achievements, challenges, and lessons learned to inform future programming and decision-making.
- Assess the Programme's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact, in line with the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria.
- Evaluate the alignment of the Programme's design, implementation, and outcomes with Moldova's national and regional development frameworks, including the Moldova 2030 Strategy, the Regional Development Strategy 2022–2027, and the EU-Moldova Association Agenda.
- Examine the effectiveness of local public administration support mechanisms, focusing on governance reforms, fiscal decentralization, and participatory decision-making in Cahul and Ungheni.
- Identify key bottlenecks in Programme execution, assessing the factors that facilitated or limited the progress in infrastructure development, business environment improvements, and citizen engagement.
- Assess the effectiveness of stakeholder consultation mechanisms, ensuring that municipal authorities, civil society organizations, private sector actors, and local communities were actively involved in planning and decision-making processes.
- Measure the Programme's contributions to employment, economic growth, and access to public services, assessing whether these improvements are sustainable beyond the funding period and whether interventions have led to systemic change at the local and national levels.
- Analyse the integration of cross cutting priorities, including gender equality, human rights, climate resilience, and digital transformation, into the Programme's design and implementation.
- Provide evidence-based policy recommendations for UNDP, UNICEF, the EU Delegation to Moldova, and national authorities on how to replicate and scale successful elements of the Programme in other regions.
- Support future decision-making and planning by identifying opportunities to enhance Moldova's economic, territorial, and social cohesion, ensuring that regional disparities are addressed through sustainable and inclusive development strategies.

***The beneficiaries and intended use of the evaluation results are***

- UNDP and UNICEF will use the evaluation to measure Programme outcomes, enhance their approaches for future programming, and scale up successful initiatives;
- EU Delegation will utilize the findings to assess the effectiveness of EU-funded interventions and decide on potential future collaborations in Moldova;
- Local and Central Governments will leverage the insights to improve governance, service delivery, and regional development planning in line with national priorities;

- Civil Society and Private Sector Stakeholders will use the lessons learned to enhance their involvement in future regional development initiatives and public-private collaborations.

### Chapter 3: Evaluation criteria and questions

In accordance with the UNDP's and UNICEF's Evaluation Policies, the OECD Evaluation Standards, and given the typology of the services provided by UNDP and UNICEF, five evaluation criteria will be used in order to assess the success of the Programme, and to indicate lessons learned and recommendations for future continuation or upscaling of the initiatives:

*Relevance:* the extent to which the Programme's parameters, such as design and implementation, respond to the global country's needs, UN system specifics, partners'/institutions', and citizens' needs and priorities.

*Effectiveness:* the extent to which extent the Programme already achieved the expected outcome, outputs, and respective targets, as well as the challenges, lessons learned, as well as identify relevant and strategic directions to be considered for scaling up similar interventions;

*Efficiency:* the extent to which the programme delivered or is likely to deliver results (outputs and their contribution to achieving outcomes) in the most cost-efficient way possible, as compared to feasible alternatives in the context. The elements to be analysed will be resource utilization, the implementation modalities and approach, intervention logic, and coordination;

*Sustainability:* the extent to which the benefits of the programme continue or are likely to continue (in case UNDP/UNICEF would end their support). This includes, as relevant, an examination of the financial, economic, social, environmental, and institutional capacities of the systems needed to sustain net benefits over time, as well as the assessment of the exit strategy;

*Cross-cutting issues:* how aspects like human rights, children's rights, gender equality, equal opportunities for people with disabilities and marginalized groups, resilience, and leaving no one behind principles have been considered in the design and implementation of the programme;

*Impact considerations:* to what extent and how, the results achieved contribute to systemic changes in the society of Moldova.

The indicative evaluation questions linked to the above-mentioned evaluation criteria are detailed in the Evaluation Matrix (Chapter 7: Evaluation matrix). The questions will be refined during the desk review stage of data collection, influenced by findings evidenced in various programmatic documents and reports.

In order to provide the most benefit to the organizations, the evaluation will also attempt to understand what worked and what did not work regarding the design and implementation, in each of the regions.

The final evaluation report will formulate conclusions and recommendations (strategic and operational), which will support UNDP and UNICEF Moldova management in refining the design to support two regions identified as regional growth poles, to boost their socio-economic development, and, in this process, to raise the economic and living conditions for the neighbouring local communities constituting the focal region.

## Chapter 4: Evaluability analysis

UNDP and UNICEF follow established evaluation policies and frameworks for programme assessments. The EU4Moldova:Focal Regions Programme includes a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework in its Description of Action (DoA), detailing monitoring principles, reporting mechanisms, and evaluation planning, with resources and time allocated for the final evaluation.

The programme evaluation uses a theory-based approach to analyse the logical framework. It assesses how supporting two municipalities as regional growth poles was intended to boost socio-economic development in the regions, enhancing economic conditions and quality of life for nearby communities.

A key part of this evaluation is examining the Theory of Change (ToC), detailed in the DoA. This includes assessing how planned activities were expected to achieve the intended outcomes and long-term impact

The evaluation will analyse the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, and impact of the programme components as outlined in the Terms of Reference (ToR). The Logical Framework (LogFrame) offers a results-based monitoring system with SMART indicators at the impact, outcome, and output levels. A robust M&E system, a clear Theory of Change, and a structured Logical Framework ensure an evidence-based, methodologically sound evaluation aligned with UN evaluation principles. These elements support assessing programme performance and generating insights to fulfil accountability and learning functions.

The evaluability analysis assesses the extent to which the Programme can be effectively evaluated, based on the availability of clear outputs, indicators, baselines, and data, as well as the Programme's Theory of Change (ToC), results framework, and problem identification.

The ToC, as outlined in the DoA, provides a structured framework for understanding how programme interventions at different levels contribute to the intended impact. The following analysis briefly examines the key assumptions and pathways of change identified in the ToC narratives, with the ToC diagrams attached as an annex.

### **Theory of Change Analysis**

The Programme's impact pathway assumes that improvements in local governance, democratic participation, and the local economy will lead to enhanced socio-economic development, increased social cohesion, and an improved quality of life in the focal regions of Cahul and Ungheni. The key change pathways are outlined below:

#### ***Change at the local governments level***

The Programme aims to strengthen local governance by increasing transparency, efficiency, and citizen engagement. The expected causal link is:

- *IF* local governments become more open and transparent and engage citizens, including youth, in planning for future regional development, *THEN* public trust and participatory governance will improve.
- *IF* local governments enhance staff competence, efficiency of operations, and infrastructure management, *THEN* service delivery and urban planning will improve.

- *IF* municipalities rehabilitate and expand infrastructure while adopting SMART technologies, *THEN* local services will be more effective, sustainable, and inclusive.

Evaluability considerations:

- The Programme's municipal capacity-building efforts can be assessed through quantitative indicators, such as institutional efficiency metrics, transparency scores, and citizen satisfaction surveys.
- Evaluating the impact of SMART technology adoption may require qualitative case studies on digital governance tools implemented at the municipal level.

***Change at the level of democratic participation***

The Programme assumes that empowering citizens and enhancing civic engagement mechanisms will result in greater participation in governance. The expected pathway is:

- *IF* citizens, including women, children, youth, and other vulnerable groups, are empowered to participate actively in local governance, including monitoring national and local strategy implementation, *THEN* their voice in policymaking will increase.
- *IF* participatory mechanisms are institutionalized through citizen budgets, youth councils, and public consultations, *THEN* accountability and responsiveness of local governments will improve.

Evaluability considerations:

- Assessing citizen participation rates in public consultations, participatory budgeting, and civic initiatives will provide quantitative evidence of democratic engagement.
- Survey-based perception studies can evaluate how women, youth, and vulnerable groups perceive their role and influence in local decision-making.

***Change in the local economies and employment***

A critical assumption in the ToC is that, improving the business environment, strengthening value chains, and investing in education and skills development will stimulate economic growth and employment. The pathway follows:

- *IF* the business environment and local infrastructure improve through investments that stimulate private sector growth, *THEN* employment opportunities for both men and women will expand.
- *IF* local manufacturing, agriculture, and service sectors benefit from clustering, value chain development, and technology adoption, *THEN* regional economic competitiveness will increase.
- *IF* the workforce, including women and youth, has access to quality, inclusive education and skills training aligned with market demand, *THEN* their employability and entrepreneurial success rates will improve.

### Evaluability considerations:

- Measuring changes in private investment levels, business creation rates, and employment growth will indicate whether the Programme's economic interventions contributed to improved general situation.
- Skills-building and vocational training outcomes can be assessed using pre- and post-programme participant data to track employment trajectories.
- Examining the impact of entrepreneurial financing and business incubation support will provide insights into start-up success rates and SME growth.

### **Overall expected impact**

- If all assumptions above hold, *THEN* citizens will be empowered to demand their rights, local authorities will be more responsive, focal regions will become economically prosperous, and social cohesion will be strengthened.
- Changes will start in urban centres (Cahul and Ungheni) and expand to neighbouring communities, creating a spillover effect across the focal regions.

