

**U4 Mid-Term Review**

Final Report

6 December 2024

## Executive Summary

This Mid-Term Review (MTR) was undertaken to assess whether the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre is on track to achieve the objectives in its 2022-2026 Strategy. It explores a set of questions around U4's relevance to the priorities of its funding partners and the wider anti-corruption sector, its effectiveness in delivering quality research and knowledge services, and the efficiency of its governance, management and funding arrangements. As well as reviewing U4 documents and management data, the MTR collected feedback from funding partners and a wide range of external stakeholders through a survey, interviews and focus groups.

The MTR finds that U4 has succeeded in remaining relevant to its partners and the anti-corruption sector. Its activities include applied research, advisory services, training and convening international actors on anti-corruption. Its annual work-planning process aligns available resources with partner priorities and emerging anti-corruption themes. U4 generally succeeds in balancing the competing demands of producing original research as a global public good and providing tailored support to its partners. It has done well over the strategy period in responding to emerging issues, such as anti-corruption in reconstruction planning in Ukraine. The breadth of its work, covering 17 thematic areas, helps make it a comprehensive resource for the sector, but at the expense of variability in depth of coverage and challenges with delivering on some of its priorities. The MTR therefore recommends moving to a two-year planning cycle with a smaller number of core priorities for in-depth research, and a broader circle of topics where U4 limits its activities to training and synthesis of existing knowledge.

The MTR has found it difficult to identify robust evidence of U4's effectiveness in achieving its strategic objectives. These objectives are high level and depend upon many actions beyond U4's control, making it difficult to identify U4's specific contribution. Furthermore, U4's planning and monitoring systems are activity-based, rather than outcome-focused. U4 does collect 'impact stories', where stakeholders share positive outcomes that have emerged from U4's activities. These provide some basis for confidence that, in the right circumstances, U4's work can lead to the kinds of outcomes set out in its strategy. However, U4 is not able to track such outcomes systematically, so the evidence remains anecdotal. Stakeholders noted U4's contribution to the mainstreaming of gender under the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) as a prominent example of its global influence. There is also some evidence of U4 influencing anti-corruption laws, policies and priorities in partner countries. Feedback from users of U4 products and services shows that a high value is placed both on its original research and its practical support, such as the Helpdesk and training. There was mixed feedback on the effectiveness of in-country engagements, which often depend on complementary efforts from funding partners or national institutions.

U4 is a lean organisation with the structures, systems and skills it needs to operate efficiently. It has consistently delivered a complex workplan that balances original research with practitioner-oriented services. However, as U4 has grown in budget, staffing and thematic scope, its project management model (built on activity-based annual workplans) has come under strain. There has been underspend in some areas, as the team has been forced to prioritise its work. U4's focus on

efficient delivery of activities has arguably come at the expense of finding synergies across the workplan towards the goals and outcomes in its Strategy. The MTR therefore recommends that U4 explore the progressive introduction of outcome-based based planning into its business model. U4's funders are clearly committed to their partnership with U4 and consider the case for investing in U4 to be strong. However, shifts in the domestic funding landscape for many partners mean that long-term funding cannot be taken for granted, and U4 may need to increase its outreach and communications.

### *Recommendations*

The MTR makes a mixture of longer- and shorter-term recommendations for U4, and some recommendations for its funding partners.

Core recommendations for U4	Quick-win recommendations for U4
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Undertake a strategic review of priority themes and focus original research on fewer themes</li> <li>2. Move the workplan process to a two-year cycle</li> <li>3. Increase U4's engagement in international fora</li> <li>4. More consistently track results against Strategy goals, and gradually move towards outcome-focused planning and monitoring</li> <li>5. Review the roles and responsibilities of the management team</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Engage partners in a structured manner during workplan development</li> <li>7. Provide easy-to-share resources to U4 focal points</li> <li>8. Systematically gather user feedback</li> <li>9. Foster relationships with a broader range of departments and agencies in U4 partner countries</li> <li>10. Map other organisations' work on anti-corruption</li> <li>11. Instate an annual individual check-in call with U4 partners</li> <li>12. Continue the provision of content in diverse languages</li> <li>13. Various U4 product-specific recommendations</li> <li>14. Consider expanding the use of fixed-term staff contracts</li> </ol>
Recommendations for U4 funding partners	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15. U4 focal points should nominate thematic specialists to engage with U4, where possible.</li> <li>16. U4 focal points should actively participate in U4 Strategy and workplan development, and help to identify strategic outcomes for U4 to pursue.</li> <li>17. U4 focal points should actively share U4 materials with in-country staff, ministry staff and other stakeholders in home countries.</li> <li>18. U4 focal points should more actively support U4 mechanisms for collecting user feedback, including by following up with Helpdesk users to identify impact stories.</li> <li>19. U4 focal points should discuss broadening the scope of the lead partner role.</li> <li>20. U4 focal points should facilitate U4 engagement with seniors in their department, as well as with other departments who have an anti-corruption interest and mandate</li> </ol>	

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## List of acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CAPC	Corruption Analysis and Prevention Center
CMI	Chr. Michelsen Institute
CoSP	Conference of the States Parties
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus group discussion
HQ	Headquarter
IACC	International Anti-Corruption Conference
ICE	In-country engagement
IFF	Illicit financial flow
International IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MISRA	Moldova Institutional and Structural Reforms Activity
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QR code	Quick response code
SCM	Steering Committee Meeting
SGD	Sustainable Development Goal
UNCAC	United Nations Convention against Corruption
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization

## 1. Introduction

The U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre is a multi-partner knowledge centre dedicated to understanding the causes and pathways of corruption around the world and its impact on global development. Since its founding in 2002, it has engaged in rigorous studies and evidence collection, and helped its partners translate this knowledge into more effective anti-corruption interventions. Its activities include research, advisory services, training, and convening international actors.

