



*Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.*

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# UNDP Social and Environmental Standards

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**POLICY UPDATE**  
**OPG approved in 2019**

Effective as of January 1, 2021

## What is New

The proposed update to the SES focuses on the following top-line revisions:

- ✓ Alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework country programming principles
- ✓ Inclusion of provisions addressing risks of gender-based violence, sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse
- ✓ Inclusion of provisions addressing the rights of persons with disabilities
- ✓ Inclusion of provisions to strengthen disaster risk considerations
- ✓ Addition of a new Labour and Working Conditions Standard
- ✓ Alignment with UNDP's updated programme and project Management (PPM) and Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) policies
- ✓ Incorporation of provisions to strengthen alignment with the 2018 Global Environment Facility (GEF) safeguards policy, UN Model Approach to Environmental and Social Standards, and World Bank Environmental and Social Framework

Key changes include:

SES 2015 Sections/Issues	Proposed Change
Introduction	Introduction eliminated as not prescriptive
Scope of application	Updated PPM definition of programmes and projects
Overarching Policy/Principles	Renamed "Programming Principles" and revised to align with UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework guiding principles
GBV, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse provisions	Added to Gender and Women's Empowerment Principle, Community Health and Safety, Labour and Working Conditions and Assessment sections
Rights of persons with disabilities	Added provisions in Human Rights, Community Health and Safety, Displacement, Assessment, Stakeholder Engagement, Access to Information sections
Emphasis on resilience	Incorporated throughout Programming Principle 3 and in Standard 2 Climate Change and Disaster Risks
Disaster Risk Reduction	Mainstreamed across SES to reflect multi-hazard approach of Sendai Framework, and a dedicated focus in Standard 2
Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Natural Resource Management	Include risks of incidental take, illegal trade in protected species; revised mitigation measures for Natural Habitats, increased emphasis on management of risks to ecosystem services, added provisions on soil management, animal welfare and antibiotic use in agriculture/livestock management, and sustainable procurement (primary suppliers)
Climate Change and Disaster Risk	Strengthened provisions on disaster risks, strengthened section on risk analysis, rephrased GHG estimation language
Community Health Safety and Security	Broadened range of potential risks and impacts, strengthened focus on health and safety assessments, broader coverage of health risk exposure, revisions and additions on infrastructure safety, hazardous materials, antimicrobial stewardship, influx of project worker risks, impacts on ecosystem services, risk of reprisals

Cultural Heritage	Strengthened community participation provisions, confidentiality and restricted access, strengthened provisions of use of CH, and added provisions on additional measures for various types of CH
Displacement and Resettlement	Added emphasis on ensuring that any resettlement activities provide sufficient resources that seek to improve livelihoods. Also added exceptions where Standard does not apply, strengthened assessment provisions, strengthened monitoring and completion provisions
Indigenous Peoples	Strengthened provisions on engagement processes, assessment, appropriate benefits, Indigenous Peoples Plan
Labour and Working Conditions	New Standard (drafted in collaboration with ILO)
Pollution Prevention and Resource Efficiency	Various strengthening throughout, updated provisions on pesticides management
Policy Delivery Process:	Renamed "Social and Environmental Management System Requirements"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Screening and Categorization</li> </ul>	Alignment of programme risk screening with Quality Assurance Framework and revised ERM Policy, including addition of Substantial Risk category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessment and Management</li> </ul>	Reframed assessment criteria to apply to all assessments, expanded range of potential risks, added provisions re gender-based violence, persons with disabilities, risk of reprisals, and contractors and primary suppliers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stakeholder Engagement and Response Mechanisms</li> </ul>	Added provision on risk of reprisals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to Information</li> </ul>	Added provision on making public record of consultations available
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitoring, Reporting and Compliance</li> </ul>	Added provisions on third party monitoring and on corrective actions