### Evaluability considerations:

- Evaluating regional economic growth and quality-of-life improvements requires both macro-level analysis (regional economic indicators, municipal development trends) and micro-level insights (citizen satisfaction surveys, business success stories, and local governance metrics).
- The impact of social cohesion interventions can be assessed through social capital indicators, trust in institutions, and participation in community development initiatives.

The ToC analysis provides a clear framework for understanding how the Programme's local governance, civic engagement, and economic interventions contribute to regional development and social cohesion. While quantitative data sources such as municipal performance indicators, investment trends, and employment rates will provide objective measures of success, qualitative methods such as stakeholder interviews and citizen engagement surveys will be essential for understanding behavioural and institutional change.

### **Change at the level of local governments**

- *IF* local governments become more open and transparent and involve citizens, including youth, in planning for future development of their focal region, *and*
- *IF* local governments improve the quality of their infrastructure and communal and social services by having more competent and skilled staff, increasing effectiveness and efficiency of operation, rehabilitating and expanding the infrastructure, using SMART technology.

### ***Change at the level of democratic participation***

- *IF* citizens (including the women, children, youth and other vulnerable groups) are empowered and participate more actively in local governance, including in monitoring the implementation of national and local strategies

### ***Change in the local economies and employment***

- *IF* business environment and infrastructure improve, by stimulating private investment, local or international, and employment opportunities for men and women increase
- *IF* local manufacturing, agriculture, or service sectors benefit from clustering and value chains approaches, as well as advances in technology and science based on a more educated local population
- *IF* the workforce, including women and youth, benefit from quality, inclusive education and skills-building in line with market demand, and have access to entrepreneurial financing

### ***Expected impact***

*THEN*, citizens are empowered to demand their rights, local authorities respond better to citizens' needs, focal regions become more prosperous, and social cohesion is advanced, while citizens enjoy a higher quality of life.

Geographically, the changes will start in the towns (urban centres) and will be extended towards the neighbouring communities which constitute the focal region.

The problem to be addressed throughout the evaluation derives from the objectives formulated in the ToR, namely to assess the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, and contribution to impact of the programme components and their results.

The programme benefits from a well-defined Logical Framework (LogFrame), with SMART indicators defined at impact and outcomes levels, as well as for most of the output-level indicators.

The evaluation methodology will be designed to verify ToC assumptions, measure intended and unintended results and ensure that findings provide actionable recommendations for scaling and sustainability.

All the elements mentioned above create ideal premises for a solid evaluation according to the proposed objectives and relevant evaluation principles in the UN context.

### **The UNICEF component in the EU4Moldova:Focal Regions Programme ToC (Annex 5: Theory of Change (As presented in the annexes of the Description of Action))**

The UNICEF component in the EU4Moldova:Focal Regions ToC aims at strengthening public service delivery, governance, and youth participation to improve citizens' standards of living in Cahul and Ungheni. Contributing to Programme's Output 2, it was designed to enhance

education, health, and social services for children and adolescents while promoting inclusive governance.

Key interventions include building local government capacity to improve adolescent services, integrating budget monitoring, and securing sustainable financing. UNICEF also supports childcare services to help young mothers re-enter the labour market, strengthens healthcare for children with disabilities, and improves education through e-learning and performance monitoring tools. Additionally, it fosters youth participation in governance and raises awareness of child rights among stakeholders.

By embedding children's needs into governance and service planning, UNICEF ensures better education, health, and civic engagement. This contributes to stronger, more accountable local institutions and a more inclusive, participatory society in Moldova's focal regions.

## Chapter 5: Cross-cutting issues

The ToR requires the evaluation to address gender equality, human and child rights, disability inclusion, and green development.

During the desk review, data will be broken down by gender and age to understand the impact on different groups. Data collection will include a gender-balanced approach for stakeholder interviews to ensure diverse perspectives. In case online survey(s) will be used, it/they will gather disaggregated data for inclusive analysis.

The evaluation will include perspectives from persons with disabilities and marginalized groups where feasible, ensuring their voices are represented in stakeholder interviews. This approach aims for a comprehensive and inclusive assessment of programme interventions.

The evaluation process will be rights-based, treating interviewees with dignity and respect to ensure fair, unbiased, and ethical consideration of their views. Stakeholders will actively participate in quality assurance, offering feedback to improve the accuracy and relevance of findings and recommendations.

The Leave No One Behind (LNOB) principle and the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) will guide the evaluation. This focus on equality, equity, and non-discrimination will assess if programme interventions meet diverse beneficiary needs and include inclusivity in activities.

## Chapter 6: Evaluation approach and methodology

This chapter describes the evaluation methodology, specifying the data collection methods, analytical approach, and main evaluation techniques used to assess the EU4Moldova:Focal Regions Programme. The methodology employs a multi-phase approach, utilizing various tools and steps after the completion of the Inception Report incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure an all-encompassing and unbiased assessment. The methodology is based on a theory-based approach to explain how the programme results contribute to achieving the expected outcomes and impacts, as well as complying with the UN System's trend to incorporate more quantitative data.

### 1. Starting Phase (January - February 2025)

The first phase focuses on the desk review of key programme documents, including:

- Strategic national and UN policy documents.
- The Programme's DoA, annual reports, and mid-term evaluation.
- Final evaluations of previous country programme documents and policy papers.
- UNDP and UNICEF Moldova monitoring reports and outputs.
- Relevant national statistics and external reports related to programme outcomes.

Furthermore, exploratory interviews will be held with key programme members and management from UNDP and UNICEF, through in-person meetings or online sessions.

### 2. Data Collection Phase (February - March 2025)

Data collection will employ various tools to ensure a thorough analysis:

- Document review: Beyond the inception-phase documents, additional reports, technical papers, and policy briefs will be reviewed. To ensure triangulation, reports from other international and national organizations will also be consulted.
- Statistical data analysis: Disaggregated data by gender, age, and geography will be examined, including internal statistics from UNDP, UNICEF, and partners. This will include studies related to socio-economic development and regional growth. If applicable, an online survey will collect perception-based data from beneficiaries and programme partners.
- Field visits: Site visits to Cahul and Ungheni will provide first-hand insights into regional dynamics, infrastructure developments, and programme effectiveness.
- Stakeholder interviews and focus groups: Up to 40 structured/semi-structured interviews will be conducted with:
  - UNDP and UNICEF management.
  - Programme management staff.
  - Donors, ministries, regional and local government representatives, and academia.
  - Implementing partners.
  - Beneficiaries, ensuring balanced gender and regional representation, including people with disabilities.
  - Other relevant stakeholders.

Interviews are scheduled to last approximately 60 minutes and will follow a semi-structured discussion guide (Annex 3: Draft Discussion Guide / Interviewing Protocol). Key interviews will be

conducted in person, while others will be facilitated through video conferencing, enabling the observation of non-verbal communication cues.

### Sampling strategy

In order to collect (qualitative) evidence ensuring statistical relevance for the findings and conclusions, the evaluation will use the stratified random sample, which is used to ensure the representation of the main research parameters and/or target groups in each sample. The sampling approach is split per category of stakeholders:

- For the LPAs, given their manageable size, representatives from all four municipality and rayonal levels of Cahul and Ungheni, will be directly consulted. For the ministries, given personnel changes and lack of institutional memory, only the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Education and Research will be consulted.
- Communities & Civil Society Organizations (CSOs): main organisations (by partnership size) will be interviewed. In case the time allocated for field visits will accommodate, additional interviews will be organised with local NGO/CSO in Ungheni and Cahul rayons;
- Economic Actors (SMEs, Business Associations): for the interviews during the field trips, two business clusters and two SME's from each region (in the municipalities and in the provinces) will be interviewed. Additionally, the evaluation team will try to identify an SME in each of the two regions which did not benefit from grants, to understand the development possibilities of non-beneficiaries;
- Local Education and Health Authorities: the sampling will cover at least one kindergarten in each municipality and in one in the surrounding regions. Same approach will cover one elementary school or lyceum per municipality and region. For the health centres, at least the most significant (size-wise) one for the region will be covered.
- Youth Councils & Youth Centres: interviews will be carried out with representatives of the rayonal and municipal Youth Centres in both focal regions.

### Final Beneficiaries

- Citizens of Cahul and Ungheni, including men, women, youth, and vulnerable populations: qualitative and quantitative data will be collected through analysis of metadata collected by the Programme, and through online surveys where databases are available. Separate online surveys might be used for economic agents to assess perceptions on the economic support.

### **3. Data analysis, synthesis, and report drafting phase (March – April 2025)**

After data collection, a structured data analysis and synthesis process will be applied:

- Triangulation: findings will be cross-checked across multiple data sources, including reports, policy documents, and interviews.
- Comparative analysis: Programme results will be assessed against national development benchmarks and international best practices.
- Case study approach: selected programme interventions will be examined in-depth to illustrate successful strategies and challenges.

Final results will be presented in a policy-oriented report covering all evaluation criteria. The findings will offer practical recommendations to improve future regional development strategies,

program design, and funding decisions. This methodology provides a thorough, evidence-based assessment, giving stakeholders actionable insights for program sustainability and scaling.