U4 has commissioned this Mid-Term Review (MTR) in order to assess whether it is on track to achieve the objectives in its 2022–2026 Strategy, and whether any course correction is required. The Strategy sets out ambitious goals for U4 in the following areas:

1. Greater impact on the ground
2. A coherent, global approach to anti-corruption
3. Addressing the complexities of corruption
4. Pushing anti-corruption up the agenda.

It also outlines a set of objectives for U4's organisational development, including to: (1) be a great place to work, (2) keep learning, (3) be a dynamic communicator also seeking audience outside the anti-corruption community, (4) continue to integrate gender and inclusion perspectives into work, and (5) be at the forefront of thinking and practice around how anti-corruption work should be conducted, ensuring that the highest ethical standards are set and maintained. These organisational objectives are referred to as the fifth goal of the U4 strategy in U4's theory of change and associated documents.

The MTR report is structured in three sections related to the OECD-DAC criteria of *relevance*, *effectiveness* and *efficiency*. This introductory section sets out the organisational context and the methodology for the MTR. **Section 2** explores the relevance of U4's strategy in an evolving global context, its alignment to stakeholders' needs and priorities, and whether it offers the right combination of services. **Section 3** explores its effectiveness in delivering its goals, and presents feedback from partners on the extent that it adds value to their anti-corruption efforts. **Section 4** on efficiency assesses U4's governance and management system, its resourcing, and its organisational relation with its funders. The final section presents conclusions and recommendations based on the report's findings.

### 1.1 The institutional context

The U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre was established in 2002, following a 1999 initiative by the ministers of international development from Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom to address what was seen as an information gap for development practitioners in the new and increasingly important area of anti-corruption.

As a permanent centre housed in the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI), U4 has become a respected provider and convenor of knowledge and learning. U4's budget has grown steadily over the strategy period. In 2024, annual income, provided by eight bilateral donor agencies, including

three of the four founding partners, is projected to exceed NOK 38 million (US\$3.5 million) and is the largest knowledge centre within CMI (see **Table 3**).

As of July 2024, U4 employed 17 staff at different percentages (managerial and advisory) and draws on the services of a network of external experts. In addition to core staffing costs and expert consultant fees, U4's annual budget covers the costs of strategic initiatives (e.g., the Ukraine workstream), operating the Helpdesk (in close cooperation with Transparency International), undertaking thematic research, creating, updating and running courses, convening events, including in-country engagement and conducting partner headquarter (HQ) visits and forums. In 2024, U4 has 17 prioritised thematic areas.

- |  |   |                                 |
|--|---|---------------------------------|
| 1. Civil society and people's engagement       | 5. Education                            | 12. Justice sector              |
| 2. Climate change/natural resources and energy | 6. Evaluation and measurement           | 13. Migration                   |
| 3. Corruption risk management and integrity    | 7. Fragile and conflict-affected states | 14. Money politics              |
| 4. Development cooperation                     | 8. Gender and corruption                | 15. Politics of anti-corruption |
|  | 9. Health                               | 16. Private sector              |
|  | 10. Human rights                        | 17. Anti-corruption in Ukraine  |
|  | 11. Illicit financial flows             |                                 |

Some of these services are provided exclusively for U4 partners (e.g., in-country engagement (ICE), HQ visits and partner forums), while others are also made available to the public, designed to produce knowledge as a public good, and directed towards the wider anti-corruption community. Public resources include open online courses, U4 briefs, issues, reports and practice insights. These are all made available on U4's website, representing a large repository of knowledge.

U4 has a dual governance structure. External oversight and strategic direction are provided by a Steering Committee, composed of representatives from each of the partner agencies, led by a nominated donor partner (lead donor) on a rotating basis, and including a CMI representative (although this is not a formal requirement). U4 is nested within a Norwegian applied research institute,<sup>1</sup> CMI, and the parent institution provides central management and administrative support, particularly in terms of financial management oversight, information technology, communications and human resource management, as well as some aspects of risk management. CMI management is also responsible for final decisions regarding U4's management structure, including recruitment of the U4 Director.

## 1.2 Methodology

The methodology is organised into four interlinked elements: contextual analysis, stakeholder feedback, results assessment, and organisational assessment, together with a validation process

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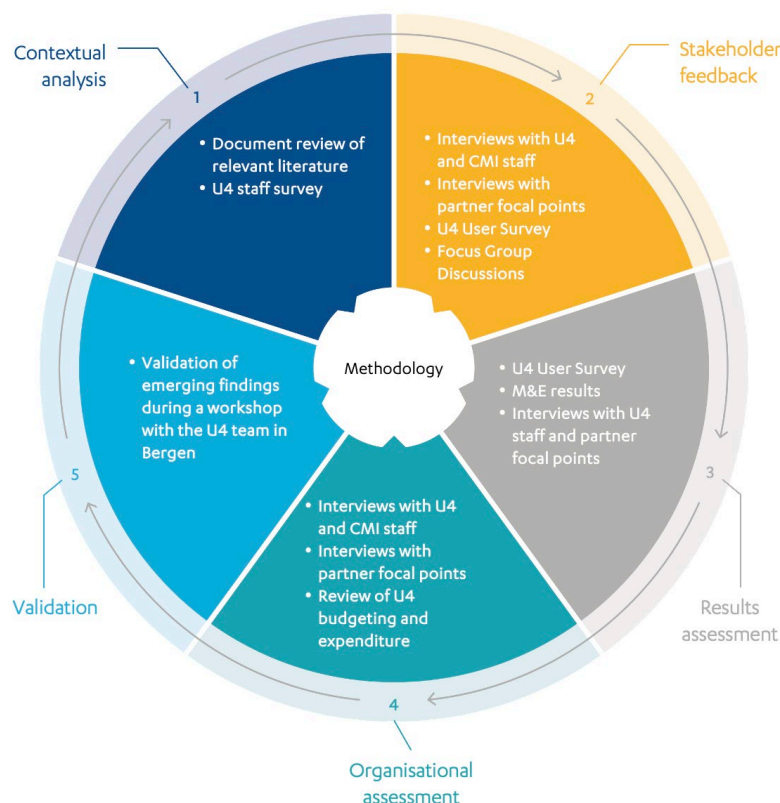
<sup>1</sup> CMI is the legal entity of which U4 is situated under. The U4 partnership itself does not have a legal identity.

undertaken with the U4 team in Bergen (summarised in **Figure 1**). The methodology is described in full in **Annex 1**.

