

Inputs to the 2024 High-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF)

UPU Contributions

1. Impacts of multiple crises on the implementation of SDGs 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body.

The Universal Postal Union (UPU) is the primary global forum for cooperation between postal sector players. Its 192 member-countries manage postal networks that employ five million people, who deliver three hundred billion postal items each year even in the remotest locations, reaching 98% of the world population. It operates a physical network of more than 670.000 post offices and vehicles, as well as an expanding digital, financial and social services infrastructure.

These assets directly support multiple SDGs, leveraging the visibility and reach of postal networks, and public trust in postal workers. Many postal operators work with governments to implement programs to reduce poverty (SDG 1) through social payments, end hunger (SDG 2) through direct delivery of food aid, mainstream climate action (SDG13) through the roll-out of electric delivery vehicles, and promote peaceful societies (SDG 16) through anti-trafficking campaigns. In addition, the International Bureau of the UPU is working to develop multi-stakeholder partnerships (SDG 17) to encourage more innovative use of the postal network, including a stronger integration between postal ministries and agencies responsible for social, environmental and economic development.

Based on a mapping exercise conducted against UPU's activities and its contributions towards the SDGs, it is observed that the UPU contributes, with varying degrees of relevance, to 15 out of 17 Goals. However, 91% of UPU activities align closely towards achieving SDG 17, followed by SDG 9, SDG 10, SDG 1, and SDG 8.

The role of the postal sector as partners to governments becomes even more important during social or environmental crises, yet these crises themselves pose a risk to the functioning of critical infrastructures. The latest State of the Postal Sector Report 2023 shows that **without postal services, a country's GDP would fall by nearly 7 percent**, highlighting postal services' essential role in sustainable national economic performance. This underlines the need for: analyses that make the SDG value of existing infrastructures more visible, for innovation to grow this value, and for strategic investment to improve their resilience to disruption.

We would like to draw attention to two global crises that threaten the ability of the postal network to support the SDGs, at the precise time when this network is in demand to provide essential services: the a/**COVID-19 pandemic**, and b/**climate change**.

a/During the **COVID-19 pandemic**, the global postal network became an essential service provider as people were forced to stay home to prevent the spread of the virus. Postal operators in many countries delivered increased volumes of mail items, assumed additional responsibilities and introduced new services, including the doorstep delivery of remittances and pension payments, food parcels, vaccines, and prescription medicine, along with wellness checks for the elderly. Simultaneously, bottlenecks in global and regional supply chains impacted delivery times, while postal operators had to implement new processes to ensure worker and customer safety. Many lessons have been learned, but there is still a need for strategic investment in this network to maximize its resilience to supply-chain shocks and to grow its value during future health crises. Therefore, COVID-19 severely impacted the achievement of SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 10, SDG 16 and SDG 17 in the postal sector.

b/**Climate change** is already impacting postal operators and the communities they serve. More extreme heatwaves and droughts, increased frequency of storms, and rising sea-levels, all directly threaten the integrity of postal infrastructure and the safety of postal workers. As with the COVID-19 pandemic,

demands on the postal network can increase during and immediately after an extreme weather event. In addition to enabling basic communication, postal operators often provide an access point for essential government services, including emergency social payments, food aid and public safety information. There is therefore still a need for strategic investment in the postal network to maximize its resilience to climate shocks and to grow its value during future climate-triggered crises. Therefore, climate change severely impacted the achievement of SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 13, SDG 16 and SDG 17 in the postal sector.

2. Three key areas where sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions for achieving the SDGs are being effectively delivered, especially related to the cluster of SDGs under review in 2024, considering the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the Goals and targets.

a/Climate solutions

A key opportunity from the perspective of the UPU, is leveraging the global postal network for climate actions at global, regional and national levels.

This global network is trusted to provide essential services to 98% of the world population, including those living in even the most remote communities. It operates a global network of over 670,000 post offices, 5 million staff and hundred of thousands of vehicles and physical infrastructure covering 192 countries.