## Stakeholder Analysis

Stakeholders are individuals, groups or entities which are directly involved in carrying out and/or benefitting from the EU4Moldova:Focal regions Programme, as well as the entities benefitting from the evaluation results. All stakeholders, whether directly involved, or beneficiaries, have a vested interest in the success of the attainment of the results outlined in the Programmes' Document / DoA. Their support and involvement are crucial for the achievement of the desired evaluation goals.

The **EU4Moldova:Focal Regions Programme** brings together a diverse range of stakeholders crucial to achieving its overarching goal of enhancing economic, territorial, and social cohesion in **Cahul and Ungheni**. Stakeholders play key roles in governance, service delivery, economic development, and social inclusion, with UNICEF contributing significantly to child-focused interventions.

### 1. Primary Stakeholders

- **LPAs:** Municipalities of Cahul and Ungheni, rayon councils, and local councils lead governance, socio-economic planning, and implementation of service improvements. Their capacity-building is key for transparency, accountability, and participatory governance.
- **Communities & Civil Society Organizations (CSOs):** Local NGOs, volunteer groups, and community-based organizations engage in governance monitoring, public participation, and social service delivery, particularly in youth, gender, and disability inclusion.
- **Economic Actors** (SMEs, Business Associations, Investors): Local businesses, entrepreneurs, and cooperatives are key for job creation, investment, and economic resilience, benefiting from smart specialization, value chains, and financial inclusion.
- **Service Providers** (Municipal Enterprises, Public Utility Operators): Entities responsible for essential public services (water, sanitation, waste management) are engaged in service modernization and regionalization efforts to improve efficiency and coverage.

### 2. Secondary Stakeholders

- **Central Government Ministries & Agencies:**
  - Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development, and Environment – Oversees regional development policies and infrastructure improvements.
  - Ministry of Education and Research – Ensures alignment with national education strategies, including preschool and vocational training support.
  - Ministry of Health – Supports improvements in healthcare services, particularly for maternal and child health in focal regions.
  - Agency for Public Services & Agency for Electronic Governance – Facilitates digital transformation, smart governance, and IT infrastructure for service delivery.
- **International Development Partners & Donors**

### 3. UNICEF-Specific Stakeholders

- **Local Education and Health Authorities:** Engage in tracking and improving early childhood education, youth services, and healthcare access.
- **Youth Councils & Youth Centres:** Facilitate adolescent participation in governance, economic empowerment, and social services.
- **Social Protection Services:** Address needs of vulnerable groups, including women, children, and people with disabilities.

### 4. Final Beneficiaries

- **Citizens of Cahul and Ungheni,** including men, women, youth, and vulnerable populations, who benefit from improved governance, better services, employment opportunities, and strengthened social inclusion.

## Chapter 7: Evaluation matrix

During the data collection phase, the evaluators will be guided by a set of questions, relevant for the six evaluation criteria, according to the following evaluation matrix:

## Evaluation Matrix

Relevant Evaluation Criteria	Key Questions	Specific sub-questions	Data sources	Data Collection methods/ tools	Indicators/ success standards	Methods for data analysis
<b>Relevance</b>	1. Is the programme and its objectives aligned with the national development strategies, and with the UNDP/UNICEF's strategic objectives in supporting Moldova?	<p>1.1 To what extent have the EU4Moldova: Focal Regions Programme results contributed to the UNSDCF/CPDs outcomes?</p> <p>1.2 To what extent are the Programme's outcomes aligned with national and sub-national priorities and the EU-Moldova Association Agenda?</p> <p>1.3 What factors have contributed to achieving or hindering achievement of the intended outputs and outcomes?</p> <p>1.4 Was the strategy adopted and inputs identified, realistic, appropriate and adequate for achievement of the results?</p> <p>1.5 Has the partnership strategy been appropriate and effective?</p> <p>1.6 To what extent did the EU4Moldova: Focal Regions Programme align and coordinate with other EU-funded interventions in Moldova?</p> <p>1.7 How effectively did the Programme's communication and visibility strategies align with EU standards and contribute to raising awareness of EU-funded support?</p>	Programmatic documents of the DoA, and national strategic documents	<p>Desk Review</p> <p>Semi-structured Interviews</p> <p>Online survey/s</p>	<p>-Degree of coherence between programme outcomes and Moldova's national development strategies, regional policies, and the EU-Moldova Association Agenda;</p> <p>-Stakeholder perceptions (government, regional authorities, EU representatives) on the relevance of programme objectives to national priorities;</p> <p>- Degree of alignment between programme results and relevant UNSDCF/CPD outcome indicators.</p> <p>-Evidence of direct contributions to UN strategic priorities (e.g., social inclusion, economic development, governance, climate resilience).</p> <p>-Number and quality of partnerships established with government institutions, civil society, private sector, and EU bodies;</p> <p>-Level of engagement of key stakeholders in programme design and implementation.</p> <p>-Evidence of increased institutional capacity and ownership due to partnerships.</p> <p>-Stakeholder perceptions on partnership effectiveness and sustainability.</p> <p>Compliance with EU visibility requirements in programme outreach and communication materials.</p> <p>Level of public awareness of EU support in focal regions (measured through surveys(if available), media engagement, and social media reach).</p> <p>- Number and type of visibility and awareness-raising activities conducted.</p>	Thematic Qualitative analysis, comparative analysis, case study approach (where possible); quantitative statistical analysis of survey results

					-Stakeholder perceptions on the effectiveness of the programme's communication strategy in promoting EU-Moldova cooperation.	
<b>Effectiveness</b>	2.How did the activities contribute to achieving the strategic objectives of Programme?	<p>2.1 To what extent the Programme already achieved the expected outcome, outputs, and respective targets?</p> <p>2.2 What have been the main contributing and challenging factors towards programme's success in attaining its targets? (Also consider any which were possibly beyond the control of the programme)</p> <p>2.3 To what extent were the cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, environmental sustainability, human rights and social standards addressed in the design and implementation of the project?</p> <p>2.4 Which programme areas are the most relevant and strategic for UNDP and UNICEF to scale up or consider going forward?</p> <p>2.5 In which areas does the programme have the greatest achievements? Why and what have been the supporting factors? How can the programme build on or expand these achievements?</p> <p>2.6 In which areas does the programme have the fewest achievements? What have been the constraining factors and why? How can or could they be overcome?</p>	Annual Reports MTE Internal statistical data Interviews Survey results	Desk Review Semi-structured Interviews  On-site visits Online survey	<p>-Progress against key performance indicators;</p> <p>-Comparative analysis of baseline vs. endline data for key intervention areas.</p> <p>-Perceptions of key stakeholders (government, UN agencies, beneficiaries) regarding the programme's effectiveness.</p> <p>-Identification of key enabling factors (e.g., policy support, institutional capacity, community engagement) and barriers (e.g., regulatory delays, economic downturns, political instability).</p> <p>-Degree of programme adaptability in response to emerging challenges and opportunities;</p> <p>Degree of alignment of potential scale-up areas with national priorities, UNSDCF/CPDs, and EU cooperation frameworks;</p> <p>Degree of programme components have demonstrated the highest impact and sustainability potential.</p> <p>Evidence of systemic changes (e.g., improved governance mechanisms, institutional capacity building, private sector engagement).</p> <p>Verifiable examples of impact stories and case studies demonstrating tangible improvements in target regions.</p>	Thematic Qualitative analysis, comparative analysis, case study approach (where possible); quantitative statistical analysis of survey results
<b>Efficiency</b>	3.Were the resources sufficient for achieving the results?	3.1. Are the process of achieving results efficient? Specifically did the actual or expected results (outputs and outcomes) justify the costs incurred? Were the resources effectively utilized?	Annual Reports MTE Internal statistical data	Desk review  Semi-structured Interviews On-site visits	<p>-Comparison of planned vs. actual budget expenditure for key programme components;</p> <p>-Stakeholder perceptions (government, donors, implementing partners) on the adequacy of resources for achieving results;</p>	Thematic Qualitative analysis, comparative

