PROJECT QA ASSESSMENT: DESIGN AND APPRAISAL

OVERALL PROJECT

EXEMPLARY (5) ◉◉◉◉◉	HIGHLY SATISFACTORY (4) ◉◉◉◉○	SATISFACTORY (3) ◉◉◉○○	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT (2) ◉◉○○○	INADEQUATE (1) ◉○○○○
At least four criteria are rated Exemplary, and all criteria are rated High or Exemplary.	All criteria are rated Satisfactory or higher, and at least four criteria are rated High or Exemplary.	At least six criteria are rated Satisfactory or higher, and only one may be rated Needs Improvement. The Principled criterion must be rated Satisfactory or above.	At least three criteria are rated Satisfactory or higher, and only four criteria may be rated Needs Improvement.	One or more criteria are rated Inadequate, or five or more criteria are rated Needs Improvement.

DECISION

- **APPROVE** – the project is of sufficient quality to be approved in its current form**.** Any management actions must be addressed in a timely manner.
- **APPROVE WITH QUALIFICATIONS** – the project has issues that must be addressed before the project document can be approved. Any management actions must be addressed in a timely manner.
- **DISAPPROVE** – the project has significant issues that should prevent the project from being approved as drafted.

RATING CRITERIA

For all questions, select the option that best reflects the project

STRATEGIC

	3	**2**
	1	

1. **Does the project specify how it will contribute to higher level change through linkage to the programme's Theory of Change?**
   - **3:** The project is clearly linked to the programme's theory of change. It has an explicit change pathway that explains how the project will contribute to outcome level change and why the project's strategy will likely lead to this change. This analysis is backed by credible evidence of what works effectively in this context and includes assumptions and risks.
   - **2:** The project is clearly linked to the programme's theory of change. It has a change pathway that explains how the project will contribute to outcome-level change and why the project strategy will likely lead to this change.
   - **1:** The project document may describe in generic terms how the project will contribute to development results, without an explicit link to the programme's theory of change.

*Note: Projects not contributing to a programme must have a project-specific Theory of Change. See alternative question under the lightbulb for these cases.

Evidence

P.9-11

Evidence:

The project does not apply a standard ToC approach, but nonetheless puts forth a cause and effect relationship on how it will bring about positive change at the impact and outcome level.

The project will apply a systemic approach to understanding and addressing sustainable recovery from COVID, including making a stronger investment case for diverse sources of financing. The high uncertainty of the current crisis and its effects coupled with the pressures felt by local government, call for distribution of risk through the application of portfolio logic. UNDP is already applying portfolio investment logic and methodology in its work: addressing depopulation in Serbia, rethinking post-tourism economies in Thailand, accelerating governance portfolio in Malawi, ad supporting seven countries around the world in the development of portfolios to address issues as diverse as future of work and COVID-19 recovery.

Here the project applies a two-pronged approach:

- **Broad:** Strengthening the capacities of local governments in designing for & financing regional development, and strengthening the learning network (exchange of best practices) through engaging the existing networks of the M4EG program of about 400 local authorities;
- **Deep**: Creating demonstration interventions in the EaP region in 12 secondary cities through the development of portfolio briefs (ready for activation) & supporting local authorities in attracting diverse investment for local development.

The project will focus on three key aspects essential to designing transformative portfolios: (deep) listening; systems change, and diversity.

2. Is the project aligned with the UNDP Strategic Plan? • **3:** The project responds to at least one of the development settings as specified in the Strategic Plan[1] and adapts at least one Signature Solution[2]. The project's RRF includes all the relevant SP output indicators. *(all must be true)* • **2:** The project responds to at least one of the development settings as specified in the Strategic Plan[4]. The project's RRF includes at least one SP output indicator, if relevant. *(both must be true)* • **1:** The project responds to a partner's identified need, but this need falls outside of the UNDP Strategic Plan. Also select this option if none of the relevant SP indicators are included in the RRF. *Evidence:* The project responds to the signature solution 2) 'accelerate structural transformations for sustainable development', and as recovery from COVID-19 pandemic is a key aim, arguably also responds to 3) 'building resilience to shocks. As the project seeks to address the multifaceted/systemic/compounded challenges faced by cities (inequality, pollution, migration, technology etc.), the project cuts across all of the 6 signature solutions, and have identified multiple SP output indicators to which the project can contribute.	3 **2** 1 **Evidence**
3. Is the project linked to the programme outputs? (i.e., UNDAF Results Group Workplan/CPD, RPD or Strategic Plan IRRF for global projects/strategic interventions not part of a programme) *Evidence* Contributing to Outcome 1 of the Regional Programme Document for Europe and CIS 2018-2021: *Accelerating structural transformations through more effective governance systems.* Output 1.4. *New forms of evidence and methods explored and leveraged through digital technologies, new sources of data and other innovative methods to address public service challenges common to the region.*	**Yes** | No