The MTR team has engaged 36 stakeholders through semi-structured interviews with U4 and CMI staff, and a range of external partners. A survey was also conducted with U4 staff, with 9 responses, and an online user survey was conducted to collect feedback from a wider circle of stakeholders and partners, with 322 responses, including 54 U4 partner respondents. The results of the user survey are presented in **Annex 5**.

Following receipt of the completed survey data, the MTR team hosted a series of virtual focus group discussions with external stakeholders to explore the initial performance findings, as well as emerging trends in the survey responses. The focus groups were divided into four stakeholder groups, with a total of 14 participants (see **Annex 11**).

*Figure 1: Summary of the MTR methodology*



### 1.3 Limitations

The main limitation we encountered in conducting the MTR was the difficulty of compiling full data on U4's delivery of outcomes under its Strategy. While U4 tracks activities set out in its annual workplan and collects examples of outcome-level results when it becomes aware of them, it does not systematically track progress on delivering the outcomes in its Strategy or results framework, due to the difficulty and costs involved. The MTR has attempted to fill the gap in results data with additional evidence generation, by collecting feedback from a wide range of

external partners and stakeholders through key stakeholder interviews, focus group discussions and the survey. This has enabled a degree of triangulation and provides useful data for U4 management and partners, for learning and accountability purposes. However, it does not allow the MTR to generate robust findings on U4's progress towards the outcomes listed in its Strategy.

## 2. Relevance

### 2.1 Thematic area alignment with partner countries

U4's 2022–26 Strategy highlights the multifaceted nature of corruption, which varies in its forms across sectors, government agencies, geographies and stakeholders. New trends, challenges and tools emerge continually, which require U4 to be agile and adaptive in its choice of topics and thematic focus areas. U4's 2024 workplan outlines important dynamics that affect the evolving nature of corruption and anti-corruption landscape, such as the increased focus on security in the context of war in Ukraine, global democratic backsliding trends, increasing risks related to climate change and a background of economic uncertainty.

#### *Process to determine thematic areas*

A formal process is established to determine U4's priorities. The process begins with U4 advisers preparing an initial proposed plan for the subsequent year in the summer, an internal meeting to discuss the different focus areas and advisers' plans in early autumn, and a consolidated plan being shared with U4 partners three weeks before the November Steering Committee Meeting (SCM). At the SCM, the workplan is discussed and feedback from the SCM is incorporated by January. The workplan is formally submitted for reporting purposes in March. See **Annex 10** for a more detailed overview of the process. Following the SCM meeting, the U4 team can still make adjustments to the workplan based on partners' feedback until mid-February.

Some U4 partners, however, expressed a willingness to be more engaged at earlier stages of workplan development. For example, it was suggested that earlier sharing of drafts (with the possibility for dialogue with advisers before the SCM) or more structured engagement with partners during workplan development might allow for more meaningful input from partners. Partners also noted that the draft workplan for the SCM meeting is sometimes submitted late, which further reduces the level of input that U4 partners can provide. U4 focal points vary in their roles, with some specialised in anti-corruption and others covering multiple subject matter areas. This means that some are able to engage more than others. Those with less time to devote to the U4 relationship noted that they rely on other partners to provide closer oversight.

Furthermore, the manner in which advisers prepare their plans slightly differs. Advisers take into account partner priorities (based on knowledge gained through research as well as direct engagement with partners in the course of research, ICE's or HQ visit planning, as well as other activities and informal consultations) and a horizon scan of the emerging themes in anti-corruption (through research and conference attendance). While this allows U4 advisers to select topics and outputs that best respond to partner priorities, it means that the partners that work most closely with particular advisers are likely to have more opportunities to ensure their priorities and interests are reflected in the workplans.

### *Alignment of thematic areas with U4 partner priorities*

U4 partners share the view that U4's priorities are generally well aligned with their organisations' priorities. However, this is partly due to U4 having 17 priority thematic areas, which cover a broad range of issues. This means that topics that may be priorities for only a few donors can still be included in U4's list of thematic areas.

One partner suggested that thematic areas in which U4 partners provide significant amounts of aid (education and healthcare in particular) should remain on U4's agenda. The reinvigoration of the education sector theme in the 2024 workplan was welcomed by multiple partner focal points. To note, however, education ranked amongst the lowers of U4's 17 themes among U4 partner agency and government respondents. Survey responses from U4 partners indicate that corruption risk management and integrity are highly prioritised (57.4%), followed by politics of anti-corruption (35.3%) and development cooperation (33.3%). In interviews, U4 partners further welcomed the active role that U4 is playing in the global debates on corruption and health, such as engaging with the Lancet commission and the World Health Organization (WHO). This is particularly important in the context of other stakeholders' interest in and funding of work on corruption in healthcare reducing. See **Annex 5** for full details of survey respondents' prioritisation of topics.