Examples in this nature demonstrating how postal networks have been used as a climate action partner to deliver sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions are the following:

- Opportunities for low-emission investment (SDG 13)
- A test-bed for new climate technologies and solutions (SDG 13)
- Support for the roll-out of national climate initiatives (SDG 13)
- Possibilities for sharing electric vehicle charging infrastructure (SDG 13)
- Locations for generation of electricity from renewable sources (SDG 13)
- An early warning system for isolated or vulnerable people; (SDG 13)
- Disaster recovery assistance and services for displaced people; (SDG 1 and SDG 13)
- Environmental data collection (SDG 13)
- Far-reaching climate education and awareness campaigns SDG 13
- Facilitation of the circular economy through reverse logistics, recycling and waste collection (SDG 13)
- Delivery of sustainable e-commerce (SDG 13)
- Joint research initiatives (SDG 17)

These sustainable solutions are aligned with SDGs 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17 and address interlinkages across the Goals and targets.

b/ Partnerships and communication

The UPU's mission to facilitate global communication through a universally accessible and efficient postal network inherently supports SDG 17's focus on strengthening partnerships for sustainable development. By ensuring the free flow of postal items across interconnected networks, the UPU fosters international collaboration, a cornerstone of SDG 17. Furthermore, through its commitment to a single postal territory, stakeholder cooperation and technical assistance, the UPU exemplifies the partnership ethos espoused by SDG 17.

The UPU also plays a pivotal role in facilitating North-South and South-South cooperation, particularly by facilitating trade and commerce through a robust and resilient interconnected global network, as represented by the idea of single postal territory.

In a bid to extend our influence and maximize the efficacy of our resources, the UPU is committed to engaging in multi-stakeholder partnerships that are strategically aimed at advancing the SDGs. This collaborative approach not only amplifies our impact but also ensures that our contributions are sustainable and aligned with global development aspirations.

c/Financial solutions and digital transformation

Postal Financial Inclusion is one of the key impact areas of postal services. Globally, post offices are the trusted institutions for underserved community customers. Post offices deliver unique and compelling capabilities to serve postal customers, especially in remote, rural and hard-to-reach communities where post offices do exist. The postal sector contributes to the achievement of SDGs under review in 2024 (SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 17) but also SDG 5, SDG 8, SDG 9, SDG 10, through the promotion of financial inclusion.

Examples demonstrating how postal networks have used financial solutions are :

- To advance community financial education programmes in alignment with National Financial Inclusion Goals to support digital access, financial literacy, capacity building and equity for the postal underserved customers across the globe;
- To provide digital choices for the underserved postal customers and population to access payments, savings, microfinance and insurance products and solutions;
- To facilitate partnerships between various stakeholders delivered through the postal networks together with the private sector, governments and other ecosystem actors to enable inclusive digital financial services and solutions like government payments to citizens, bill payments, ecommerce solutions, microfinance and inclusive insurance;

These capacities are directly linked to the SDGs under review in 2024, SDG 1, SDG 2, but also SDG 5, SDG 8, SDG 9, SDG 10.

Another area where a sustainable, resilient and innovative solution for achieving the SDGs is being effectively delivered is digital transformation. The UPU launched a global initiative called Connect.post to meaningfully connect communities to the internet by 2030 through the postal network to advance their socio-economic development. Indeed, according to UPU estimates, there are over 670,000 post offices worldwide and more than 100,000 remain unconnected. Connect.post is also an open platform which actively promotes the development of partnerships to maximize impact by leveraging the postal network.

This initiative is highly focusing on SDG 9 (e.g. access to the internet), but also all the other SDG since we cannot meet the SDGs without ending the digital divide.

3. Three examples of specific actions, policies and measures that are most urgently needed to effectively deliver sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions to eradicate poverty and reinforce the 2030 Agenda, building on interlinkages and transformative pathways for achieving the SDGs.

