

2016 UNCT Results Report: Strategic Summary of Coordination Results

1. Brief description of major development or political and economic events that have had an effect on the work of the UNCT

The year 2016 marked the 25th anniversary of Azerbaijan's independence. The country has made a profound economic and social transformation over the last decade, making progress in meeting most of the internationally agreed development goals (such as reducing poverty, improving access and quality of education and health services, advancing gender equality, fostering environmental sustainability, etc.). Azerbaijan continues to play an assertive role on the regional arena, in a bid to renew its historical relevance as a key logistical node in the center of Eurasia. Rich in hydrocarbons, the country i) significantly contributes to the energy security of Europe by implementing the Southern Gas Corridor project, which will expand Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) and Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), and ii) deepens cooperation with Europe and Asia through supporting regional East-West and North-South connectivity initiatives to foster ICT and energy projects, transport and trade corridors, and strategic trans-regional logistics networks, driven by the aspiration to become a true intermodal transport hub.

In 2016 Azerbaijan was elected (by 176 countries) as a member of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for a three-year term (2017 – 2019). Other major events that have taken place in 2016 include: a) an escalation of the armed conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region in April; b) a constitutional referendum in September; c) the launch of the Strategic Roadmaps for economic reform in December, which were initiated to address a number of negative shocks that have impaired the recent economic performance in Azerbaijan; d) the establishment of the National Coordination Council for Sustainable Development which aims to make progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and e) Parliamentary ratification of the Paris Climate Agreement in October.

a. Escalation of the armed conflict in and around Nagorno-Karabakh

Since the early stages of Azerbaijan's independence, armed hostilities in and around Nagorno-Karabakh has caused massive displacement of ethnic Azerbaijanis who were forced to flee their homes in Armenia. They became refugees in Azerbaijan, and thousands more became IDPs when Armenia occupied Nagorno-Karabakh in the surrounding seven areas. The government has been funding the construction of new IDP settlements construction since 2001 with a total of US\$7 billion already spent to build 95 settlements for 250,000 IDPs. A new state programme on improving livelihoods of IDPs for 2017-2020 is under preparation.

Negotiations led by the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs (France, US and Russia) over the past twenty five years to find a peaceful solution to the conflict have made little progress and a fragile ceasefire agreement is continuously being violated by both sides. This year in particular, tensions escalated during four days of armed conflict between 2-5 April 2016 in clashes that have been described as the worst since the 1994 ceasefire. Notwithstanding the regular exchanges of fire along the line of contact (LoC) over the last two decades, this violence was unprecedented in its scale and intensity, resulting in serious humanitarian consequences, including casualties among civilians.

WHO and other UN Agencies stood ready to provide specific expertise to the Government as part of a coordinated national response in the aftermath of the April escalation. In May, UNHCR conducted an assessment mission in the most affected districts of Terter, Agdam, Barda and Goranboy, which concluded that of the 121,761 people residing in the areas along the LoC that were affected by the April violence, up to 11,699 had been temporarily displaced by the events. As a result of the field mission, UNHCR provided assistance through cash-based interventions to 533 vulnerable persons displaced by the violence. In August, the UN Resident Coordinator and UNHCR Representative visited some of the affected areas along the LoC which are hosting these internally displaced persons (IDPs). During the mission, they met with the representatives of local government, civil society organizations, and members of IDP communities in each region to inquire about their post-escalation situation. Following the mission, IDPs' concerns were shared with local and central authorities. Furthermore, the UNCT have ensured that this vulnerable category of people are prioritized in programme activities.

b. A Constitutional Referendum

A referendum was held on 26 September 2016, the result of which showed that 84.2 percent of voters were in favour of 29 amendments to the Constitution. Along with 117 international observers from over 30 countries, an assessment mission from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) concluded that 'the referendum was organized in accordance with the national legislation and the Constitution of Azerbaijan and is considered legal and legitimate'¹. However, the delegation expressed 'regrets that the Azerbaijani authorities did not ask the respected Venice Commission of the Council of Europe to give its opinion on the draft modifications to the Constitution'. It has been expected that a reshuffling of the cabinet would follow the resulting constitutional change. However, to date no significant change in the government has been witnessed.

c. Launching the Strategic Roadmaps for Economic Reforms

Over the last ten years, Azerbaijan has emerged as one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Strong economic growth, boosted largely by hydrocarbon resources, allowed major investments in infrastructure and a steep decline in poverty rates from 46.7 percent (2002) to 5 percent (2016)². However, heavy reliance on oil in an environment of declining output and lower oil prices is