Focus group discussion (FGD) participants shared that one of the core strengths of U4 was the breadth of thematic areas that it covers, including through its Helpdesk answer repository – referred to as “an encyclopaedia” by one FGD participant. Multiple FGD participants, particularly global anti-corruption experts, shared that U4's resources were their first point of call for when they started working on a slightly new angle or topic on corruption. U4's leadership on sexual corruption, gender and justice and law enforcement thematic areas was noted.

The MTR suggests, while maintaining U4's engagement across a breadth of topics, U4 and its partners should also identify a smaller number of thematic areas for deeper engagement over multiple years. This prioritisation exercise could include clustering of some topics or alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In one FGD, participants highlighted that clustering topics could be useful to bring out the links between the different themes – such as gender and human rights.

### *Responsiveness to emerging themes*

U4 has been responsive to global events and major developments at both national and international levels. In the election super year of 2024, U4 reinstated its 'money in politics' theme. U4's work on corruption in Ukraine, including during reconstruction, reflects global donor priorities in safeguarding international funding for Ukraine and also ensuring that the anti-corruption gains made in Ukraine prior to the 2022 full-scale invasion are able to continue. U4's work on Ukraine was also a commonly cited example of the organisation's responsiveness to emerging issues. This builds on earlier demonstrations of responsiveness to large challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. U4's logframe notes that in the first year of the COVID-19 crisis, U4 produced 15 outputs related to the pandemic, which helped to shape donor agendas, as indicated in **section 3.2**.

New thematic areas are continually emerging within the anti-corruption community. U4's engagement with new topics includes conference participation and hosting webinars on salient issues. For example, U4 hosted an online and in-person [seminar on Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) in anti-corruption](#) in June 2024. AI was mentioned by multiple interview respondents as an area that requires further focus, although it was among the lowest-ranked thematic areas within the survey.<sup>2</sup> As another example, stakeholders working on corruption have increasingly been considering the link with national security considerations, since the US government's inclusion of strategic corruption in its national [Strategy on Countering Corruption](#) in late 2021. Subsequently, increasing geo-political security risks in Europe have resulted in an increased focus on the interlinkages between security and corruption. U4 has engaged in global discussions on this topic by participating on a panel at the International Anti-Corruption Conference (IACC). Both of these events were raised by U4 partners as examples of U4 introducing new topics and considerations to the partners. FGD participants, however, noted that the topics of conflict and corruption as a national security threat were largely missing from U4's work.

Interviews with U4 advisers also raised the important role U4 plays in developing frameworks and approaches to corruption and anti-corruption that can guide practitioners and researchers in a broad range of thematic areas. Interviewees and FGD participants shared that U4's more substantial publications are referenced in academic and policy documents, and used for teaching on anti-corruption (for example, at the University of Sussex and at Dublin City University).

Anticipating donor priorities plays a significant role in the design of the workplan. U4 partners mentioned U4's work on human rights and corruption, illicit financial flows (IFFs) as well as strategic lawsuits against public participation as examples of topics that anticipated donor needs and priorities, in addition to the aforementioned events on AI and corruption. U4 partner focal points also noted that U4 has been responsive to partner requests and adaptive to changing priorities and situations,<sup>3</sup> acknowledging staff time restrictions and areas of expertise. Adaptiveness has been particularly required in the context of ICEs, where both security situations and U4 partner priority changes have required adaptations in planned workshop activities.

### *Thematic area prioritisation*

The thematic area portfolio has grown organically, partly in response to meeting different interests and priorities across many different donors, emerging trends, and U4 resources available. Findings from the 2019 MTR suggested that diversity and numbers of partners at times resulted in U4 being pulled in different directions with multiple partner interests and commitments. This to some extent holds given the diverse priorities amongst partners, which exist despite the partners having a significant core base of overlapping priorities.

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<sup>2</sup> When asked which thematic areas covered by U4 are most relevant to them, 8.4% of all user survey respondents included ICTs/Technology (AI, Blockchain, etc.), while 11.1% of U4 partner respondents included ICTs/Technology (AI, Blockchain, etc.).

<sup>3</sup> This reflects user survey results, where 24.1% of U4 partner respondents strongly agreed and a further 53.7% agreed that U4's thematic offerings are responsive to their organisational needs. 12 respondents provided comments in support of their answers, with seven noting that the thematic areas presented by U4 are relevant to their priorities and are used by the respondents. One respondent said that U4 is able to adapt quickly to new priorities. See questions 39 and 40 of **Annex 5** for additional details.

The trade-offs between breadth and depth of topics, and responsiveness to emerging concerns versus focusing on fewer priority areas, were explored in the interviews and are suggested to be explored as part of a strategic thematic retreat (see recommendations section). The key considerations explored are summarised in **Table 1** below. Notably, U4 user survey respondents<sup>4</sup> asked for a focus on practical case studies, examples of success and actionable recommendations.

*Table 1: Having a broad range of topics - pros and cons*

Benefits	Drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to respond to the diverse needs and interests of the 8 partners</li> <li>• Ability to respond to emerging challenges and issues</li> <li>• Preparedness to pre-empt donor needs</li> <li>• Avoiding the introduction of unnecessary hierarchies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dividing U4's resources more thinly, to the detriment of more concentrated work</li> <li>• More challenging to develop specific focus areas as a global leader on the topic</li> <li>• More dispersed focus areas, in light of other organisations establishing their niche in specific subject matter areas</li> </ul>

The MTR recommends that U4 continues to cover a relatively broad range of topics, within the context of shorter-term products, including topic pages, Helpdesk responses, partner fora and webinars. At the same time, U4 should dive deeper into a select number of topics, jointly selected with U4 partners (please see the recommendations section for more detail). This would allow for a longer consultation period to ensure that the topics where U4 can add most value are selected, while permitting the organisation to remain responsive to emerging priorities and issues.