	<p>Were all activities organized efficiently and were objectives achieved on time?</p>	<p>3.2 What factors are contributing to implementation efficiency?  3.3 To what extent were resources used to address inequalities and gender issues?  3.4 To what extent were partnership modalities conducive to the delivery of programme outputs?  3.5 Do the programme' activities overlap and duplicate other similar interventions (funded nationally and /or by other donors? Are there more efficient ways and means of delivering more and better results (outputs and outcomes) with the available inputs?  3.6 Could a different approach have produced better results?  3.6 How is the program management structure operating?  3.7 How efficient are the management and accountability structures of the programme?  3.8 How did the programme financial management processes and procedures affect programme implementation?  3.9 To what extent did UNDP and UNICEF engage or coordinate with different beneficiaries (men and women, boys and girls), implementing partners, other United Nations agencies and national counterparts to achieve outcome-level results?  3.10 What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the programme implementation process?  3.11 Was the intervention logic clear, and did it contribute to achieving intended results?</p>	Interviews	Online Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Identification of operational and contextual factors facilitating or constraining programme delivery (e.g., procurement processes, staffing, bureaucratic procedures).</li> <li>-Degree of flexibility and adaptability in programme management to respond to challenges.</li> <li>-Extent to which innovative approaches (e.g., digital solutions, streamlined workflows) enhanced efficiency;</li> <li>-Level of integration and coordination between UNDP, UNICEF, national counterparts, and other donors;</li> <li>-Degree of complementarity and avoidance of duplication with other similar interventions;</li> <li>-Stakeholder perceptions on the added value of partnership modalities in enhancing efficiency.</li> <li>-Stakeholder feedback on the clarity of roles, responsibilities, and management structures.</li> <li>-Degree to which programme design and intervention logic were appropriate for achieving intended results efficiently.</li> <li>-Evidence of learning and adaptation in programme implementation based on efficiency assessments.</li> </ul>	analysis, case study approach (where possible); quantitative statistical analysis of survey results
<b>Sustainability</b>	<p>4. To what extent will the benefits of the activities persist after</p>	<p>4.1 What were the major factors which influenced the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of the programme?</p>		Documents Review Semi-Structured Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Degree of local ownership and commitment (e.g., financial contributions, policy adoption, sustained implementation by national and subnational actors);</li> </ul>	Thematic Qualitative analysis, comparative analysis, case

	the end of the intervention?	<p>4.2 What needs to be done and/or improved to ensure sustainability?</p> <p>4.3 What could be done to strengthen exit strategies and sustainability in order to support female and male project beneficiaries as well as marginalized groups?</p> <p>4.4 Describe the main lessons that have emerged.</p> <p>4.5 What are the recommendations for similar support in future?</p> <p>4.6 How well did the Programme incorporate monitoring and learning processes to inform and improve project implementation?</p>	Internal reports Programme Staff Key informants interviews	On-site visits Online Survey	<p>-Stakeholder perceptions on the durability of programme impacts at the community, institutional, and policy levels.</p> <p>-Extent to which implementing institutions have the capacity and resources to sustain programme benefits.</p> <p>-Risks to sustainability (e.g., changes in government priorities, economic downturns, dependency on external funding).</p> <p>-Existence and effectiveness of exit strategies for programme components (e.g., transition plans, capacity-building efforts, private sector engagement).</p> <p>-Verifiable examples of adaptation and learning from implementation to improve sustainability measures.</p> <p>-Evidence of adaptive learning (e.g., mid-term adjustments, capacity-building initiatives based on lessons learned).</p> <p>-Stakeholder perceptions on the effectiveness of knowledge-sharing and capacity-building efforts in reinforcing sustainability.</p>	study approach (where possible); quantitative statistical analysis of survey results
<b>Cross-Cutting Themes</b>		<p>5.1 To what extent the rights of children has been addressed and have poor, women, men and other disadvantaged and marginalized groups benefited from the implementation of the Programme in the focal regions?</p> <p>5.2 To what extent has the Programme promoted positive changes in gender equality and the empowerment of women? Did any unintended effects emerge for women, men or vulnerable groups?</p> <p>5.3 To what extent has the Programme promoted and reached beneficiaries with disabilities / special needs?</p>	Internal Reports Other statistical data available Key informants interviews Results of survey	Documents Review Semi-Structured Interviews On-site visits Online Survey	<p>-Percentage of programme beneficiaries from disadvantaged and marginalized groups (e.g., women, children, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities);</p> <p>-Stakeholder perceptions (beneficiaries, government, civil society) on the programme's impact on inclusion and social equity.</p> <p>-Number and type of programme activities specifically aimed at promoting gender equality and women's economic or social empowerment.</p> <p>- Evidence of policy and institutional changes supported by the programme to advance gender equity.</p> <p>-Identification of any unintended gender-related effects (positive or negative) resulting from programme activities.</p>	

					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Percentage of programme beneficiaries who are persons with disabilities, disaggregated by gender and age.</li> <li>-Level of accessibility and inclusiveness of programme interventions (e.g., infrastructure adaptations, accessible communication methods, targeted services).</li> </ul>	
<b>Contribution to achieving Impacts</b>		<p>6.1 To what extent has the EU4Moldova: Focal Regions Programme contributed to long-term changes in the targeted regions (e.g., economic growth, social development, institutional capacity)?</p> <p>6.2 What has been the impact of the Programme on beneficiaries, including marginalized and vulnerable groups?</p> <p>6.3 How has the Programme contributed to enhancing gender equality and reducing inequalities in the regions?</p> <p>6.4 To what extent have the Programme's interventions led to sustained improvements in local governance, public service delivery, and economic opportunities?</p> <p>6.5 What are the unintended positive or negative impacts of the Programme, and how have these affected the overall outcomes?</p> <p>6.6 How has the Programme contributed to systemic or transformative changes within the local and regional economic environment?</p> <p>6.7 How have the Programme's activities influenced national or sub-national policy and decision-making processes in the long term?</p> <p>6.8 To what extent has the Programme's work strengthened the resilience of communities to future crises (economic, social, or environmental)?</p>	<p>Internal Reports</p> <p>Other statistical data available</p> <p>Key informants interviews</p> <p>Results of survey</p>	<p>Documents Review</p> <p>Semi-Structured Interviews</p> <p>On-site visits</p> <p>Online Survey</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Measurable improvements in key socio-economic indicators in focal regions.</li> <li>-Institutional capacity development indicators (e.g., enhanced local government effectiveness, improved public financial management, strengthened service delivery mechanisms).</li> <li>-Perceptions of government officials, civil society, and private sector actors on programme contributions to long-term regional development.</li> <li>-Qualitative evidence of improved well-being and empowerment from beneficiary testimonies and case studies.</li> <li>-Evidence of policy or institutional changes supporting gender equality and social inclusion at local and regional levels.</li> <li>-Private sector growth indicators (e.g., increase in SMEs, investment attraction, business environment improvements).</li> <li>-Identification and analysis of unintended programme effects, both positive (e.g., spillover benefits to non-targeted areas, innovation uptake) and negative (e.g., exclusionary effects, dependency on donor funding).</li> <li>-Degree of integration of programme-supported economic models into broader regional or national development strategies.</li> <li>-Extent to which programme-supported research and data informed policymaking at national and sub-national levels.</li> </ul>	<p>Thematic Qualitative analysis, comparative analysis, case study approach (where possible); quantitative statistical analysis of survey results</p>

					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Level of engagement of national and local policymakers in programme implementation and decision-making.</li> <li>-Level of integration of resilience-building components in local governance and planning processes;</li> <li>-Stakeholder perceptions of improved community capacity to withstand economic, social, and environmental shocks.</li> </ul>	
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## Chapter 8: Revised schedule of key milestones, deliverables and responsibilities

The timetable and key outputs for the Evaluation are highlighted below:

TIMEFRAME	ACTIVITY
<b>Inception Phase</b>	
13 January 2025/ - February 2025	Contracts signed with International (IC) and National (NC) Consultants; evaluation started
14 February 2025	Kick-off meeting (UNDP/UNICEF, IC, NCs)
6 – 17 Feb 2025	Collect and analyse background materials (NC)
	Review of the relevant input/background documentation (IC)
27 Jan – 17 Feb 2025	Draft the Evaluation Outline and Inception report, including evaluation methodology, work plan and evaluation matrix (IC)
17 Feb 2025	Submission of the Evaluation Outline
20 February 2025	Submission of the draft Inception Report (IC)
28 Feb 2025	Submission of comments on draft Inception (UNDP/UNICEF)
04 March 2025	Submission of the revised Inception Report (IC)
04 March 2025	Approval of the Inception report (UNDP/UNICEF)
03-10 March 2025	Preparation of questionnaire; preparation of the online survey (IC)
<b>Data Collection and Analysis Phases</b>	
18 Feb – 7 Mar 2015	Organize field visits and meetings with relevant parties (NCs)
24 - 28 February 2025: 10 - 12 March 2025	Field Mission in the Republic of Moldova Interviews / calls with stakeholders and partners Preliminary analysis of findings Debriefing mini-workshop: Following the initial data collection phases, a debriefing mini-workshop will be held to discuss findings and potential recommendations (at UNDP/UNICEF office)

20 March 2025	Drafting of the Evaluation report
25 March 2025	Provide inputs to the draft evaluation report (NCs)
31 March 2025	Provide inputs to the presentation of the final evaluation report (NCs)
03 April 2025	Submission of the draft evaluation report to UNDP/UNICEF
07 April 11 April	Debriefing with UNDP/UNICEF/EUD Finalization of the evaluation report (incorporating comments received on first drafts)
16 April	Provide inputs to the final evaluation report
18 April	Submission of the Final evaluation report to UNDP/UNICEF.

## Roles and Responsibilities

To ensure the effective implementation of the evaluation, all involved parties must have a clear framework of responsibilities. The successful completion of the evaluation relies on e among UNDP, UNICEF, and the evaluation team.

### UNDP and UNICEF roles and responsibilities

UNDP, through the Programme Manager, will oversee the evaluation process. The Evaluation Manager will coordinate and consult with relevant organizational units, including Management Teams, ensuring that evaluation activities align with UNDP, UNICEF, and UNEG evaluation standards.