¹ Statement of the PACE assessment mission for the Constitutional referendum in Azerbaijan, 27 September 2016; <http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/News/News-View-EN.asp?newsid=6326&lang=2&cat=31>

² ADB Basic Statistics 2016; <https://www.adb.org/publications/basic-statistics-2016>

Azerbaijan's key challenge for long-term growth. This in addition to weak regional growth and currency devaluations in Azerbaijan and its main trading partners, decreased the large current account surplus that the country has enjoyed since the oil boom years³. For the first time since 1995, Azerbaijan's economy contracted in 2016, mainly due to low global oil prices, coupled with sharp cuts in public investment which remained the key driver of national non-oil robust growth. Hence the Government has been exploring new sources of sustained growth in the non-oil sector to foster sustainable economic development, improve social welfare, and continue progress in reducing poverty. Although the high volatility of output and inflationary pressures persisted throughout 2016, Azerbaijan maintained its tight monetary stance, pursuing policies aimed at promoting macro-economic and political stability, economic diversification, and improved resilience to external headwinds, in an effort to lift growth back to a stable trend rate.

A national employment strategy for 2017-2030 is being finalized, with support from several UN Agencies and based on the ILO employment policy formulation methodology. Pursuant to Presidential Decree, the President's Office increased support to a self-employment programme by allocating 6 million AZN (US\$3.6 million) to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. , Subject to the success of this pilot programme, a further allocation of over 80 million AZN (US\$48.5 million) is envisaged. This signals a shift in government policy from providing social assistance to supporting entrepreneurship by boosting the SME sector.

According to the Global Competitiveness Report 2016-2017⁴, Azerbaijan improved its performance, ranking 37 (ahead of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine in the CIS region), despite the drop in oil prices. The country is ranked 65 among 190 economies in the Doing Business 2017 report, making progress on three indicators (namely, Getting Electricity, Trading Across Borders, and Paying Taxes) by introducing: i) an electronic connection map to streamline the process of obtaining an electricity connection, ii) an electronic system for submitting export and import declarations, and iii) an abolishment of the vehicle tax for residents.

Driven by the commitment to foster diversification, the government established the Centre for Economic Reforms Analysis and Communications (CERAC) (<http://ereforms.org>) in April 2016, which was entrusted with developing a new strategic roadmap for economic reforms. The UN System contributed to the strategic roadmaps drafting process, which was led by an international consulting firm, in partnership with national think-tanks, researchers and experts. These drafts identified eleven priority non-oil sectors such as agriculture, SME's role in export and production, heavy industry, tourism and recreation, logistics and trade, vocational education and training, affordable housing, financial services, telecommunications, etc. Several UN Agencies (namely UNDP, UNICEF, FAO, ILO, IOM, WHO, and UNHCR) through joint efforts with the donor community provided substantial inputs to the draft strategy to support Azerbaijan's self-sustaining growth in the non-oil sectors, while emphasizing the linkages between social development and economic success. The finalized roadmaps were launched by Presidential Decree in December 2016. Operating under the auspices of the

³ IMF Country Report No. 16/296, September 2016; <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2016/cr16296.pdf>

⁴ The Global Competitiveness Report 2016-2017

President's Office, the CERAC will be in charge of monitoring progress towards the expected goals and results.

At the same, the FAO Partnership and Liaison Office in Azerbaijan has been exploring opportunities for collaboration between the Ministry of Agriculture and CERAC as to how: i) to identify priorities in agriculture; ii) monitor and evaluate through selected indicators; iii) analyze the sector performance, and iv) assess the impact of agricultural policies with a view to develop technical and institutional capacities to better implement the agricultural reform programme through an on-going and future technical assistance project. UNDP has supported CERAC's work by: i) assessing Azerbaijan's financial sustainability trends; ii) assessing sustainability of Azerbaijan's State Social Protection Fund; iii) advising on setting-up a trade portal; and iv) providing short-term capacity building measures. IOM is supporting CERAC in analyzing migration policies, with a focus on the impact of migration on economic development in Azerbaijan and the SDGs in particular as related to targets on migration and socio-economic development.

d. Establishing a National Coordination Council for Sustainable Development

As a result of UN advocacy, the Government of Azerbaijan established the National Coordination Council for Sustainable Development (NCCSD) by Presidential Decree dated 6 October 2016 to coordinate and monitor Azerbaijan's progress towards the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and SDGs. Chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Ali Ahmedov and co-chaired by the Minister of Economy Mr. Shahin Mustafayev, the Council comprises twelve senior government officials (at the deputy ministerial level) who will oversee the implementation of national commitments on achieving the SDGs as well as their monitoring and reporting.