RELEVANT

4. Does the project target groups left furthest behind? • **3:** The target groups are clearly specified, prioritising discriminated and marginalized groups left furthest behind, identified through a rigorous process based on evidence. • **2:** The target groups are clearly specified, prioritizing groups left furthest behind. • **1:** The target groups are not clearly specified. *Note: Management Action must be taken for a score of 1. Projects that build institutional capacity should still identify targeted groups to justify support*	3 **2** 1 **Evidence**

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[1] The three development settings in UNDP's 2018-2021 Strategic Plan are: a) Eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions; b) Accelerate structural transformations for sustainable development; and c) Build resilience to shocks and crises

[2] The six Signature Solutions of UNDP's 2018-2021 Strategic Plan are: a) Keeping people out of poverty; b) Strengthen effective, inclusive and accountable governance; c) Enhance national prevention and recovery capacities for resilient societies; d) Promote nature based solutions for a sustainable planet; e) Close the energy gap; and f) Strengthen gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Evidence As a regional project covering 6 countries with diverse contexts, the project has laid out the parameters for ensuring that no one is left behind and that the groups made marginalized within the country and local context will be targeted through the devised actions.	

	3	2
5. Have knowledge, good practices, and past lessons learned of UNDP and others informed the project design? • **3:** Knowledge and lessons learned backed by credible evidence from sources such as evaluation, corporate policies/strategies, and/or monitoring have been explicitly used, with appropriate referencing, to justify the approach used by the project. • **2:** The project design mentions knowledge and lessons learned backed by evidence/sources, but have not been used to justify the approach selected. • **1:** There is little or no mention of knowledge and lessons learned informing the project design. Any references made are anecdotal and not backed by evidence. *Note: Management Action or strong management justification must be given for a score of 1* *Evidence* The project builds on the previous Mayors for Economic Growth project (2017-2020) and incorporates lessons and the recommendations from the final evaluation of this phase 1. The project document refers to and will build on the ongoing work, lessons, results and partnership that UNDP has established in the area of strategic innovation and transformation.	1	
	Evidence	

	3	2
6. Does UNDP have a clear advantage to engage in the role envisioned by the project vis-à-vis national/regional/global partners and other actors? • **3:** An analysis has been conducted on the role of other partners in the area where the project intends to work, and credible evidence supports the proposed engagement of UNDP and partners through the project, including identification of potential funding partners. It is clear how results achieved by partners will complement the project's intended results and a communication strategy is in place to communicate results and raise visibility vis-à-vis key partners. Options for south-south and triangular cooperation have been considered, as appropriate. *(all must be true)* • **2:** Some analysis has been conducted on the role of other partners in the area where the project intends to work, and relatively limited evidence supports the proposed engagement of and division of labour between UNDP and partners through the project, with unclear funding and communications strategies or plans. • **1:** No clear analysis has been conducted on the role of other partners in the area that the project intends to work. There is risk that the project overlaps and/or does not coordinate with partners' interventions in this area. Options for south-south and triangular cooperation have not been considered, despite its potential relevance. *Note: Management Action or strong management justification must be given for a score of 1* *Evidence* UNDP has strong experience in local (economic) development in all 6 countries. UNDP also has a strong relationship with a network of partners that are committed to strategic innovation & transformation, including but not limited to: Future of Cities SEE initiative & Clean, Healthy Cities ran by Climate KIC, CHORA Foundation, Dark Matter Lab, ALC, UCL Bartlett School of Architecture, Vinnova - Swedish Innovation Agency, Finnish Innovation Fund - SITRA, European Space Agency, German Aerospace Center, among others. In addition, through the years of experimentation - UNDP has grown a network of partners that work on applying innovative processes, innovative finance and innovative technologies to development challenges. UNDP's team in Istanbul has strong capabilities on innovative finance, strategic innovation, innovative data usage and engagement with ecosystems of diverse actors, areas that are key to the successful implementation of the M4EG programme. UNDP COs in the EaP countries have strong local programming, which would enable efficient and effective cooperation with local authorities and local government associations.	1	
	Evidence P.9	