The UNDP and UNICEF evaluation focal points will:

- Supervise and coordinate the evaluation process, ensuring that all steps adhere to the agreed timelines.
- Facilitate communication between evaluators and key stakeholders.
- Ensure the quality of evaluation deliverables and their compliance with UNDP, UNICEF, and UNEG evaluation frameworks.

During the evaluation, UNDP and UNICEF representatives will:

- Provide oversight and guidance throughout the planning, implementation, and follow-up stages of the evaluation.
- Conduct a briefing session to present the evaluation framework, scope, and expectations to the evaluators.
- Make available relevant programme documents, reports, statistics, studies, and other necessary data to support the evaluation team.
- Share a list of key national and international experts, partners, and stakeholders to be interviewed, and enable contact with identified partners or beneficiaries in case the national consultants did not identify relevant persons through own research.

- Provide feedback on the evaluators' findings and draft evaluation report, including comments, suggestions, and recommendations for refinement.

### Evaluation team responsibilities

The evaluators are responsible for conducting the assessment using rigorous, evidence-based methodologies while ensuring objectivity and impartiality. They must adhere to UNDP's and UNICEF's Evaluation Policies, UNEG Evaluation Standards, and Ethical Guidelines.

The evaluation team will:

- Apply the highest professional standards in conducting the evaluation, using a neutral, evidence-based approach to assess programme plans, processes, and results.
- Treat all interviewees with dignity and respect, ensuring inclusivity and sensitivity to race, gender, age, social status, and disability.
- Strictly adhere to ethical considerations, including confidentiality and data protection, in accordance with the UNEG "Code of Conduct in Evaluations" and the "Ethical Guidelines".
- Deliver a draft evaluation report that incorporates feedback from stakeholders and reflects suggested adjustments.
- Submit the final evaluation report within the agreed timeframe, ensuring compliance with evaluation quality standards and the writing style outlined in the UNDP Style Manual.
- Commit not to disclose any programme-related information to third parties.

According to the evaluators' respective Terms of References, besides the general considerations above, the roles of the *national consultants* are to provide inputs to methodology and workplan, to organise field visits, and to provide inputs to the draft and final evaluation reports, as well as for the presentation of findings after the field visits stage. The *international consultant* is responsible with the overall drafting and quality assurance of the evaluation outline, Inception Report, performs field visits, oversees the intermediary presentation of the findings, ensures timeliness and quality of the draft evaluation report, manages the incorporation of the feed/back from stakeholders and coordinates the final evaluation report from the evaluation team side.

This framework ensures that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, allowing for efficient collaboration and a high-quality, impartial evaluation process. By adhering to these principles, ethical guidelines, and procedural standards, the evaluation will generate credible, actionable insights to inform future programming and decision-making.

Besides the fact that the evaluators are aware of abiding to the ethical considerations, including confidentiality and data protection, in accordance with the UNEG "Code of Conduct in Evaluations" and the "Ethical Guidelines", no other considerations in the evaluation design are requiring additional ethical approval. Children will not be involved in the evaluation process at any stage.

### Quality Assurance

As per the UNDP Evaluation Guidelines, the evaluation will be conducted in line with a detailed quality assurance (QA) process. This QA process will include the following steps:

### **Inception Phase**

- The evaluators will keep open lines of communication with the UNDP/UNICEF evaluation teams to ensure flow of information and updates on progress;
- The evaluators will ensure they have received all relevant reports and documentation from UNDP and UNICEF and will inform the management promptly of any additional data or reports that are needed in order to conduct a thorough desk review;

### **Data Collection and Analysis Phase**

- The evaluators will ensure that the interviews are scheduled and conducted in a professional manner. First communication with interviewees will copy the UNDP/UNICEF Teams on CC of the emails;
- Before conducting the in-depth interviews - assuming that interviewees agree to be recorded to alleviate note-taking during interviews - audio recording devices will be checked to ensure that they are fully functioning;
- The evaluators will carefully document each interview by recording the relevant descriptive information (e.g. time, date, interviewee name and function) and where recording is not wished, detailed note-taking will take place;
- After the data has been collected, the evaluators will implement a clear and consistent coding system for the data to identify, categorize, and label the themes or patterns in the data;
- In the analysis phase, the evaluators will make sure to seek information that does support the findings, to look for consistency of findings across multiple methods of data collection and in particular, in interpreting the interview data; external data sources will also be sought to verify claims from the interviews where possible. Data may be analysed and reported in a disaggregated way to illustrate the stakeholders' diverse perspectives, ensuring anonymity;
- In case an online survey is deemed as relevant to be used, the necessary quality checks will be performed: before finishing the questionnaire, it will be thoroughly checked to ensure that the questionnaire skip logic is correct, that the questions are in the correct format and that the questionnaire can be completed fully with no errors experienced. Once the data has been collected, quality checks of the completed survey results will be run. This will involve checking for missing responses and other potential errors in responses;
- The evaluator will ensure that the final report is written in line with the Quality Assurance principles of the UNDP Evaluation Guidelines.

### **Risks and Mitigation Strategies**


The evaluators will ensure that the evaluation exercise will consider risk analysis to minimize effect that might potentially arise, especially due to the online conduct of the interviews. These risks will be mitigated by prompt reaction and the use of appropriate tools:

Risk	Impact	Probability	Mitigation
Different expectations around comprehensiveness, depth and results of the final evaluation	Medium	Medium	In the inception phase, consultations with UNDP and UNICEF underline the understanding and agreement on the expected results of the evaluation. The evaluation touches all key aspects sufficiently to support informed, fact-based findings and recommendations.
Delay in implementation due to procurement issues.	Medium	Medium	The evaluators accelerated the inception phase, and split the field missions in two tranches, to accommodate the existing schedules.
Limited availability/unreliability of statistical data.	Medium	Low	Available sources of information were identified (internal data generated by UNDP and UNICEF monitoring and reporting mechanisms).
Limited interviewee availability: the evaluators may find that key interviewees are unavailable during the data collection phase.	High	Low-Medium	The interviews will be announced well in advance, to accommodate busy schedule. Where the first-choice interviewee is completely unavailable, the consultants will request a substitute interviewee from the institution in question.
Possible defensiveness around the evaluation and its findings	Medium	Medium	Pro-active transparency around the evaluation exercise: The evaluation team provides appropriate information about the evaluation and its independent and impartial status, together with guarantees around the confidentiality of internal sources and inputs by interviewees.
Lack of follow-up and lasting benefit from the evaluation	High	Low	The evaluation will focus on creating valid findings and reasonable recommendations, that can be easily incorporated and monitored into the Management Response by making the Evaluation Report available on the UNDP Evaluation Resource Centre and UNICEF website.

## Annex 1: Terms of Reference

### Terms of Reference Final Evaluation of the EU4Moldova: Focal Regions Programme

**Job title:** International Consultant to conduct the Final Evaluation of the EU4Moldova:Focal Regions Programme

**EU4MOLDOVA** REGIUNI CHEIE 

**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**Job Title:** International Consultant to conduct the Final Evaluation of the EU4Moldova: Focal Regions Programme

**Duty Station:** Home based. One mission of 7 working days to Moldova

**Project reference:** EU4Moldova: Focal Regions Programme

**Contract type:** Individual Contract (IC)

**Duration of assignment:** 40 days of consultancy, incl. one mission to Moldova

**1. Background and context:**

EU4Moldova Focal Regions Programme (hereafter the Programme) is based on the European Commission Decision on the implementation of the 2018 Annual Action Programme for the Republic of Moldova and is funded by the European Union and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme.

The purpose of the five-year Programme lies in strengthening the economic, territorial and social cohesion in the Republic of Moldova by facilitating smart, green, inclusive, sustainable and integrated socio-economic local development and improving the living standards of citizens in the focal regions: Cahul and Ungheni.

To achieve this major goal, the Programme aims to address the urban-rural gap and regional disparities, stimulate economic growth, create jobs for men, women and young people in the focal regions and improve the attractiveness of the focal regions (small towns and villages) taking into account climate change and gender perspectives in Programme's activities.


**Specific objectives:**

1. To strengthen transparency, accountability of local public authorities and citizen participation in local governance processes in the focal regions;
2. To improve citizens' access to quality public services and utilities in the focal regions;
3. To create employment opportunities for men and women in the focal regions and improve the attractiveness of the focal regions for investors and entrepreneurs;
4. To promote the smart specialization of the economy of the focal regions through the development of the clustering and value chain approach.

Programme objectives will be achieved through measures focused on: (i) capacity building to support the implementation and monitoring of local economic development plans; (ii) involvement of civil society in local planning, governance processes and delivery of basic social services; (iii) provision of investment funding to support the creation and/or development of social and technical infrastructure, which in combination with the results of interventions (i) and (ii) above, will have an immediate, visible and tangible impact on job creation, living standards of the population in focal regions.