## 2.2 Balancing knowledge products as a public good and delivering services for partners

U4 partners shared that both the knowledge products contributing to public goods as well as the tailored support provided to partners were valued by their organisations. The ability to share U4's public resources – including research and online training courses – with their partners in the countries where U4 donors work was highly valued.

### *Balance between research, training and convening work*

U4 partners generally agreed that U4 strikes a good balance between research, training and convening work. Partners shared that their most immediate, practical needs are mostly met by U4's Helpdesk and training offers; and the convening work aids teams in collaborating with other donors (including other U4 partners), as well as keeping abreast of new developments in the thematic areas.

Overall, 88.4% of all U4 user survey respondents agreed that U4 knowledge outputs are relevant to their work (50.6% strongly agreed and 37.8% agreed). 92.2% of U4 partner respondents were also happy with the relevance of U4 outputs to their work, with 56.6% agreeing and 35.6% strongly agreeing.

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<sup>4</sup> U4 survey respondents include those from U4 partner agencies, individuals who have engaged with U4 research, online courses and subscribe to the U4 newsletter.

*“U4 Knowledge outputs provide a very good starting point in understanding the état de lieu of most topics and countries where I work. It is my first go-to source.” [U4 user survey respondent]*

*“Helps to accumulate best practices for new thoughts.” [U4 user survey respondent]*

*“I use the critical views to question our approaches and learn from the evidence-based research about new trends and methods. I get inspiration for new topics. I find the evidence that I need to support policies and processes.” [U4 user survey, partner respondent]*

U4 advisers in particular saw original research work as essential to maintaining the credibility of U4’s work on other products. This is also one of the six points raised within U4’s 2022-26 Strategy on what makes U4 unique: “Independent thinkers driven by research excellence”. The multidisciplinary, research-based and practice-oriented nature of U4’s work, in between policy and academia, was identified by U4 staff as the organisation’s unique features and offer, as illustrated in the word cloud below, from the MTR Bergen workshop. FGD participants also highlighted the value of U4’s reputation as a trusted partner and independent party, the breadth of its work, and accessibility of its products (see **Annex 11** for more detail).

*Figure 2: U4’s unique features and offer*



U4 advisers, naturally, had differing preferences in terms of engagement in the range of U4’s products – from convening in-country workshops and reviewing Helpdesk answers. Advisers raised that while in theory there would be a preference to build on original research work to develop blogs, trainings and ICEs, this does not always happen in practice. This is partly due to legacy work (e.g., trainings that need updating), as well as time pressures on advisers.

### *Flexibility in addressing pressing issues and unexpected challenges*

U4 advisers and partners were positive about U4’s ability to be flexible in responding to pressing issues, as discussed above. U4’s funding arrangements were not cited as a barrier. Both U4’s and partners’ flexibility to arrange additional funding to delve deeper into issues that arise once the annual workplan has been confirmed has been demonstrated in the context of U4’s work on Ukraine (funded by Canada), climate change (funded by Switzerland) and health (funded by

Norway). The constraints in responding to emerging issues mostly relate to human resources and availability of time to address the topic given the other demands on advisers' time and other thematic areas covered by the adviser(s).

U4 advisers also shared U4's responsiveness to adapting its work to the context. For example, an engagement was modified in Azerbaijan following the [imprisonment of a scholar from the London School of Economics](#) who had criticised the government, in [the context of arrests](#) of other journalists and academics. Work on a planned study was discontinued and a decision was taken to engage in a webinar on corruption in the country with external resource persons to avoid putting local researchers at risk.

### 3. Effectiveness

The MTR has found it difficult to identify and collect robust evidence of U4's progress towards the strategic goals and the outcomes in its results framework. U4 collects quantitative data on its activities and outputs. It takes note of individual instances of outcome and impact-level results when it becomes aware of them, but is not able to collect them systematically in order to obtain a full picture of its results. The MTR itself generates additional data through its survey, interviews and focus groups, in the form of feedback from a range of external stakeholders on the relevance and utility of U4's work. While this is useful and important data, it does not support an assessment of U4's progress towards its strategic objectives. The challenge is objectively difficult, for a number of reasons.

First, identifying the outcomes and effectiveness of U4's convening, research and training work is challenging for a range of reasons, including the difficulties in attributing impact when a range of other initiatives and engagement is necessary to translate such products into impact. U4 is able to identify 'impact stories', where stakeholders share positive outcomes that have emerged from U4 activities. These provide some basis for confidence that, in the right circumstances, U4 services can lead to positive outcomes, as defined in U4's results framework. However, these impact stories are somewhat anecdotal in nature, and U4 is yet to identify a systematic process for tracking outcomes across its portfolio of activities. FGDs with external anti-corruption experts confirmed that, beyond conversations with policy-makers and programme staff, it is challenging to track the policy impact of research, training and convening work – particularly on longstanding issues in the anti-corruption field.

Second, CMI is the publisher of U4 publications, which means that media coverage often refers either to CMI or to individual author's names. This makes tracking media citations difficult. CMI uses global media monitoring software, Infomedia, to track media mentions (both in-text references and citations). From 1 January 2022 to 12 September 2024, Infomedia collated 419 results across 330 unique media outlets. However, U4 does not routinely use the media monitoring data in its MEL, as many media outlets referencing U4 generally have lower global relevance or quality (some sources may even be AI generated). Infomedia is currently used only to track instances where U4 resources are referenced, thereby excluding instances where

references or quotes are attributed to specific authors but “U4” is not specifically stated.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, U4 considers the most meaningful citations as mentions in policy documents, which are then translated into programmes and other action. Tracking these effectively would be challenging, according to U4, as manual searches for publication titles and authors’ names would be very time consuming.