PRINCIPLED

	3	2

7. Does the project apply a human rights-based approach? • **3:** The project is guided by human rights and incorporates the principles of accountability, meaningful participation, and non-discrimination in the project's strategy. The project upholds the relevant international and national laws and standards. Any potential adverse impacts on enjoyment of human rights were rigorously identified and assessed as relevant, with appropriate mitigation and management measures incorporated into project design and budget. *(all must be true)* • **2:** The project is guided by human rights by prioritizing accountability, meaningful participation and non-discrimination. Potential adverse impacts on enjoyment of human rights were identified and assessed as relevant, and appropriate mitigation and management measures incorporated into the project design and budget. *(both must be true)* • **1:** No evidence that the project is guided by human rights. Limited or no evidence that potential adverse impacts on enjoyment of human rights were considered. *Note: Management action or strong management justification must be given for a score of 1 *Evidence*: The project will promote the inclusion of voices and engagement of 'unusual suspects' in local economic planning, e.g. youth activists, grass root organizations and other civil society groups that traditionally do not 'reach' the decision-makers at the local level. This will be done through inter alia applying 'deep listening' exercises and tools as part of the portfolio approach, promote the inclusion of voices and engagement of 'unusual suspects' in local economic planning, e.g. youth activists, grass root organizations and other civil society groups that traditionally do not 'reach' the decision-makers at the local level. This will be done through inter alia applying 'deep listening' exercises and tools as part of the portfolio approach.	**1** **Evidence**
8. Does the project use gender analysis in the project design? • **3:** A participatory gender analysis has been conducted and results from this gender analysis inform the development challenge, strategy and expected results sections of the project document. Outputs and indicators of the results framework include explicit references to gender equality, and specific indicators measure and monitor results to ensure women are fully benefitting from the project. *(all must be true)* • **2:** A basic gender analysis has been carried out and results from this analysis are scattered (i.e., fragmented and not consistent) across the development challenge and strategy sections of the project document. The results framework may include some gender sensitive outputs and/or activities but gender inequalities are not consistently integrated across each output. *(all must be true)* • **1:** The project design may or may not mention information and/or data on the differential impact of the project's development situation on gender relations, women and men, but the gender inequalities have not been clearly identified and reflected in the project document. *Note: Management Action or strong management justification must be given for a score of 1	**3** **2** **1** **Evidence** P.23
9. Did the project support the resilience and sustainability of societies and/or ecosystems? • **3:** Credible evidence that the project addresses sustainability and resilience dimensions of development challenges, which are integrated in the project strategy and design. The project reflects the interconnections between the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Relevant shocks, hazards and adverse social and environmental impacts have been identified and rigorously assessed with appropriate management and mitigation measures incorporated into project design and budget. *(all must be true)*. • **2:** The project design integrates sustainability and resilience dimensions of development challenges. Relevant shocks, hazards and adverse social and environmental impacts have been identified and assessed, and relevant management and mitigation measures incorporated into project design and budget. *(both must be true)* • **1:** Sustainability and resilience dimensions and impacts were not adequately considered. *Note: Management action or strong management justification must be given for a score of 1 *Evidence:* The entire project is about promoting sustainability and resilience.	**3** **2** **1** **Evidence** P.3, 4,25.