The UN System in Azerbaijan publicly commended the Government's efforts to set up the NCCSD and has since effectively engaged with it through the provision of specific technical assistance. At a meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister held on 12 October, the UN Resident Coordinator i) expressed the UN's readiness to provide joint support to the Government in applying the SDGs as a framework for ensuring national policy coherence, measuring the progress towards SDGs, and reporting, ii) encouraged the Government to submit a voluntary national review (VNR) to the 2017 High-level Political Forum (HLPF), and iii) welcomed the Government to join a UN advocacy campaign on SDGs to be launched this year.

The Government's formal application to undertake the 2017 VNR has since been approved. Azerbaijan, along with other 42 countries, will submit the VNR at the 2017 HLPF due in July (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/azerbaijan>), which will contribute to generating momentum and will help spur action for achieving the SDGs at the national level as well as facilitate sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned.

Under the stewardship of the Ministry of Economy, a NCCSD Secretariat has been created. Furthermore, working groups on economic growth and decent work, social development, and

environment, have been set up, which encompass all three dimensions of sustainable development. In addition, an M&E Group has been established to embark on the SDGs mapping process and lay the foundation for tailoring these global goals to Azerbaijan's national context. With support from the UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub, the working groups have been: i) briefly guided on applying the Rapid Integrated Assessment (RIA) tool and Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS) approach, and ii) received information regarding regional and country experiences gained in the contextualization process. The working groups are expected to take an inventory of the landscape of national plans and strategies and the respective goals and targets. Their findings will feed into the SDGs alignment, prioritization, and integration processes.

e. Signing and ratifying the Paris Climate Change Agreement

On 22 April 2016, 174 countries, including Azerbaijan, signed the Paris Climate Change Agreement at the UN Headquarters in New York. The Parliament then ratified the Paris Agreement on 28 October 2016, demonstrating the Government's strong commitment to its international obligations pertaining to climate change. Azerbaijan has set an ambitious national goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 35 percent by 2030. The UN System in Azerbaijan will provide support to the Government in implementing the Paris Agreement and achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly SDG 13, which calls for taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

2. Highlights on progress on joined-up work

Implementing the UN-Azerbaijan Partnership Framework 2016-2020

The UN-Azerbaijan Partnership Framework (UNAPF) 2016-2020, was signed by Mr. Shahin Mustafayev, Minister of Economy, and Mr. Ghulam M. Isaczai, UN Resident Coordinator, on 12 July 2016. The ceremony was attended by several ministers and senior government officials, the Vice-Speaker and other Members of Parliament, academia, and members of the diplomatic corps, international development partners, civil society, the private sector, and media. This framework was developed in close cooperation with the Ministry of Economy, the principal national partner for the UNAPF formulation and finalization, during two years of close consultation between the Government of Azerbaijan and the UN system as well as representatives of the private sector, civil society, and academia.

The UNAPF is anchored in shared priorities and goals and is built around the following three strategic areas: (i) promoting sustainable and inclusive economic development underpinned by increased diversification and decent work; (ii) strengthening institutional capacities and effective public and social services; and (iii) improving environmental management and resilience to hazards and disasters. It is aligned to national aspirations that are articulated in the 'Azerbaijan – 2020: The Vision of the Future' development concept. Its primary purpose is to support the national development agenda through a coherent, coordinated and joined up approach to serve human development, peace and the well-being of all people in Azerbaijan. Human rights and gender equality will remain the fundamental principles that will guide the implementation of the UNAPF and the UN's joint support to the

Government in achieving its national development priorities and meeting its international commitments.

The UNAPF is also a joint UN commitment to support the Government in its implementation of the 2030 Agenda with its accompanying SDGs to foster sustainable development with its three interconnected elements – economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability, with a focus on the concept of *leaving no one behind*, given its centrality in achieving the SDGs.

The first year of UNAPF implementation has been affected by its delayed endorsement and the fact that UN Agencies were adapting to the changing country development context. However, the UN Country Team (UNCT) has made concerted efforts to operationalize three UNAPF Results Groups and deliver the agreed results. To oversee the effective support for achieving the UNAPF, a joint high-level Steering Committee has been established, comprising of senior government officials including members of the *National Action Group for 'Vision 2020'* (at the deputy ministerial level), as well as Heads of UN Agencies, development partners, and other stakeholders.