Third, there are also difficulties in tracking the outcomes of U4’s work directly through users of U4 products. Feedback from people who use the products is not easy to collect, likely due to high demands on U4 product users, survey fatigue and staff turnover. Illustratively, U4 received feedback through an anonymous survey on 15 of 31 Helpdesk queries from partners that were answered in 2023. By late August 2024, U4 had received feedback on 8 of 23 accepted queries.

The MTR has sought to gather additional information and feedback from a diverse range of stakeholders on the effectiveness of U4’s work and progress against its Strategy, and accordingly formulate recommendations. The U4 user survey and FGDs have provided multiple examples of U4’s work influencing programming and policies. Multiple FGD participants said that U4 work is not always referenced within donor documentation. Specific examples are mentioned in the user survey responses – where U4 resources were used to develop programmes, for example on capacity development for Supreme Audit Institutions, and justice sector programmes, and to enhance risk management processes and corruption risk assessments, for example in health and education work. Respondents also cited their experiences of U4 trainings leading to reduced corrupt practices in the workplace and their personal stances in refusing inappropriate gifts. The data available, however, does not give a full picture of U4’s progress in delivering the outcomes in its Strategy.<sup>6</sup>

### 3.1 Progress against Strategy

#### *Progress against goals*

U4 staff and partners generally shared that the Strategy remained relevant to U4, and was seen by U4 staff as a declaration of intent and a reminder of what U4 seeks to do and achieve. The goals in the Strategy were helpful in aligning U4’s activities to a set of higher objectives. However, given their aspirational nature and the measurement challenges outlined above, there was limited expectation that U4 demonstrate attributable impact against the goals. Nevertheless, the information gathered by the MTR provides examples of activities and achievements against all four goals.

- **Goal 1: Supporting partners to achieve greater impact on the ground**

The 2019 MTR encouraged U4 to be more responsive to partner needs and to strengthen its engagement with the wider anti-corruption community, both researchers and practitioners, and potential partner institutions, particularly those in the Global South. U4 subsequently revised its logical framework indicators to track progress against this priority. Local partnerships were mostly built through ICEs and associated research. Since the launch of the 2022-26 Strategy, U4

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Infomedia did not capture the [2022 Washington Post](#) article.

<sup>6</sup> Most of the logframe indicators are input focused. Furthermore, they are not systematically used for work planning

has become more active in the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) Coalition, and worked with other anti-corruption focused organisations such as the Basel Institute on Governance.<sup>7</sup> Increased focus on context-specific corruption issues and operating environments was suggested by a number of FGD and user survey participants. Resource constraints, however, mean that U4 has to be selective in the country-specific engagements and research that it can carry out.

- **Goal 2: Developing a coherent, global approach to anti-corruption**

The 2022-26 Strategy outlines objectives around convening stakeholders within partner governments and more broadly in response to priority topics and events emerging at the international level. A prominent example of this includes U4's work with the UNCAC Coalition on a range of topics, including significantly contributing to [passing Resolution 10/10](#) (which includes mainstreaming gender in anti-corruption) at the 10th Conference of States Parties to UNCAC.<sup>8</sup> U4 partners welcomed such international-level engagement, and encouraged U4 to further participate and play a leadership role within global initiatives, including Financing for Development and Pact for the Future. Examples of strengthening alliances outside the anti-corruption community include U4 strategically engaging on health and corruption issues at the global level, by collaborating with the WHO and the Lancet on health systems strengthening; and collaboration with the conservation community under the natural resource management thematic area. Such collaborations and alliances both within and outside the anti-corruption community, can help develop a coherent global approach to tackling corruption.

- **Goal 3: Equipping partners to address the complexities of corruption**

The U4 Strategy highlights the complex and evolving nature of corruption. This requires both a sustained effort on core aspects of corruption, as well as flexibility and adaptability to respond to new challenges and developments. U4 needs to strike a balance between breadth and depth of work on different thematic areas, to address the complexities of corruption head-on. U4 partner interviews also highlighted the valued convening role that U4 played – both amongst the donors (within the context of the SCM, partner fora and other engagements), as well as with external stakeholders, as discussed in **section 3.4**. This can also contribute to progress on other goals. For example, one partner shared that understanding other U4 partner anti-corruption strategies and framing can be useful in shaping their own formulation of anti-corruption work in budget discussions – e.g., framing it as key to reducing tax losses or from a rights/governance perspective.

- **Goal 4: Pushing anti-corruption up the agenda in partners' home countries**

U4 staff survey responses surfaced a view that the goals set out in U4's 2022-26 Strategy are very ambitious, and often dependent on the actions of U4's partners and domestic political circumstances. This is particularly relevant in the context of pushing anti-corruption up the agenda in partners' home countries. Challenges were also identified by U4 staff in the attribution

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<sup>7</sup> Partnerships are further discussed in **section 3.4**.

<sup>8</sup> See **section 3.4** for more detail.

of U4's research, advice or convening events to larger scale policy change. Staff also noted that the goals were not fully unpacked in action plans (beyond being referenced in concept note proposals), workplans are not specifically reviewed against the strategic goals and resource allocation is not tracked against specific goals, which makes it difficult to track progress towards them. Nevertheless, examples of catalytic effect have been noted. HQ visits in particular were highlighted by U4 partner interviews as being instrumental in raising the profile of anti-corruption work within partner governments. While it may be difficult to directly attribute impact, an illustrative example of U4's resources being used to promote whole of government approaches was mentioned by one interviewee (**Box 1**).

#### Box 1: Uptake example: Mainstreaming corruption within Finland's aid to Ukraine

One interviewee shared that a U4 study arguing for mainstreaming corruption within broader interventions (e.g., health, education) was used to directly influence the Finnish government's decision to require corruption and rule of law considerations in Finnish aid provided to Ukraine.