According to the UPU, the three actions, policies and measures that are most urgently needed to effectively deliver sustainable resilient and innovative solutions to eradicate poverty are as follows :

1/One of the important objectives in enabling the effective role of Postal Networks globally is **to expand and advance the important dialogue between the postal networks and the regulators and policymakers** on the positive impact of enhanced postal Digital Financial Services (DFS) regulations in supporting and advancing the national Financial Inclusion priorities, thus great impacting SDG 1 (e.g. end poverty in all its forms everywhere). The contribution of enhanced enabling postal DFS regulations empowers the postal network to contribute to the digital inclusion of underserved postal customers and paves the way for the delivery of new and relevant digital products and solutions. The enabling postal regulatory provisions supports the postal network in adopting the most relevant DFS engagement model to meet the needs of the various postal customer segments, namely MSMEs, women, youth, small-holder farmers and other underserved postal customer segments.

2/There is an urgent **need for joined-up policy making in order to truly facilitate cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder collaborations, e.g. by including the postal sector in national development plans.** In the postal context, this entails greater recognition by policymakers of the value of the postal network beyond the delivery of mail and parcels; it can function as sustainable infrastructure that can deliver a range of digital, social and environmental services. To achieve this, there is an urgent need for greater financial investment and policy space that focuses on enabling the postal network to build resilience to disruption, to innovate, and to incubate new business models that deliver greater value for the environment and the public.

3/ With over 670,000 permanent post offices, the UPU enables **inclusion and access for all to postal services.** In order to close the physical-digital divide, the UPU has launched its connect.post initiative to enable connected post offices, particularly in remote areas where post offices are often the only public service access point. Finally, the UPU contributes substantially towards **building the resilience** of the poor and those in vulnerable situations, and reducing their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters.

4. Follow-up actions and measures being undertaken by your intergovernmental body to support implementation of the Political Declaration of the SDG Summit.

The actions and measures being undertaken by the UPU to support implementation of the Political Declaration of the SDG Summit are as followed:

1/The **UPU Congress Decision on climate action** (2023) is in line with the need of supporting Political Declaration of the SDG Summit in September 2023, on all dimensions of sustainability. The UPU's fourth Extraordinary Congress has agreed on an historic "Green Package" including voluntary climate action targets for the sector, setting forth a voluntary tiered approach to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the postal sector, recommended based on posts' capacity to measure emissions and to take action. First tier countries would strive to reduce emissions 30% by 2030, with all three tiers working towards a collective 85% reduction by 2050. In addition to the reduction targets, the package sets forth

a framework for enabling greater climate action within the sector, focusing on mitigation, adaptation, and climate finance, and supported by a dedicated Climate Facility.

2/The UPU is working tirelessly on **leveraging the postal network to bridge the digital divide** and spread the benefits of digitalization. The UPU Connect.post project to connect communities to the internet by 2030 through the postal network is one example. Also, the UPU is contributing to the development of the Global Digital Compact.

3/In addition, the **future 2026-2029 strategy of the UPU** is proposed to contain concrete indicators aimed to support member countries in integrating the postal network into their national policy frameworks towards achieving the SDGs (supporting implementation of para 37s of the Declaration).

5. Recommendations and key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2024 HLPF.

Recommendations and key messages from the UPU for inclusion to the Ministerial Declaration of the 2024 HLPF are the following:

a/ **Leverage existing infrastructures to support the SDGs** : Many existing infrastructures, including the postal network, already support the implementation of the SDGs, or could be repurposed to do so. These infrastructures become even more valuable during social or environmental crises, yet these crises themselves pose a risk to the functioning of critical infrastructures. This underlines the need for analyses that make the value of existing infrastructures more visible to SDG actors at all levels, innovation to grow their value, and for strategic investment to improve their resilience to disruption.

b/ **Digital transformation and enhanced global connectivity** : At the UPU Strategy Summit 2023 attended by over 30 Ministers in charge of the postal sector, as well as more than 120 CEOs, Vice-Ministers and heads of regulators, there emerged a clear agreement on the immense value of digital transformation and enhanced global connectivity, harmonized standards, as well as big picture thinking to create a more sustainable postal sector. Furthermore, postal sector leaders emphasized the sector's commitment to sustainable development and its role in addressing issues like gender equality and climate change. They underscored the urgent need for action to combat climate change and promote sustainability, and expressed their commitment towards putting sustainability in all its dimensions as a top priority for the sector.