The first UNAPF Steering Committee meeting was convened on 19 January 2017 and co-chaired by the Minister of Economy and the UN Resident Coordinator. The UNAPF Steering Committee endorsed the Committee's terms of reference and membership, approved the operationalization of three UNAPF Results Groups (per each UNAPF strategic area), and their TORs, and reviewed priorities identified for 2017 through the joint work plans, which were presented by the UNAPF Results Group Co-chairs (World Bank/ILO, UNICEF, and UNDP/FAO, respectively) in line with the Agencies' country programmes signed with the respective national partners.

This year, the UNAPF Results Groups will place greater emphasis on improving statistics and analysis to support evidence-based policy making through drawing on global best practice, innovation, creative communication, with a special focus on national capacity development to achieve the SDGs. The 2017 Joint Work Plans will be approved in March as soon as they are finalized by the UNAPF Results Groups, in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, to encapsulate specific actions and resources required to achieve broad UNAPF strategic outcomes. The UNAPF Steering Committee will meet tentatively in November 2017 to review the UNAPF Annual Review findings and approve the recommendations generated by the joint review process to further UN's comprehensive work planning and monitoring for results and to explore opportunities for joined-up approaches, capitalizing on synergies and innovation.

In addition to three Results Groups, the UN Gender Theme Group (chaired by UNFPA) and UN Task Force on Human Rights (led by OHCHR) are contributing to the UNAPF implementation as well as joint policy development and normative activities. The UNCT is committed to making progress towards *Delivering as One* approach with support from the Operations Management Team (chaired by UNDP), and UN Communications Group, which will be chaired by UNDPI as soon as a full-fledged skeleton staff is recruited by the headquarters. To strengthen the joint outreach and develop common messages on the priority areas, the UNCT will approve the UN Communications Strategy for 2017-2020 to be aligned with the UNAPF strategic outcomes and SDGs.

Implementing the Standard Operating Procedures

The UN System in Azerbaijan strives to efficiently deliver coherent and strategic policy advice for the achievement of nationally owned development results. UN Agencies are applying the “Delivering as One” approach (e.g. *One Leader* (empowered UN Resident Coordinator and empowered UNCT), *Operating as One*, and *Communicating as One*) to function more effectively and foster greater collaboration, teamwork, and joint initiatives. To accelerate the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) implementation and ensure a UN focus on results with strengthened accountability, monitoring and evaluation, and improved outcomes, the UNCT convened a retreat on 24-25 November 2016 in Shemakha. The retreat was attended by the Heads of Agencies and representatives of nine UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes as well as the OMT Chair and the World Bank Country Manager and Senior Operations Officer.

Facilitated by Mr. Robert Bernardo, Policy Specialist, UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub, the two-day retreat provided a venue for interactive deliberations on emerging issues emanating from the SOPs to advance the *Delivering as One* model for promoting UN policy and operational coherence in Azerbaijan. While reviewing the 15 Core Elements of the SOPs, some of which are being applied by the UNCT, a sequence of steps was suggested to gradually make progress in the pending specific areas and accomplish the process. Specifically, the UNCT discussed the operationalization of the three UNAPF Results Groups mentioned previously, and decided to abolish the Joint UN Team on AIDS, due to the diminishing scope of joint interventions as a result of shrinking funds.

The UNCT will continue to act together to intensify joint support for a robust national M&E system and statistical capacity for greater disaggregation of national data, using the technical expertise and capacities of the UN system. Given that there is no appropriate staff for a stand-alone UNAPF M&E Group, the UNCT will recruit a Junior Programme Officer or UNV M&E Specialist in 2017 to integrate M&E across the UNAPF Results Groups.

Another outcome of the UNCT retreat was the finalization of the UNCT Code of Conduct, which was driven by a strong commitment to work towards common results and accountability through implementation of the Management & Accountability System and the UNCT Conduct & Working Arrangements.

3. Results of joined-up approaches

Advocating for human rights and advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment

Advocating for human rights and advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment remained central to the UN System’s policy advice and programme interventions in Azerbaijan.

Human rights

The UNCT continued its support to the Government and other stakeholders for building capacity to implement the universal UN norms and recommendations to improve adherence to international human rights standards. With support from the UN Task Force on Human Rights chaired by OHCHR, several UN Agencies promoted the participation of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the UN Human Rights Mechanisms and their making substantive submissions to the UN Treaty Bodies, Special Procedures, as well as for the Universal Periodic Review. A series of public awareness events were launched to promote UN human rights mechanisms and build capacity of national CSOs and lawyers' community members to enhance their role in advocating for the implementation of recommendations adopted by the UN Treaty Bodies, Special Procedures and UPR process. As a result of the technical advisory support provided to the CSOs, a number of alternative reports were developed and submitted to the Human Rights Committee for the sessions on Azerbaijan concerning the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) convened in May and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) held from October to November.