#### *Implementation challenges encountered*

Progress towards U4's goals is dependent on a range of factors outside of U4's control – the significant impact of political, economic and social dynamics in partner countries, high partner staff turnover and, in some cases, resource constraints. ICEs are a key part of U4's practical engagement with partners to help them achieve impact on the ground. Challenges, however, have been raised about the sustainability of these engagements, particularly given Embassy staff turnover. These are discussed in **section 3.3** below.

### 3.2 U4's value add in enabling partners to achieve impact

#### *Enabling results and impact for partners*

Despite the challenges in identifying and attributing impact of U4's work discussed above, feedback received on Helpdesk responses illustrated how the Helpdesk answers have been used, and their influence on policies, laws, government and institutional priorities as well as projects and campaigns. Most respondents shared that the Helpdesk answers informed their work and increased their awareness of the issues, and most had shared the responses with others with almost 50% using the material in a workshop, conference or training course. U4 partner interviewees also noted that U4's work has caused partner agency staff to reflect on issues presented, which can positively impact their work.

In addition to specific examples of U4's work reaching decision-makers and impacting policies mentioned in the 2022 and 2023 logframe results (see **Annex 7**), interviews and the user survey (see **Annex 5**) unveiled the below examples of results and reach of U4's work.

#### Box 2: Results examples raised by U4 partners and staff in interviews

- U4's trainings are being integrated in mandatory courses for the partner's Ministry of Foreign Affairs working with development policy related matters – in HQ, embassies and multilateral organisations.

- U4's work on zero tolerance of corruption has enabled one partner to have more informed discussions internally about moving from 'zero tolerance of corruption' discussions to 'zero tolerance of not acting on corruption'.
- Health sector work in Zambia resulted in the inclusion of an anti-corruption target in the national health sector strategy, lifting corruption up on the government's agenda.
- U4's *Anti-corruption partnership pilot* in Moldova led to a local non-governmental organisation (NGO) – the Corruption Analysis and Prevention Center (CAPC) – developing a new strategy, supported by Sida, as well as the incorporation of workshop ideas in USAID's Moldova Institutional and Structural Reforms Activity (MISRA) project. The pilot also catalysed the Swiss Development Cooperation to initiate a complementary project working with small and medium enterprises in Moldova.
- Uptake of U4's recommendations on Ukraine in integrating recommended principles on incorporating anti-corruption considerations in reconstruction efforts. This included citations of U4's work in the Financial Times.

### *Feedback mechanisms*

Formal feedback mechanisms are in place to receive feedback from U4 partners and service users. U4 partners formally provide feedback within the SCM process, described above. Feedback on specific products – such as training courses and Helpdesk answers – is sought after completion of the course or delivery of the product. Challenges with immediate collection of feedback centre around the potential to measure satisfaction with the product and plans to use it, but not actual use. The bi-annual survey conducted by U4 (and conducted as part of the MTR in 2024) provides an opportunity to follow-up on the results of trainings and research conducted earlier, although the rotation of staff means that stakeholders are harder to reach.

Informal interaction was mentioned by virtually all U4 partners and advisers consulted as a significant source of feedback from partners. As discussed in **section 2.1**, however, this can mean that some partners are heard more than others. Generally, however, interviewees considered that while there might be fluctuations in which partners have more engagement with U4 advisers, this does even out over the different themes and years.

Semi-formal feedback, which involves multiple donors or combines a scheduled format but less structured (i.e., without a survey or formal agenda) was raised. One donor mentioned that after a partner forum, a discussion organically emerged with the partner participants on the centrality of the topic (disabilities) to some partner priorities. Such semi-formal engagement on topics, which gives an opportunity for all partners, could be beneficial to solicit and test out ideas for new topics.

### **3.3 Formats of U4's products**

Overall, U4 partners placed high value on the practical support that U4 offers – Helpdesk and introductory, self-paced training courses which some U4 partners have included as part of core training for staff rotating into postings – which are accessible to staff throughout the partner government agencies. Some U4 partners also singled out the value of U4's convening power – both among the anti-corruption community, and its ability to raise the profile of corruption and anti-corruption within partner governments through HQ visits. Other more in-depth products

were also appreciated and are particularly used by a smaller, more specialised group of individuals within the agencies. Some FGD participants, however, having engaged in one type of U4 product, were not aware of the other resources available to them (e.g., U4 partner local staff members that participated in U4 trainings were not aware of the Helpdesk offer).

### *Capacity building*

Self-paced trainings were most often mentioned by U4 partners as particularly appreciated, enabling partner government staff to build a basic understanding of corruption and anti-corruption issues. This support was particularly valued in the context of resource constraints. One U4 partner has made the anti-corruption basics training mandatory for its in-country staff. Participants of one FGD suggested that this could usefully be flowed down to donors' implementing partners. 96.9% of U4 user survey partner respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they use the knowledge gained from U4's online courses.

The length of the trainings – usually one hour – was considered conducive to the trainings reaching a broader audience, as time for longer engagements can be more challenging to find. In addition, the facilitated courses were considered a valuable addition to U4's offer, to allow for more in-depth exploration of key issues by more specialised staff. Interview and FGD respondents particularly appreciated the ability to share the online courses with their local partners. Further, multiple interview and FGD respondents commented on the engaging nature of U4's courses, both self-paced and facilitated. 88.5% of all user survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they have used the knowledge gained from U4's online courses.