The following results were envisaged at the inception of the Programme:

Adresa: **Chişinău, str. Maria Ciobanu 14** **Telefon:** +373 22 864 900 **Pagina web:** www.eurojust.europa.eu

**EU4MOLDOVA** REGIUNI CHEIE 

**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**Job Title:** National/Individual Consultant to support conducting the Final Evaluation of the EU4Moldova: Focal Regions Programme, focusing on UNICEF component aimed to improve access to quality child and adolescents' friendly social services

**Duty Station:** Home based, with travel to Ungheni and Cahul regions.

**Project reference:** EU4Moldova: Focal Regions Programme

**Contract type:** Individual Consultancy

**Duration:** 40 billable days, during December - March 2025

**1. Background and context**

From 2019 to 2024, Moldova experienced significant socio-economic changes, influenced by both internal reforms and external challenges. Moldova's economy showed signs of recovery, particularly in 2024, with a 2.2% growth in the first half of the year. This recovery was driven by rebounds in domestic trade, manufacturing, and the energy sector. Despite economic growth, poverty remains a significant issue, especially in rural areas. Low labour force participation and employment rates continue to impede poverty reduction efforts. Moldova's progress towards EU accession has driven structural reforms aimed at improving governance, reducing regulatory burdens, and enhancing competitiveness.

The socio-economic situation in the Cahul and Ungheni regions has seen significant improvements from 2019 to 2024, largely due to the EU4Moldova: Focal Regions Programme (hereafter the Programme), that has played a crucial role in driving socio-economic development in targeted regions, making them more prosperous and sustainable. The Programme is based on the European Commission Decision on the implementation of the 2018 Annual Action Programme for the Republic of Moldova and is funded by the European Union and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme.

The purpose of the five-year Programme lies in strengthening the economic, territorial and social cohesion in the Republic of Moldova by facilitating smart, green, inclusive, sustainable and integrated socio-economic local development and improving the living standards of citizens in the focal regions: Cahul and Ungheni.


To achieve this major goal, the Programme aims to address the urban-rural gap and regional disparities, stimulate economic growth, create jobs for men, women and young people in the focal regions and improve the attractiveness of the focal regions (small towns and villages) taking into account climate change and gender perspectives in Programme's activities.

**Specific objectives:**

1. To strengthen transparency, accountability of local public authorities and citizen participation in local governance processes in the focal regions;
2. To improve citizens' access to quality public services and utilities in the focal regions;

The following results were envisaged at the inception of the Programme:

Adresa: **Chişinău, str. Maria Ciobanu 14** **Telefon:** +373 22 864 900 **Pagina web:** www.eurojust.europa.eu

**EU4MOLDOVA** REGIUNI CHEIE 

**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**Job Title:** Local Consultant to conduct the Final Evaluation of the EU4Moldova: Focal Regions Programme

**Duty Station:** Home based with travel to Ungheni and Cahul regions.

**Project reference:** EU4Moldova: Focal Regions Programme

**Contract type:** Individual Contract (IC)

**Duration of assignment:** 40 days of consultancy

**1. Background and context:**

EU4Moldova: Focal Regions Programme (hereafter the Programme) is based on the European Commission Decision on the implementation of the 2018 Annual Action Programme for the Republic of Moldova and is funded by the European Union and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme.

The purpose of the five-year Programme lies in strengthening the economic, territorial and social cohesion in the Republic of Moldova by facilitating smart, green, inclusive, sustainable and integrated socio-economic local development and improving the living standards of citizens in the focal regions: Cahul and Ungheni.

To achieve this major goal, the Programme aims to address the urban-rural gap and regional disparities, stimulate economic growth, create jobs for men, women and young people in the focal regions and improve the attractiveness of the focal regions (small towns and villages) taking into account climate change and gender perspectives in Programme's activities.

**Specific objectives:**

1. To strengthen transparency, accountability of local public authorities and citizen participation in local governance processes in the focal regions;
2. To improve citizens' access to quality public services and utilities in the focal regions;
3. To create employment opportunities for men and women in the focal regions and improve the attractiveness of the focal regions for investors and entrepreneurs;
4. To promote the smart specialization of the economy of the focal regions through the development of the clustering and value chain approach.

Programme objectives will be achieved through measures focused on: (i) capacity building to support the implementation and monitoring of local economic development plans; (ii) involvement of civil society in local planning, governance processes and delivery of basic social services; (iii) provision of investment funding to support the creation and/or development of social and technical infrastructure, which in combination with the results of interventions (i) and (ii) above, will have an immediate, visible and tangible impact on job creation, living standards of the population in focal regions.

The following results were envisaged at the inception of the Programme:

Adresa: **Chişinău, str. Maria Ciobanu 14** **Telefon:** +373 22 864 900 **Pagina web:** www.eurojust.europa.eu

(double click opens full ToRs)

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## Annex 2: List of Documents consulted

- Strategic national and UN policy documents (National development strategy “Moldova 2030”; United Nations Strategic Development Frameworks 2018 – 2022 and 2023 – 2027; UNDP Country Programme documents 2018 – 2022 and 2023 – 2027);
- The Programme’s DoA, annual reports (2020-2024), and EU4Moldova: Focal Regions Programme mid-term evaluation report;
- Final evaluations of previous country programme documents (Final Evaluation of the Republic of Moldova UNITED NATIONS Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development 2018 – 2022; Evaluation of UNICEF Moldova Country Programme 2018-2022)
- UNDP and UNICEF Moldova Programmes Annual Reports 2020 to 2024;
- Minutes of National Steering Committee Meetings 2020 – 2024;
- Analytical Report on implementing formative evaluation in education (UNICEF Moldova, Dec 2024);
- "Enhancement of child centered teaching in Cahul and Ungheni schools through digital technologies and STEAM education”
- Databases of partners and beneficiaries.

### Web-pages:

- <https://www.undp.org/moldova/projects/eu4moldova-focal-regions> - Programme’s web/site
- <https://euneighbourseast.eu/projects/eu-project-page/?id=855>
- [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/moldova\\_ro?s=223](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/moldova_ro?s=223) – EU Delegation in Moldova
- <https://primariacahul.md/>
- <https://ungheni.md/>

Additionally, various press releases and social media links were consulted in the preparation stage.

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## Annex 3: Draft Discussion Guide / Interviewing Protocol

Note: each discussion guide will be adapted to the respective interviewee with due regard to their areas of involvement and expertise.

### Evaluation of the “EU4Moldova: Focal Regions Programme”

**Questions Guideline** – February, 2025

Note: Respondents will be assured of confidentiality and discretion. Respondents will also be asked for their consent to record the interview in order to alleviate note-taking burden. (Each discussion guide will be adapted to the respective interviewee with due regard to their areas of involvement and expertise. Some questions might be altered, or other questions will be included as the desk research will be finished and the first interviews with the UNDP/UNICEF representatives will be carried out)

**Intro** – describing the evaluation of the Programme and purpose of the evaluation and of the interview.

- What is your job title? How long have you been in this position?
- What are your current responsibilities?
- Please describe your involvement with the Programme.

#### Relevance

- To what extent are the Programme’s outcomes aligned with national and sub-national priorities and the EU-Moldova Association Agenda?
- What factors have contributed to achieving or hindering achievement of the intended outputs and outcomes?
- Has the partnership strategy been appropriate and effective?
- To what extent did the EU4Moldova: Focal Regions Programme align and coordinate with other EU-funded interventions in Moldova?
- How effectively did the Programme’s communication and visibility strategies align with EU standards and contribute to raising awareness of EU-funded support?
- Which improvements could be made in the future, to make similar interventions even more relevant to the UN system and achieving the SDGs?

=====

#### Efficiency

Were the actions to achieve the results **Efficient?** (*Have things been done right?*)

Probe for following details:

- did the actual or expected results (outputs and outcomes) justify the costs incurred? Were the resources effectively utilized?
- What factors are contributing to implementation efficiency?
- To what extent were resources used to address inequalities and gender issues?
- To what extent were partnership modalities conducive to the delivery of programme outputs?

- 
- Do the programme' activities overlap and duplicate other similar interventions (funded nationally and /or by other donors? Are there more efficient ways and means of delivering more and better results (outputs and outcomes) with the available inputs?
  - Could a different approach have produced better results?
  - How is the program management structure operating?
  - How efficient are the management and accountability structures of the programme?
  - How did the programme financial management processes and procedures affect programme implementation?
  - To what extent did UNDP and UNICEF engage or coordinate with different beneficiaries (men and women, boys and girls), implementing partners, other United Nations agencies and national counterparts to achieve outcome-level results?
  - What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the programme implementation process?
  - Was the intervention logic clear, and did it contribute to achieving intended results?
- =====

## Effectiveness

Were the actions to achieve the results **Effective?** (Have the right things been done?)

- What have been the main contributing and challenging factors towards programme's success in attaining its targets? (Also consider any which were possibly beyond the control of the programme)
  - To what extent were the cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, environmental sustainability, human rights and social standards addressed in the design and implementation of the project?
  - Which programme areas are the most relevant and strategic for UNDP and UNICEF to scale up or consider going forward?
  - In which areas does the programme have the greatest achievements? Why and what have been the supporting factors? How can the programme build on or expand these achievements?
  - In which areas does the programme have the fewest achievements? What have been the constraining factors and why? How can or could they be overcome?
- =====

## Sustainability

Do you think the results of the activities are **sustainable and long-lasting?** Will the results lead to benefits beyond the life of the existing portfolio?