The UNCT provided joint inputs into: i) a mission undertaken by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (16-25 May), which monitored 22 detention and institutionalization places and interviewed over 80 inmates and patients in Baku, Ganja and in the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic, as well as met with civil society representatives and other stakeholders. The UN Working Group will present its final report to the UN Human Rights Council in September 2017; and ii) a country visit of Mr. Michel Forst, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders (14-22 September) who met with the government officials, members of the judiciary, human rights defenders, as well as representatives of civil society and the diplomatic community. Mr. Forst will present a final report with his findings and recommendations to the Human Rights Council in March 2017.

To foster the realization of the right to education, the Government has increased teacher training support in order to deliver school readiness programmes. Over 3,700 teachers have received training through new modules, enabling the Government to provide school readiness programmes in 3,000 new schools and reaching an additional 100,000 children, increasing enrolment to 55 per cent.

The juvenile justice sector has been strengthened through systematic improvements in knowledge and understanding amongst judiciary and legal professionals. Knowledge of core human rights principles and approaches and capacity for detecting child abuse has been strengthened through work with the head of the National Preventative Group against Torture and Ill-treatment.

Public awareness of access to justice for children was supported through the joint communication efforts of UNICEF, the World Bank, and the EU, with a focus on the availability of free legal aid services supported on a pilot basis in rural areas. Over 800 cases have been handled through these services. To support promotion of access to justice, local community organizations have been supported to develop communication strategies to target local populations with information and background on the legal services initiative.

UNICEF partnered with the National Paralympic Committee, Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan and the Football Federation of People with Disabilities to promote the integration of

children with disabilities into mainstream society and girls' participation in and through sport. The key results achieved through the new partnership include enhanced capacity of coaches to bring girls and children with disabilities into mainstream sport, breaking taboos and public attitudes to the role of these groups in the community.

UNHCR and UNICEF teamed up with the office of the Ombudsperson of the Republic of Azerbaijan to raise awareness in four districts around the conflict-affected areas and Baku on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the importance of child rights in their IDP communities. 4,000 children and young people, as well as 300 teachers have been targeted, as part of a renewed focus on engaging children and young people in the importance of development, underpinned by a stronger appreciation of their basic rights.

Advancing gender equality and women's empowerment

Chaired by UNFPA, the UN Gender Theme Group provided support to the government in advancing gender equality and strengthening women's empowerment, which is considered a cross-cutting issue in the UNAPF. These joint efforts specifically focused on an effective follow-up on the CEDAW Concluding Observations, which were submitted to the Government in March 2015 and include, inter alia, the urge to eliminate stereotypes and harmful practices, combat all forms of gender-based violence (GBV) and discrimination, promote participation of women in public and political life, and address inequalities faced by women in the employment, health, and education sectors in Azerbaijan.

To address the recommendations of the CEDAW Committee, UNFPA provided support to the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs (SCFWCA) in the development of a legal and policy framework on GBV prevention and response within the framework a new project aimed at combating GBV in Azerbaijan. With support from a team of international and local experts, an in-depth review of GBV legislation is being conducted to develop a model of an effective referral mechanism for GBV prevention and response. An assessment of the services provided by the SCFWCA's Family Support Centers as well as NGOs, which are accredited by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection for providing GBV services, was conducted and its findings will be used for formulating intervention strategies aimed at building staff capacity in these institutions.

To follow up the CEDAW Committee's recommendation on multi-sectorial response to GBV, UNFPA also initiated a project with the Ministry of Health, which has resulted in the development of a manual/guide for health workers on how to identify and assist domestic violence victims. Several NGOs that are active in promoting gender equality and combating GBV were assisted to launch advocacy action for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence), which fed into a joint Government-NGO discussion hosted by the SCFWCA to find solutions for combatting GBV.

