

Quick Guide: Managing COVID-19 Risks in UNDP Programming

The COVID-19 pandemic requires regularly scanning for emerging risks across UNDP programming to ensure we can continue to deliver results, prevent unintended harm as a result of our activities, and adapt quickly in the rapidly changing context. This requires **agility in how we manage our programmes and projects**, and decision-making informed by **proactive risk identification and management** to ensure opportunities can be seized while minimizing harm.

UNDP's [Programme and Project Management](#) and [Enterprise Risk Management](#) frameworks enable and offer tools for such an approach (e.g. Business Continuity, Security Risk Management, Programme Criticality, Social and Environmental Standards). **This note provides some quick reminders and actions that can be taken to ensure COVID-19 risks are being managed across all programming.**

Screen for COVID-19 Risks Across Programme Portfolio

Screening for risks, particularly in a rapidly changing context such as the COVID-19 pandemic, needs to be constant to inform rapid response and decision making. All **UNDP Programme Managers** (esp. RRs and DRRs) need to ensure their programme portfolio, including all active projects, are being regularly screened for such risks. The following are some considerations or questions when screening for risks related to COVID-19:

Relevance of existing or new programme/project:

- ✓ Has there been a change in national priorities and context?
- ✓ Are the original assumptions and theory of change in the programme/project (e.g. vulnerable or marginalized groups, drivers of change) still valid?
- ✓ If you need to reprioritize existing programming and rapidly deliver a new programme offer to help countries respond (see UNDP's COVID-19 Programme Offer), what are the implications of such changes?

Potential harm to people and/or the environment (NOTE: you may need to revisit Social and Environmental Screenings for projects to help identify risks, refer to [SES Toolkit](#)):

- ✓ Potential impacts on vulnerable or excluded groups from the virus itself, as well as the impact of measures taken to curb the spread, and the protection and enjoyment of human rights (e.g. restrictions on freedoms of movement, privacy and surveillance measures)?
- ✓ Potential health and safety, including exposure, risks for communities and partners we engage with, including the project workforce (e.g. personnel, third party workers, volunteers, cash for work)?
- ✓ Potential impacts related to gender equality, including socio-economic and Gender-Based Violence, especially domestic violence (see [Gender and Recovery Toolkit](#))?
- ✓ Potential impacts on the environment, including immediate impacts of medical waste, suspension of environmental monitoring and protection services, and longer-term impacts related to socio-economic recovery?

Monitoring and evaluation:

- ✓ Uncertainties or constraints around planned M&E activities due to restricted movement and safety measures?
- ✓ Risks related to existing or planned Third-Party Monitoring activities?

Partnerships and external relations:

- ✓ Potential reputational risks that need to be managed?
- ✓ Issues related to existing partnerships and/or donor relationships (e.g. risks related to repurposing funds)?
- ✓ Opportunities for new partnerships, including with women's grassroots organizations, private sector, CSOs, etc.?

Financial resources:

- ✓ Potential diversion or delays of anticipated funding sources due to COVID-19 response?
- ✓ Are there new sources of funding for COVID-19 response and UNDP COVID-19 Programme Offer?
- ✓ Will the commitment to 15% expenditures on gender specific interventions be maintained?

Operations:

- ✓ Potential issues related to Business Continuity and the safety, security and well-being of personnel?
- ✓ Impacts from sustained remote working arrangements, travel restrictions per UN and national requirements?
- ✓ Procurement risks (including procurement of medical supplies) and local markets/supply chains?
- ✓ Challenges related to cash requirements and/or banking arrangements, particularly for remote areas?

Safety and Security:

- ✓ Escalating security environment, e.g. riots, anti-UN rhetoric and/or attacks, increase in crime and impacts on staff?
- ✓ Potential effects of programming activities on security stability, including local non-acceptance or negative perception etc?

☑ Develop Risk Management Strategy and Actions

To address these risks, a **risk management strategy to address COVID-19 risks** should be in place for the programme, applying across all projects. This does not necessarily require a document to be drafted but rather it is critical to ensure clarity on how such risks should be regularly screened, managed and reported to ensure the Programme Manager has relevant data from across all projects for effective decision making and to determine when escalation is required.

Each risk needs to be assigned an “owner” and someone to be responsible for each of the mitigation (or “treatment”) measures identified. **Risk management measures** and related decisions include, among other things:

- ✓ Revision of programme or project
- ✓ Reallocation and mobilization of resources
- ✓ Temporary suspension of certain projects or activities
- ✓ Rapid development of new bankable projects or activities
- ✓ Donor/partner relations management
- ✓ Update business continuity plans
- ✓ Virtual and remote methods for working and implementation (e.g. for monitoring, stakeholder engagement)
- ✓ Human rights assessments and protection measures
- ✓ Ensure a gender-responsive approach and engagement of women
- ✓ Measures to prevent Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
- ✓ Community and occupational health and safety safeguard measures
- ✓ Waste management and environmental protection measures
- ✓ Regular risk monitoring and assessment of changing local context
- ✓ Frequent reporting on implementation of risk mitigation measures
- ✓ Monitoring personnel wellbeing during crisis/telecommuting

⚠ COMMUNITY HEALTH & SAFETY RISKS

Projects that involve close engagement with communities, partners, or involves a project workforce needs to have clear procedures and safeguards in place to protect people (not only UNDP personnel) and prevent the spread of COVID-19. This can include the use of remote methods when possible, protective equipment, maintaining social distancing, and other measures recommended by WHO and national authorities. Such safeguards need to be conveyed to all partners, third parties, contractors. If adequate safeguards are not or can not be put in place then such activities should be suspended until a time when appropriate safeguards can be implemented.

[WHO's library of country and technical guidance for COVID19](#) should be referenced.

☑ Track and Monitor Risks – Updating the Risk Register

The Risk Register should be updated regularly to track, monitor, and escalate (when needed) COVID-19 risks at all levels. This ensures clear accountability and risk ownership. It will also enable aggregation of risks to better be able to identify where the highest risks are, if there are common risks that require a programmatic or corporate approach/tools, where support is needed, etc.

- ✓ **Programme Risk Register** = Update [IWP Risk Register](#) with new programme/unit level risks
- ✓ **Project Risk Register** = Update [Atlas Project Risk Register](#)

Note that any Risk Category can be used to track COVID-19 risks as determined relevant. If there is not a clear risk category, the “Social and Environmental/Health and Safety” category should be applied.