	Yes	No
10. Has the Social and Environmental Screening Procedure (SESP) been conducted to identify potential social and environmental impacts and risks? The SESP is not required for projects in which UNDP is Administrative Agent only and/or projects comprised solely of reports, coordination of events, trainings, workshops, meetings, conferences and/or communication materials and information dissemination. [if yes, upload the completed checklist. If SESP is not required, provide the reason for the exemption in the evidence section.]		
	SESP Not Required	

MANAGEMENT & MONITORING

	3	**2**
11. Does the project have a strong results framework? • **3:** The project's selection of outputs and activities are at an appropriate level. Outputs are accompanied by SMART, results-oriented indicators that measure the key expected development changes, each with credible data sources and populated baselines and targets, including gender sensitive, target group focused, sex-disaggregated indicators where appropriate. *(all must be true)* • **2:** The project's selection of outputs and activities are at an appropriate level. Outputs are accompanied by SMART, results-oriented indicators, but baselines, targets and data sources may not yet be fully specified. Some use of target group focused, sex-disaggregated indicators, as appropriate. *(all must be true)* • **1:** The project's selection of outputs and activities are not at an appropriate level; outputs are not accompanied by SMART, results-oriented indicators that measure the expected change and have not been populated with baselines and targets; data sources are not specified, and/or no gender sensitive, sex-disaggregation of indicators. *(if any is true)* *Note: Management Action or strong management justification must be given for a score of 1	**1** **Evidence** Available on the narrative of the programme and on the RRF	
12. Is the project's governance mechanism clearly defined in the project document, including composition of the project board? • **3:** The project's governance mechanism is fully defined. Individuals have been specified for each position in the governance mechanism (especially all members of the project board.) Project Board members have agreed on their roles and responsibilities as specified in the terms of reference. The ToR of the project board has been attached to the project document. *(all must be true)*. • **2:** The project's governance mechanism is defined; specific institutions are noted as holding key governance roles, but individuals may not have been specified yet. The project document lists the most important responsibilities of the project board, project director/manager and quality assurance roles. *(all must be true)* • **1:** The project's governance mechanism is loosely defined in the project document, only mentioning key roles that will need to be filled at a later date. No information on the responsibilities of key positions in the governance mechanism is provided. *Note: Management Action or strong management justification must be given for a score of 1 *Evidence* A ToR of the Regional Steering Committee as well as the National Mechanism (non-binding) will be devised in the inception phase.	3 / **2** **1** **Evidence** See Governance section p.37-39	
13. Have the project risks been identified with clear plans stated to manage and mitigate each risk? • **3:** Project risks related to the achievement of results are fully described in the project risk log, based on comprehensive analysis drawing on the programme's theory of change, Social and Environmental Standards and screening, situation analysis, capacity assessments and other analysis such as funding potential and reputational risk. Risks have been identified through a consultative process with key internal and external stakeholders. Clear and complete plan in place to manage and mitigate each risk, reflected in project budgeting and monitoring plans. *(both must be true)* • **2:** Project risks related to the achievement of results are identified in the initial project risk log based on a minimum level of analysis and consultation, with mitigation measures identified for each risk.	3 / **2** **1** **Evidence** See Risk section p.21-23	

• **1:** Some risks may be identified in the initial project risk log, but no evidence of consultation or analysis and no clear risk mitigation measures identified. This option is also selected if risks are not clearly identified and/or no initial risk log is included with the project document. *Note: Management Action must be taken for a score of 1	

EFFICIENT

	Yes (3)	No (1)
14. Have specific measures for ensuring cost-efficient use of resources been explicitly mentioned as part of the project design? This can include, for example: i) using the theory of change analysis to explore different options of achieving the maximum results with the resources available; ii) using a portfolio management approach to improve cost effectiveness through synergies with other interventions; iii) through joint operations (e.g., monitoring or procurement) with other partners; iv) sharing resources or coordinating delivery with other projects, v) using innovative approaches and technologies to reduce the cost of service delivery or other types of interventions. *(Note: Evidence of at least one measure must be provided to answer yes for this question)* ***Evidence*** The project will apply a portfolio and adaptive management approach to improve synergies with other interventions within the project as well as ongoing relevant initiatives in strategic innovation (e.g. TGFF2/Cities Experiment Fund) and ongoing CO projects on local development.	Yes (3)	No (1)