UNDP promoted women's participation in economic life through their entrepreneurial skills development, networking, and sensitizing eight private companies and ASAN Centres (one-stop shop for public service delivery) to women's needs. A total of 35 women from three regions (Masalli,

Bilasuvar, and Salyan) started up their small businesses, and 500 women from five regions (Sabirabad, Neftchala, Masally, Bilasuvar and Salyan) benefitted from improved financial literacy. Staff capacity in five ASAN Centres (in Baku, Sumgayit, Ganja, Masally, and Gabala) has been improved to deliver gender-sensitive public services, especially services targeting women victims of domestic violence. Involvement of women in natural resource management was promoted by giving them a voice in two Pasture and two Forest Users' Associations in Shemakha and Ismayilli regions and teaching them new livelihood skills. A total of 60 women in Ismayilli region gained skills in the sustainable collection of medicinal and aromatic plants. Understanding of the CEDAW Convention has improved among 24 members from 16 NGOs. An awareness raising event in Baku and a training session on effective advocacy to promote women's rights targeted six representatives of Women Resource Centres from Sabirabad, Bilasuvar, and Neftchala.

WHO provided support to the Government in its leading the development of a new reproductive health strategy, which places emphasis on gender equality.

UNHCR partnered with the Ombudsperson Office and local authorities to effectively advocate for gender-based violence and response among IDP communities in 5 regions. As a follow-up on the joint initiative, a network of officials who are in charge of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) related issues will be established and maintained to systematize and further elaborate recommendations and ideas on improving capacity of various stakeholders in the prevention and response to SGBV in the IDP communities.

With support from the UN Gender Theme Group, several UN Agencies (UNFPA, UNHCR, UNDP and IOM) pooled their efforts to support the '16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence' campaign, which brought together representatives from the government, diplomatic corps, civil society and media from Baku and the regions to galvanize joint action to end violence against women and girls in Azerbaijan. The campaign included: i) a high-level conference highlighting the importance of prevention, protection, and promotion as the major cornerstones of the strategic interventions to prevent gender-based violence; ii) youth flash-mobs; iii) joint awareness raising activities with the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan, and iv) a movie festival entitled 'Azerbaijani Family', which calls to preserve national family traditions and universal values that are grounded in respect for the elderly and women, as well as promote the culture of tolerance and peace in family relations. A number of billboards and posters displaying the key messages of the campaign were installed across the city and used in the subway. Leaflets and other promotional materials were widely distributed to visitors of 11 ASAN Centers across the country to raise public awareness on the different forms of gender-based violence and available protection mechanisms.

Newly initiated joined-up approaches

Several UN Agencies have teamed up for initiating the following joined-up approaches which will yield results in 2017 and onwards:

- UNDP and FAO teamed up to ensure conservation and sustainable use of agro-biodiversity. A newly launched project, under GEF funding, will help integrate robust capacity building

approaches within the Ministry of Agriculture to make agricultural ecosystems more resilient and productive, manage climate risks and contribute to better nutrition, productivity and livelihoods;

- UNFPA joined efforts with WHO to support the Government in drafting a new National Reproductive Health Strategy for 2017-2025;
- WHO, jointly with FAO, has been supporting the development of the first national anti-microbial resistance policy to be finalized in 2017;
- FAO teamed up with the World Bank and IFAD to create synergies within a WB-funded project on the improvement of agricultural competitiveness under a component on upgrading and modernization of plant protection and veterinary services and IFAD-funded integrated rural development project, respectively;
- UNDP and ILO pooled efforts to help the Government ensure more coordinated and complementary support in: i) the implementation of the National Employment Strategy for 2017-2030; and ii) the roll-out of the country's large-scale self-employment programme, which is aimed at providing formal sector employment opportunities for the unemployed. A follow-up joint mission is tentatively scheduled for the middle of 2017;
- UNHCR and ILO jointly advocated with the Government for the adoption of the ILO Guiding Principles on Access of Refugees and other Forcibly Displaced Persons to the labour market.

Joint initiatives to promote youth empowerment and participation

With a third of the population aged 14-29 years, increased attention is being paid by the UNCT to youth development, for example by upgrading youth policies, endorsing a National Youth Development Strategy and including youth considerations in other key strategies. Limited engagement with young people on decision-making and lack of access to positive social and recreational space and school-to-job transition opportunities, all underline the importance for more complementary approaches to youth and adolescent development.

With support from UNICEF, the UNCT has intensified joint efforts to effectively support young people by: i) undertaking a review of its combined activities in support of young people to identify potential areas where closer collaboration and alignment of activities would be of increased value, and ii) renewing the UN Youth Advisory Council, as follows:

- i) The Government of Azerbaijan has recognised the important role young people play in the shaping and leadership of the country's future. Finalised in 2015, a National Youth Strategy pledges over the next ten years to deliver better access to education, training, health, social services, housing, employment and information for young people. This creates an ideal opportunity for the UN family to engage with the Government and offer a creative and comprehensive package of support to the implementation of the youth strategy.