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## Acronyms

CPD	Country Programme Document
DIM	Direct Implementation Modality
ESIA	Environmental and Social Impact Assessment
ESMF	Environmental and Social Management Framework
ESMP	Environmental and Social Management Plan
FPIC	Free Prior and Informed Consent
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GMO	Genetically Modified Organism
GRM	Grievance Redress Mechanism
HRBA	Human Rights-based Approach to Development Programming
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPP	Indigenous Peoples Plan
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
IVM	Integrated Vector Management
LAP	Livelihood Action Plan
LMO	Living Modified Organism
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NIM	National Implementation Modality
OAI	Office of Audit and Investigations
POPP	Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures
RAP	Resettlement Action Plan
SECU	Social and Environmental Compliance Unit
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SES	Social and Environmental Standards
SESA	Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment
SESP	Social and Environmental Screening Procedure
SRM	Stakeholder Response Mechanism
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNSDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
WHO	World Health Organization

## Policy Objectives and Scope of Application

1. UNDP's Strategic Plan<sup>1</sup> and policy framework articulate the organization's strategic commitment to promoting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>2</sup> The SES underpin this commitment by ensuring social and environmental sustainability is mainstreamed across all programming. The SES are UNDP policy and require that all UNDP programming maximizes social and environmental<sup>3</sup> opportunities and benefits as well as ensures that adverse social and environmental risks and impacts are avoided, minimized, mitigated and managed. The SES do not define the substantive development outcomes and results orientation of UNDP's programming, as this is elaborated in UNDP's Strategic Plan and programming instruments.
2. Through application of the SES, UNDP enhances the consistency, transparency and accountability of its decision-making and actions, improves performance, and strengthens achievement of sustainable development outcomes. The SES assist UNDP staff, implementing partners and responsible parties to manage social and environmental risks and impacts of UNDP programmes and projects.<sup>4</sup>
3. The SES objectives are to: (i) strengthen the quality of programming by ensuring a principled approach; (ii) maximize social and environmental opportunities and benefits; (iii) avoid adverse impacts to people and the environment; (iv) minimize, mitigate, and manage adverse impacts where avoidance is not possible; (v) strengthen UNDP and partner capacities for managing social and environmental risks; and (vi) ensure full and effective stakeholder engagement, including through a mechanism to respond to complaints from project-affected people.

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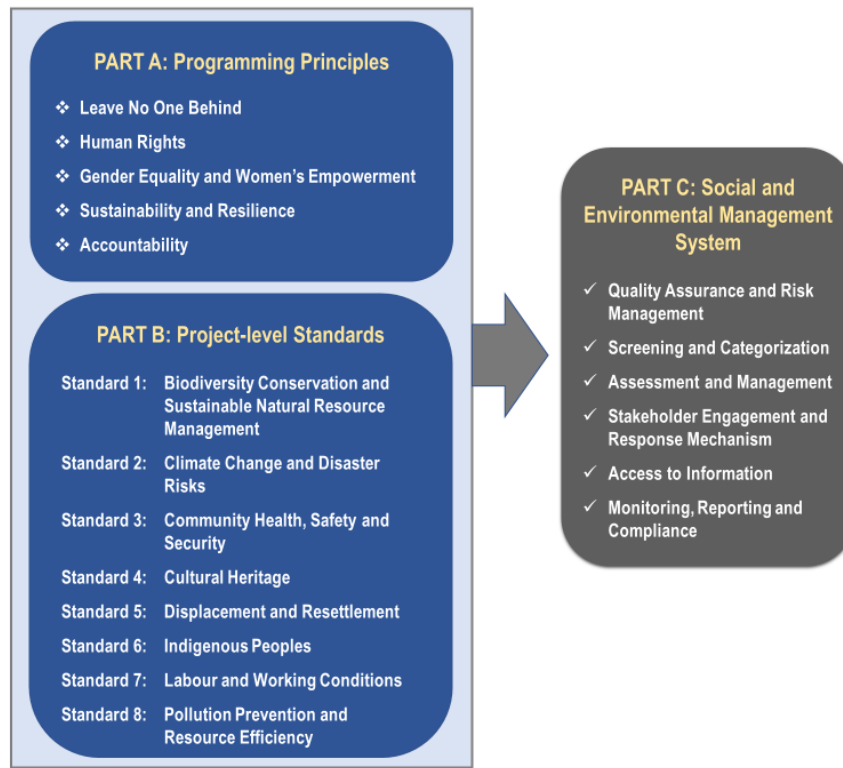
<sup>1</sup> UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, available at <http://strategicplan.undp.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> See [Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), UN Doc. A/RES/70/1.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'social and environmental' should be understood to include the breadth of issues in the Programming Principles and Project-level Standards.