	3	**2**
15. Is the budget justified and supported with valid estimates? • **3:** The project's budget is at the activity level with funding sources, and is specified for the duration of the project period in a multi-year budget. Realistic resource mobilisation plans are in place to fill unfunded components. Costs are supported with valid estimates using benchmarks from similar projects or activities. Cost implications from inflation and foreign exchange exposure have been estimated and incorporated in the budget. Adequate costs for monitoring, evaluation, communications and security have been incorporated. • **2:** The project's budget is at the activity level with funding sources, when possible, and is specified for the duration of the project in a multi-year budget, but no funding plan is in place. Costs are supported with valid estimates based on prevailing rates. • **1:** The project's budget is not specified at the activity level, and/or may not be captured in a multi-year budget. Note: In addition to the overall and approved budget (annex 3 of the Agreement with donor), the project operates with a detailed budget for all years. This approach was preferred by both donor and UNDP to allow for flexibility to adapt underlying activities based on monitoring and learning during implementation.	3 / 1 **Evidence** Annex 3 of DoA and detailed 4year budget shared with all COs	**2**

	3	**2**
16. Is the Country Office/Regional Hub/Global Project fully recovering the costs involved with project implementation? • **3:** The budget fully covers all project costs that are attributable to the project, including programme management and development effectiveness services related to strategic country programme planning, quality assurance, pipeline development, policy advocacy services, finance, procurement, human resources, administration, issuance of contracts, security, travel, assets, general services, information and communications based on full costing in accordance with prevailing UNDP policies (i.e., UPL, LPL.) • **2:** The budget covers significant project costs that are attributable to the project based on prevailing UNDP policies (i.e., UPL, LPL) as relevant. • **1:** The budget does not adequately cover project costs that are attributable to the project, and UNDP is cross-subsidizing the project. *Note: Management Action must be given for a score of 1. The budget must be revised to fully reflect the costs of implementation before the project commences.	3 / 1 **Evidence** Detailed 4year budget shared with all COs	**2**

EFFECTIVE

	3	**2**
17. Have targeted groups been engaged in the design of the project?	1	**2**

• **3:** Credible evidence that all targeted groups, prioritising discriminated and marginalized populations that will be involved in or affected by the project, have been actively engaged in the design of the project. The project has an explicit strategy to identify, engage and ensure the meaningful participation of target groups as stakeholders throughout the project, including through monitoring and decision-making (e.g., representation on the project board, inclusion in samples for evaluations, etc.) • **2:** Some evidence that key targeted groups have been consulted in the design of the project. • **1:** No evidence of engagement with targeted groups during project design. Note: as a regional project, voices and engagement with local stakeholders occurs through the COs.	**Evidence** See p.23 on stakeholders

18. Does the project plan for adaptation and course correction if regular monitoring activities, evaluation, and lesson learned demonstrate there are better approaches to achieve the intended results and/or circumstances change during implementation?	Yes (3)	No (1)

19. The gender marker for all project outputs are scored at GEN2 or GEN3, indicating that gender has been fully mainstreamed into all project outputs at a minimum. N/A as the project is GEN1 *Note: Management Action or strong management justification must be given for a score of "no"	Yes (3)	No (1)
	Evidence	

SUSTAINABILITY & NATIONAL OWNERSHIP	

20. Have national/regional/global partners led, or proactively engaged in, the design of the project? • **3:** National partners (or regional/global partners for regional and global projects) have full ownership of the project and led the process of the development of the project jointly with UNDP. • **2:** The project has been developed by UNDP in close consultation with national/regional/global partners. • **1:** The project has been developed by UNDP with limited or no engagement with national partners.	3	2
	1	
	Evidence	

21. Are key institutions and systems identified, and is there a strategy for strengthening specific/ comprehensive capacities based on capacity assessments conducted? • **3:** The project has a strategy for strengthening specific capacities of national institutions and/or actors based on a completed capacity assessment. This strategy includes an approach to regularly monitor national capacities using clear indicators and rigorous methods of data collection, and adjust the strategy to strengthen national capacities accordingly. • **2:** A capacity assessment has been completed. There are plans to develop a strategy to strengthen specific capacities of national institutions and/or actors based on the results of the capacity assessment. • **1:** Capacity assessments have not been carried out.	3	2
	1	
	Evidence	

22. Is there is a clear strategy embedded in the project specifying how the project will use national systems (i.e., procurement, monitoring, evaluations, etc.,) to the extent possible? Note: as this a regional project, no specific strategy is in place.	Yes (3)	No (1)

23. Is there a clear transition arrangement/ phase-out plan developed with key stakeholders in order to sustain or scale up results (including resource mobilisation and communications strategy)? Note: will be developed as the project is implemented, learning and lessons gathered and project adapted.	Yes (3)	No (1)