Based on feedback received from youth focal points representing UNFPA, UNICEF, and UNDP, priorities of the respective UN Agencies were identified. An in-depth consultation among the focal points is planned for February 2017 to identify areas for potential cooperation

and help young people benefit from a wide package of support, blended with opportunities for them to play a full part in the lives of their own communities, taking on leadership roles and civic responsibility. Based on the outcome of the upcoming consultation, the initiative will be further discussed at the next UNCT meeting to make a final decision on initiating the joint UN youth project;

- ii) The UN Youth Advisory Council (UNYAC) was formed in May 2014 to contribute to the present UNAPF formulation process and was functioning in 2015. The UNYAC has been newly re-formed to provide an opportunity for representatives of Azerbaijani youth to engage with the UN System, providing advice, guidance and inputs to strategic planning, identify areas where UN support and leadership would be of value to young people, and provide feedback on the UN's contribution to sustainable development in the context of youth and adolescents.

Improving statistics to contribute to evidence-based policy making

The UN System in Azerbaijan places emphasis on providing evidence-based policy support anchoring greater transparency and accountability and contributing to the improvement of quality and availability of national statistics and its compliance with international standards.

UNICEF supported: i) the launch and utilization of the National Centralised Child Databank which is now generating evidence on the situation of children through data on 37 categories. Data on 1.3 million children has been integrated from the Ministry of Justice database alone. The relevant Executive Committee officials were trained on the use of the databank. At the moment, negotiations are underway with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection to integrate their data into the databank; ii) technical skills building with district officials on inputting data; iii) the skills development of a group of local young researchers to position them as future leaders on youth engagement and participation; iv) the Public Health and Reform Centre on improving data collection techniques for the WHO STEPS survey, which measures non-communicable disease risk factors, v) the Ministry of Health on data collection tools and methodologies for analysis of low birth weights amongst new-borns, including better tracing of survival rates.

UNFPA continued its efforts aimed at producing data and an evidence base for informed policy making on preventing GBV and discrimination. The State Statistical Committee has been supported in developing nine new sex disaggregated indicators for the national population databank and publishing the annual statistical compilation of sex disaggregated data "Women and Men". A needs assessment of the services offered by Family Support Centers under the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs and NGOs accredited with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection for providing support services to the gender-based violence victims was conducted. Its findings will feed into the development of training programmes aimed at improving the knowledge of government staff. Moreover, the results of the recently conducted International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) on men's attitudes and practices – along with women's opinions and reports of men's

practices – on a variety of topics related to gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights will be widely communicated from early 2017.

Azerbaijan traditionally has had high levels of first marriages taking place at a young age, derived from the paternalistic model of the family and male dominated society. It is therefore crucial to have quality data available that will be utilized by policymakers, researchers, advocates and volunteers in order to combat this practice. Given the lack of consistently updated statistical data on child marriage in the country, UNFPA has provided support to the State Statistics Committee to conduct a sample household statistical survey on early marriages and out of wedlock birth cases in Azerbaijan. The report was published and officially launched in 2016.

With funding from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, UNDP and UNFPA commenced a joint assessment of barriers to participation of women in the private sector, which will help identify the key reasons that are preventing women from accessing economic and employment opportunities in the private sector, both in rural and urban areas. The assessment will include focus-group discussions and interviews with women, government and private sector representatives to be held in Baku and 6 regions of Azerbaijan. The findings generated by the assessment will feed into formulation of action-oriented recommendations.

FAO assisted the Ministry of Agriculture to develop statistical and analytical capacities to better assess the impact of various agricultural policies implemented.

WHO conducted a Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey to identify key opportunities for the improvement of health and well-being of school-aged children in Azerbaijan. This reviewed available strategies and programmes concerning health promoting schools and school health services and is the main data source for adolescent health related behaviour in Europe. The last survey was undertaken in 2013-2014, and an international summary report was launched in 2016. The Ministry of Health was supported in advancing its data collection and health information systems.

IOM conducted an assessment on Mainstreaming Statistics on International Migration into the Labour Market Information System (LMIS) of the Republic of Azerbaijan. This aimed at strengthening the capacity of the existing LMIS to provide accurate and timely information, in order to better manage labour migration. The assessment focused on the administrative sources of labour market information, such as employment and unemployment statistics, as well as statistics on the employment of non-nationals, and identified labour market needs.