<sup>4</sup> UNDP "programming" comprises the planning, implementation, reporting and evaluation of development results achieved with partners through UNDP support. A UNDP "programme" is a plan for effectively contributing to outcome-level development results through UNDP's "project modalities:" development projects, the engagement facility and development services.

Figure 1: Key Elements of UNDP’s Social and Environmental Standards (SES)



4. UNDP ensures adherence to the SES for programming activities implemented using funds channeled through UNDP’s accounts,<sup>5</sup> regardless of implementation modality. In cases where implementation of the SES is found not to be adequate, UNDP will undertake appropriate measures to address shortcomings.
5. UNDP programmes and projects may involve partners that contribute in-kind resources or parallel funding and apply their own policies and procedures to achieve common objectives. Therefore, while UNDP does not ensure compliance with the SES beyond those activities funded through UNDP’s accounts, the entire programme or project is reviewed for consistency with the requirements of the SES.
6. When the implementing partner<sup>6</sup> is a government institution (National Implementation Modality or “NIM”), UN entity, inter-governmental organization, or nongovernmental organization (NGO), it is

<sup>5</sup> Excluding pass-through funds where UNDP serves only as the Administrative Agent.

<sup>6</sup> The “implementing partner” is the entity responsible and accountable for the overall management of a UNDP-supported project. It is the entity to which the Administrator has entrusted the implementation of UNDP assistance specified in a signed project document along with the assumption of full responsibility and accountability to UNDP for the effective use of UNDP resources and the delivery of expected outputs. The Implementing Partner enters into an agreement with UNDP to manage the project and achieve the results defined in the signed project documents. The accountability of an Implementing Partner is: to report, fairly and accurately, on project progress against agreed work

responsible and accountable to UNDP for overall management of the project. UNDP remains ultimately accountable to its Executive Board and respective donor(s) for the sound use of financial resources channeled through UNDP accounts and must ensure the quality of its support. Implementation of the SES is therefore integral to UNDP's quality assurance responsibilities.

7. UNDP supports sustainable practices in contracting and procuring goods and services. Procurement of certain goods and services may at times present social and environmental risks. UNDP's Sustainable Procurement Policy<sup>7</sup> seeks to identify such risks and to maximize environmental, social and economic considerations in the procurement process whenever possible. UNDP promotes sourcing from responsible suppliers and requires contractors to comply with, among other policies, the SES.<sup>8</sup>
8. UNDP is responsible for informing all implementing partners, responsible parties<sup>9</sup> and relevant contract holders of their obligations to address the SES in their respective activities.

## PART A: Programming Principles

9. UNDP applies the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) guiding principles for UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (Cooperation Frameworks).<sup>10</sup> These principles form the normative foundation for the Cooperation Framework and integrated programming in all country contexts, with **“leave no one behind”** as the overarching and unifying principle. Leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first is at the core of programming and advocacy efforts across all UN agendas. This principle is further elaborated through the guiding principles of human rights; gender equality and women's empowerment; sustainability and resilience; and accountability. The SES reinforce a “principled”<sup>11</sup> approach to all UNDP programming.

### Leave No One Behind

10. Leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first is the central promise of the 2030 Agenda. As an overarching programming principle, leaving no one behind requires UNDP to prioritize its programmatic interventions to address the situation of those most marginalized, discriminated and excluded, and to empower them as active agents of the development process. All persons living in extreme poverty, in any form, are left behind, together with those enduring disadvantage(s) that

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