- What were the major factors which influenced the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of the programme?
- What needs to be done and/or improved to ensure sustainability?
- What could be done to strengthen exit strategies and sustainability in order to support female and male project beneficiaries as well as marginalized groups?
- What are the sustainability recommendations for similar support in future?

- How well did the Programme incorporate monitoring and learning processes to inform and improve project implementation?

### Cross-cutting Themes

- To what extent the rights of children has been addressed and have poor, women, men and other disadvantaged and marginalized groups benefited from the implementation of the Programme in the focal regions?
- To what extent has the Programme promoted positive changes in gender equality and the empowerment of women? Did any unintended effects emerge for women, men or vulnerable groups?
- What proportion of the beneficiaries of a Programme were persons with disabilities?

Specific questions for the interviewee – depending on the role, region, entity

### Closing Questions and Final Remarks

1. What do you think should be the next steps for UNDP/UNICEF to sustain or further develop the results of the Programme?
2. If you had the power to time-travel back to the start of the programme, is there anything you would do differently, knowing what you know now?
3. And finally, any other questions, which we didn't ask but should have?

If we have any follow up questions later in the research phase, may we contact you again, perhaps via email?

### Thanks and Close

Structured grouping of the questions from the ToR, aligned with the key informants. This grouping will help streamline the data collection and analysis process.

#### Grouped Evaluation Questions by Key Informants

1. UNDP & UNICEF Senior Management and Programme Staff

*(UNDP DRR, Programme Manager, Programme Staff, UNICEF Representatives)*

Relevant Evaluation Criteria & Questions:

- Relevance & Coherence:
  - To what extent are the Programme's outcomes aligned with national priorities and the EU-Moldova Association Agenda?
  - How effectively did the Programme's communication and visibility strategies align with EU standards?
  - Has the Programme met its expected outputs, outcomes, and targets?
  - What factors contributed to or hindered programme success?
  - How effectively were cross-cutting issues (gender, climate resilience, human rights) addressed?
- Efficiency:
  - How effective were programme management structures and financial oversight?
  - Were resources used efficiently to achieve results?

- Sustainability & Impact:
  - What are the Programme's long-term effects on local economic growth and institutional capacity?
  - How has the Programme contributed to systemic or transformative changes in the regions?

## 2. EU Delegation to Moldova & Central Government Institutions

- Relevance & Coherence:
  - How well does the Programme align with Moldova's national development strategies?
  - How did inter-institutional collaboration impact implementation?
- Effectiveness:
  - Were government institutions adequately involved in planning, decision-making, and implementation?
  - What policy-level improvements were supported by the Programme?
- Sustainability:
  - How can Programme results be integrated into national and local policies for continuity?
  - What mechanisms can be institutionalized for long-term impact?

## 3. Local Governments & Municipal Enterprises

*(Cahul and Ungheni Rayon Authorities, Local Public Administrations, Intercommunal Development Association Ungheni, Municipal Enterprises in charge of public services)*

Relevant Evaluation Criteria & Questions:

- Relevance & Effectiveness:
  - How well did the Programme support local governance reforms and service delivery improvements?
  - Were local authorities adequately capacitated to manage new infrastructure and governance reforms?
- Efficiency:
  - Were public resources allocated efficiently to maximize the impact of investments?
- Sustainability:
  - Are local governments prepared to sustain Programme-initiated improvements in governance, infrastructure, and services?

## 4. Private Sector & Economic Actors

*(SMEs benefitting from grants, Business Clusters, Ungheni Business Hub, Value Chain & Cluster Managers, Local & International Investors)*

Relevant Evaluation Criteria & Questions:

- Effectiveness:
  - How did the Programme impact the business environment and investment climate?
  - Have new employment and economic opportunities been created?
- Efficiency:
  - Did the Programme interventions avoid duplication with other donor-funded initiatives?
  - Were business support mechanisms (grants, training, infrastructure) effectively structured?
- Sustainability & Impact:
  - How sustainable are the gains made in employment and entrepreneurship development?
  - How can successful interventions be scaled up or replicated?

## 5. Civil Society, Community-Based Organizations & Citizens

*(NGOs, Local Action Groups, Volunteer Groups, Community Representatives, Citizen Beneficiaries, Youth, Women, People with Disabilities, etc.)*

Relevant Evaluation Criteria & Questions:

- Relevance & Democratic Participation:
  - To what extent did the Programme empower local citizens, women, and marginalized groups?
  - How did the Programme enhance participatory governance?
- Effectiveness & Sustainability:
  - How well did the Programme engage communities in monitoring and decision-making?
  - How have community initiatives contributed to long-term socio-economic benefits?
- Impact:
  - What tangible benefits have citizens experienced in terms of quality of life, employment, and public services?
  - How resilient are these communities to future challenges?

## 6. Education & Social Sector Stakeholders

*(STEAM/WASH Schools, Teachers, Parents, Caregivers, Social Workers, UNICEF-related Programme Beneficiaries)*

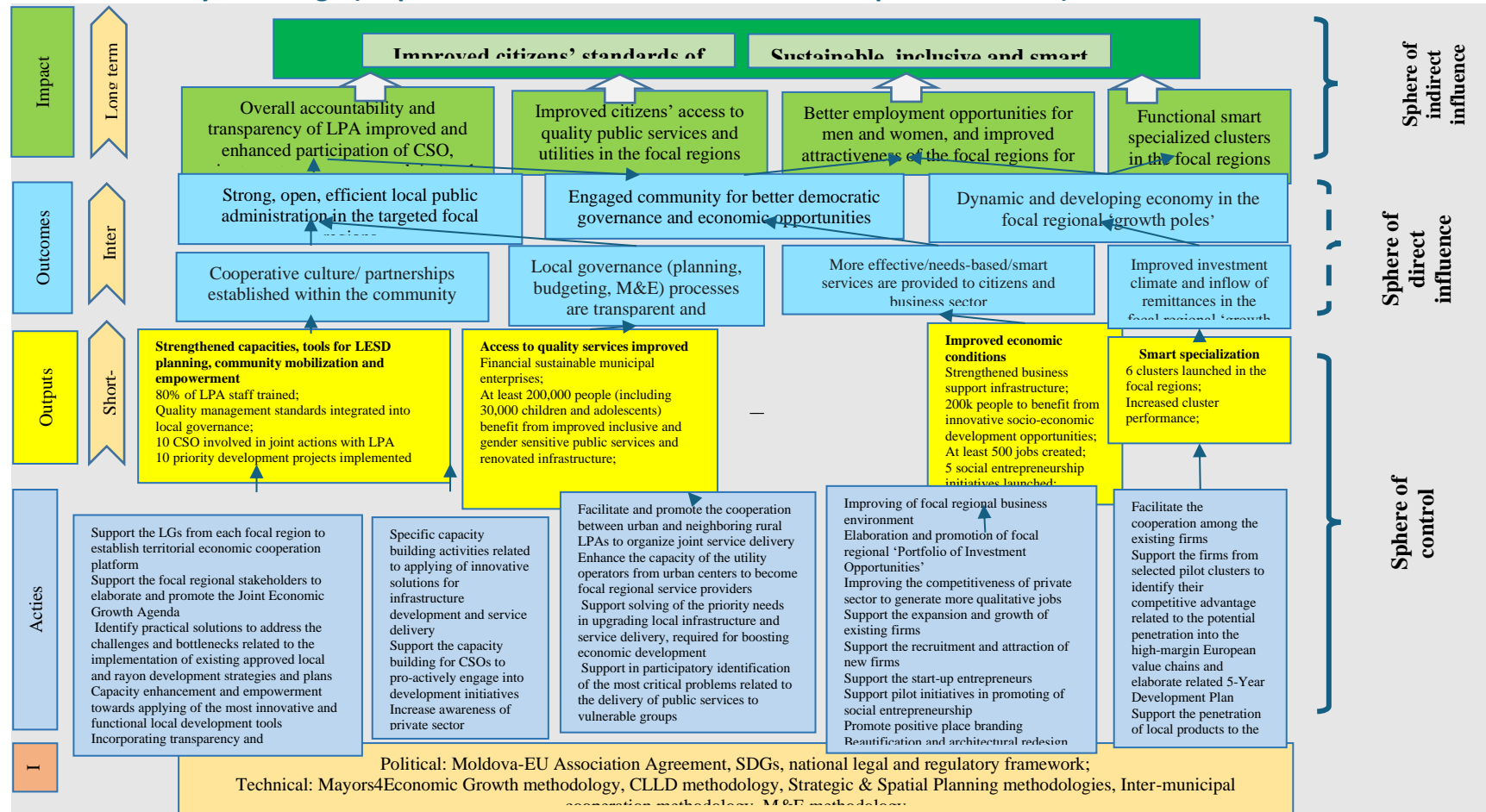
Relevant Evaluation Criteria & Questions:

- Effectiveness & Efficiency:
  - How effective were education and social services interventions (STEAM, WASH, child protection)?
  - Were resources used efficiently to support vulnerable populations?
- Impact & Sustainability:
  - What improvements in education, social services, and child well-being can be attributed to the Programme?
  - How can these interventions be institutionalized for long-term impact?