4. Upcoming opportunities in 2017

The UN System in Azerbaijan identified the following joint priorities for 2017:

1. Undertaking the first UNAPF Annual Review is planned for November in order to strengthen existing coordination mechanisms and ensure that UN efforts are coherent and will have the desired impact on the sustainable development of the country, allowing the UNCT to be an active, coordinated and responsive partner with the people and Government of the Republic of

Azerbaijan. The UNCT will intensify its efforts to accelerate SOP implementation by exploring opportunities for joint resource mobilization and further advancing *Communicating as One* and *Operating as One*, and will enhance joint coherent support to the Government for translating the SDGs to national policy targets in Azerbaijan.

2. Providing joint support to the Government for successful implementation of the SDGs in Azerbaijan:

2.1 Within the UN-Azerbaijan Partnership Framework 2016-2020, the UNCT will ensure i) a common understanding on the relevance of the SDGs for the UN–Azerbaijan cooperation; ii) translating the SDGs into national programme and policy planning processes; and identifying key areas requiring policy investment; and iii) taking national approaches to sustainable development to *leave no one behind*, with a special focus on evidence-based policy advice, institutional capacity development, and monitoring of progress towards the SDGs.

2.2 Cooperating with the National Coordination Council for Sustainable Development to promote investments in those sectors, which will be instrumental to delivering sustainable social and economic progress, including, amongst other priorities, early childhood development and education for all; improved health especially for women; boosting agricultural productivity and food security; creating opportunities for displaced and migrant populations; promoting social inclusion – placing special emphasis on the needs of the most vulnerable segments such as persons with disabilities, vulnerable adolescents and youth, low income families; and advancing gender equality. UNDP will support identification of SDGs accelerators and their inter–linkages; build capacity of the Government in implementing regular SDGs reporting through preparing the VNR at the High–Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development in July 2017 and SDG country report.

2.3 Building national capacity for better statistics to generate reliable data and monitor the SDG indicators. The UNCT will place greater emphasis on providing support to the Government for generating disaggregated data and better monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the SDGs in Azerbaijan. This is especially critical with regard to the most excluded and marginalized populations, which are often not represented or under-represented in current national data collection. Special attention will be given to augmenting capacity of the State Statistical Committee, which has made commendable efforts to align national data with the SDG indicators and will need to be assisted in embedding the SDG indicators (as soon as they are finalized) within the national M&E system.

UNDP will provide support to the State Statistical Committee in producing a database of SDG indicators and monitoring progress against the goals. UNFPA will contribute to the integration of ICPD-related indicators at the country SDG related fora, identify the linkages and complementarity between the 2030 Agenda and ICPD plan of action, and provide technical guidance on how to collect/standardise/harmonise/disaggregate SDG indicators, and review their current availability and data collection practices and options through the existing strategic

partnerships with the state institutions, particularly the State Statistical Committee. FAO will provide support for improving statistics for food security, sustainable agriculture, and rural development.

2.4 Launching a joint advocacy campaign on SDGs to communicate the global goals to a broader audience, including the general public, by mobilizing multiple stakeholders and engaging the media on issues of accountability, transparency and cooperation. The UNCT will help the Government in mobilizing multi-stakeholder support and partnerships for the implementation of the SDGs as part of the joint UN outreach efforts. In partnership with the Government and a wide range of stakeholders and actors, the UNCT will launch a country-wide joint advocacy campaign on the SDGs to raise public awareness of the 2030 Agenda, building on national and local contexts and values. UNDP will support effective outreach and communication engaging a wide range of international and national stakeholders into the SDGs process.

3. Strengthening cooperation with CERAC and respective lead ministries as soon as a modus operandi for the government's strategic roadmaps is identified, including implementation and coordination mechanisms for cooperation with UN Agencies and engaging other international development partners, the private sector and civil society. Meanwhile, UNDP is putting together a robust capacity building programme to assist CERAC with monitoring of the Strategic Roadmap and the further strengthening of its research and communication capacities. FAO is planning to propose a project on capacity development and institutional building to support the Ministry of Agriculture implement the roadmap by introducing agricultural modelling which is of great interest to CERAC.
4. Marking the 25th anniversary of its accession to the UN (on 2 March) and the establishment of the formal presence of the UN in the country (in November). Joint observance of the anniversary will provide opportunities to look back on the history of the UN–Azerbaijan successful cooperation and take stock of the achievements as well as to highlight where the UN and Azerbaijan need to make vigorous efforts to foster national sustainable human development.