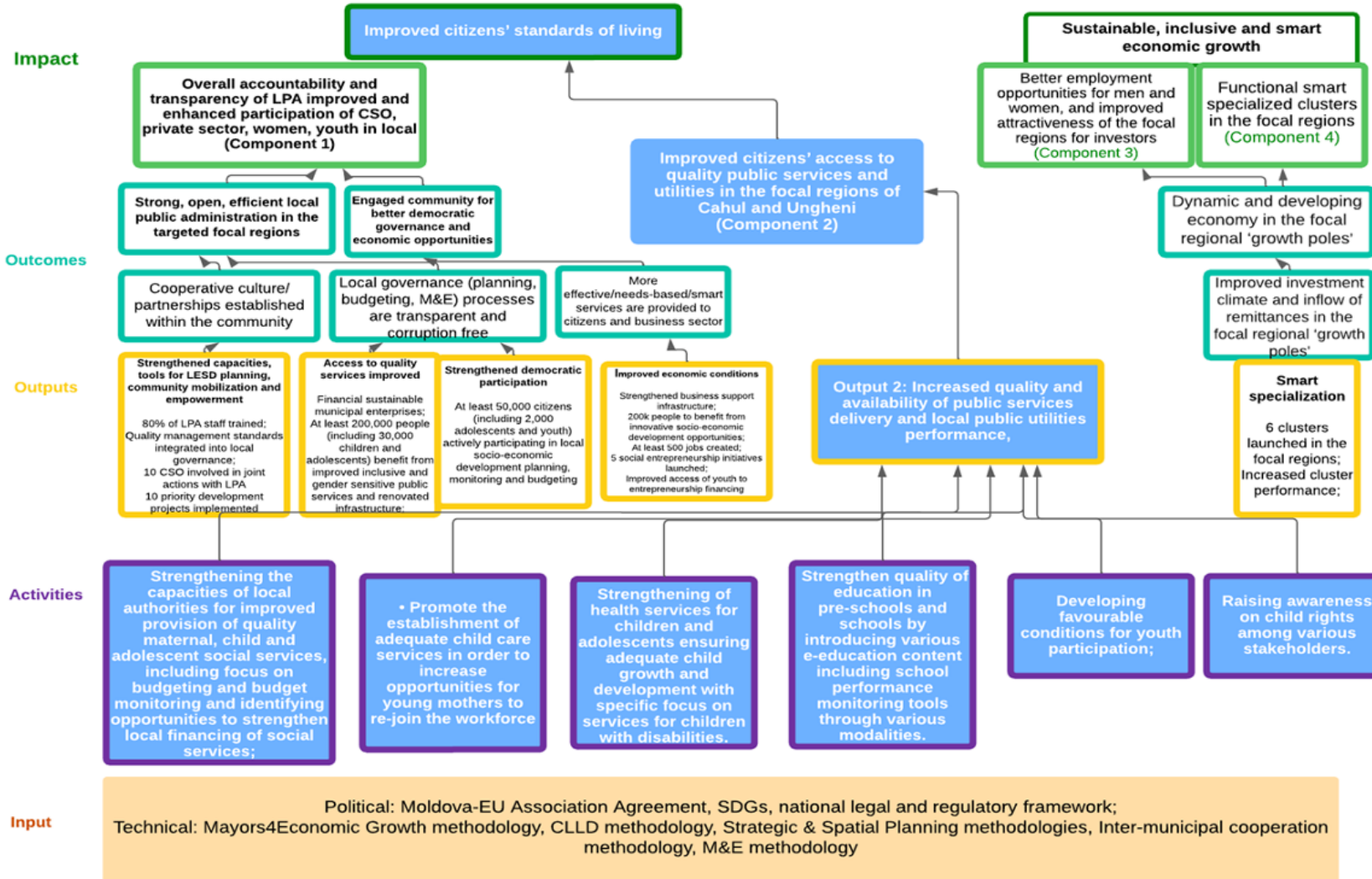
## Annex 4: Key Informants for consultation (interviews, online survey, etc)

1. UN Agencies and development partners
  - Senior Management and Programme Staff from UNDP and UNICEF (Programme Manager, technical leads).
2. EU Delegation to Moldova – representatives overseeing regional development.
3. National Government representatives
  - Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development (regional policies, infrastructure).
  - Ministry of Finance (financial sustainability, public funding mechanisms).
  - Ministry of Education and Research (education, STEAM, vocational training).
  - Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry (agribusiness, rural economy).
  - Ministry of Economic Development and Digitalization (SMEs, entrepreneurship).
  - State Chancellery of Moldova (decentralization, regional governance).
4. Local government representatives
  - Mayors and key representatives from Cahul and Ungheni Municipia.
  - Selected representatives of communes from each region (two per rayon).
  - Municipal enterprises responsible for local public services (utilities).
  - Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova (CALM).
5. Economic and business sector representatives
  - Business clusters (1-2 per region):
    - Ungheni: Mobile furniture, Dealurile Magurii, Bacifer.
    - Cahul: Apicol (honey production), Vinificatie (winemaking), Tourism.
  - Selected SMEs receiving non-reimbursable financial assistance (grants):
    - 2-3 from Cahul (e.g., INTERSTEPCOM, Mega WASH, BeePRO).
    - 2-3 from Ungheni (e.g., LILIART LLC, HIPPO BIO, Unfloria).
  - Tenants from the Ungheni Business Hub (1-2 businesses).
  - Selected agribusinesses from both regions (1-2 per rayon).
6. Civil society and community groups
  - Community-based organizations (CBOS), NGOs, and Local Action Groups (LAGs).
  - Volunteer groups, including youth-led initiatives.
  - Dialogue platform in Cahul (Component 3.1).
7. Beneficiaries and participants for online surveys
  - Municipal councillors, local experts, and business sector representatives.
  - Training beneficiaries:
    - STEAM education programme teachers (selected representatives from 12 schools).
    - Vocational training participants (English, IT, entrepreneurship skills).
    - SME support programme beneficiaries (cluster development, financial literacy, tourism sector training).
  - Young people engaged in career development and entrepreneurship programmes.
  - Parents and caregivers from WASH-related activities and “Ask the Professional” sessions.

### Annex 5: Theory of Change (As presented in the annexes of the Description of Action)



Overall EU4Moldova Focal Regions ToC and the place of UNICEF component



## Annex 6: Interviews Schedule Template

### Evaluation of the EU4Moldova: Focal Regions Programme

#### Tentative Agenda of meetings (in person or video-conferences)

\*The times in the agenda reflect Chisinau time

Date/Time	Institution/Who	Person/Contact	Venue / Online platform	Comments
<b>Friday, 14 February 2025</b>				
10:00	UNDP MDA / UNICEF MDA	Alexandru Pelivan; Zinaida Adam; Andrei Darie; Jana Midoni; Elena Laur	MS Teams/Zoom	Done
<b>Monday 24 February 2025</b>				
10:00	Programme Management and staff (UNDP)	Alexandru Pelivan, Simion Berzoi, TBD	in person	Confirmed
13:00	UNDP Senior Management	Seher Alacaci Arner	in person	Pending
15:00	UNDP Technical Lead	Andrei Darie	in person	Confirmed
16:30	EU Delegation in MDA	Jan Demidovits-Mekeläinen	in person	Confirmed
<b>Tuesday 25 February 2025</b>				
tbd	Ministry	tbd	in person	Proposed
tbd	Ministry	tbd	in person	Proposed
16:00	Programme Management and staff (UNICEF)		in person	Confirmed
tbd	Academia / NGO / CSO			Proposed
<b>Wednesday 26 February 2025</b>				
tbd	Partners/NGO	tbd	In person	Proposed

<b>Cahul rayon and Municipality</b>				
<b>27 – 28 February 2025</b>				
tbd	Cahul 1		in person	Proposed
tbd	Cahul 2		In person	Proposed
<b>Ungheni rayon and Municipality</b>				
<b>10-11 March 2025</b>				
tbd	Ungheni 1		In person	Proposed
tbd	Ungheni 2		In person	Proposed
<b>Chisinau - debriefing</b>				
<b>12 March 2025</b>				
Tbd	Chisinau		In person	Proposed

## Annex 7: Outline of the final evaluation report

The final evaluation report will follow the structure of the template outlined in the UNDP and UNICEF evaluation guidelines, in order to ensure quality, completeness of information required and to maximise its usability.

1. Title and opening pages
2. Project and evaluation information details
3. Table of Contents
4. List of acronyms and abbreviations
5. Executive summary
6. Introduction and background
7. Evaluation scope and objectives
8. Evaluation approach and methods
9. Data analysis
10. Findings and conclusions
11. Recommendations
12. Lessons learnt

Annexes