### *Research and knowledge products*

The U4 product most widely appreciated by partners has been the Helpdesk answers, which allow partners to solicit desk research-based answers to specific questions. The speedy (usually within 10 working days, but with extensions) as well as the concise and practical nature of the responses and their direct applicability to partners' work were raised as particularly valuable. The value that partners place on the Helpdesk has been reflected in the consistent demand from partners over the years (although the level of use of the Helpdesk option varies per partner, with some partners consistently asking more questions than others), and an increase in demand for Helpdesk answers in 2023 and 2024. Accordingly, the limit of Helpdesk answers for 2024 was increased. The repository of Helpdesk answers was also seen by partners and the broader anti-corruption community FGD participants as a valuable public good. Interviews raised that the expectations of country offices for Helpdesk answers can be diverse, e.g., including original research, which is more than what can be delivered by a Helpdesk answer. One U4 partner respondent suggested that involving focal points from the outset – initial request from the partner staff – could be useful.

*Table 2: Helpdesk queries (2022-2024)*

	2022	2023	2024 (to end-August)
Total Helpdesk queries	27	36	26
Queries made by U4 partners	24	31	23
Queries made by U4 advisers	3	5	3

Multiple interviewees shared that the combination of long- and short-form work provided by U4 is valued by their organisations, as it caters to both the staff that specialise on anti-corruption (and are looking to, for example, design programmes), while the shorter publications are read by those who are more pressed for time. Original research, as discussed above, was cited as a core contributor to U4's credibility in this thematic space, and as a building block for subsequent partner support. For example, one adviser shared how a book published with support from CMI led to a range of requests from partners to build on the adviser's work in the thematic area, and helped establish U4's credibility in this space. FGD discussants also highlighted the value of original research, noting that it is not uncommon for central banks, in order to attract leading scholars as well as to maintain their reputation as thought leaders, encourage or require their staff to publish in academic journals. When asked to consider the best way for U4 to contribute to the anti-corruption field, *producing original research and ideas* ranked second highest among both general respondents and U4 partner respondents (scoring 3.43 and 3.17 out of 5 respectively), following *provide advice and expertise*.

### Convening

Convening includes the **SCMs** which help coordinate work among the U4 partners. Partners unanimously shared that hearing what other partners were working on, what their priorities and experiences are, as well as building and/or strengthening links with other donors is very valuable. Partners also stressed the value of convening U4 partners alongside conferences such as the IACC or Conference of the States Parties (CoSP) to the UNCAC. Engagement on the side-lines of international conferences could also be useful in deepening informal relationships between U4 staff and partner focal points, which could be particularly useful for newly appointed U4 focal points. Furthermore, U4 also facilitates global convening beyond the U4 partners – for example, through the UNCAC coalition working group on gender and corruption which has wide representation (more than 150 individuals signed up to the working group), and which was founded and is chaired by one of U4 staff and grew out of a cohort of U4 course participants.

**HQ visits** were generally well received and valued by partners. They were noted to help raise the profile of corruption and anti-corruption within the country at senior government levels, which can contribute to U4's progress towards achieving its fourth strategic objective, broaden the perspectives of those who are working on anti-corruption and provide an opportunity for thematic and informal engagement with U4 advisers. For example, one partner shared that the HQ visit encouraged staff to consider the bigger picture of corruption challenges, including grand corruption. U4 leadership's participation in HQ visits was seen as important.<sup>9</sup>

The standalone nature of the **partner fora** with diverse topics discussed was raised as a positive point by partners, enabling them to efficiently dedicate their time to the topics that are of highest priority. This was raised in contrast to other networks which might include presentations and

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<sup>9</sup> Two partners suggested to strategically consider the participants' roles and potentially streamline the attendee list for HQ visits, including when these are held alongside the SCM, with some presenters on specific issues potentially joining online. This is being planned for the 2024 SCM.

discussions as part of quarterly networks meetings, where some presentations might be less relevant to some partners than others.

U4's newsletters were also identified by U4 partner focal points as useful summaries of resources that can be shared with relevant teams and departments within the partner governments.

### *In-country engagements*

ICEs draw substantial partner interest, can provide opportunities for U4 to directly feed into the design of country-level interventions (as U4's *Anti-corruption partnership pilot* in Moldova did, as noted in **section 3.2**) and are also often used to produce targeted research in collaboration with local experts. U4 partners also highlighted the convening power of the workshops, for example in Honduras bringing together civil society organisations working on human rights and on corruption which had not previously been collaborating. According to one partner, the U4 workshop in Honduras "created a new dynamic" and momentum.

However, both U4 partners and advisers acknowledge that these often did not lead to immediately identifiable outcomes. Challenges include change of levels of support and interest from the sponsoring country in the topic (particularly given the substantial time investment required from the partner representatives on the ground), as well as high embassy staff turnover, changing donor country priorities and/or security situation. In 2023, U4 introduced the option of proposing two to three-year ICEs in addition to one-year engagements. This was designed to facilitate continuity, "pursue greater impact" and allow for more time to build engagement. While the change was welcomed, the effects of this change are yet to be seen.

Reflecting on the value of ICEs, U4 staff, as well as some U4 partners and multilateral agency FGD participants highlighted the value of the engagements grounding U4 staff in country-level issues and giving a deeper understanding of country-level challenges around the globe. Further, ICEs are often accompanied by country-specific research. Such locally focused work was highlighted by both user survey respondents as well as U4 partner in-country staff FGD participants. While the vast majority of the user survey respondents found the ICEs to be "somewhat" or "very" useful, there were suggestions for improvement centred around ensuring continuity of efforts and engagement, as well as increased focus on local context.

## **3.4 Partnerships with other organisations**

### *Engaging local partners, adapting to audiences and languages*

In 2022 and 2023, 60% or more of U4's collaborators were new.<sup>10</sup> The majority of U4's collaborators were based in Europe.<sup>11</sup> Research collaborations outside of ICEs do not consistently

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<sup>10</sup> As per the logframe, the split is as follows:

**2022:** 63 collaborators, 60% new, (19% Academia/Think tanks; 10% Govts; 43% ind. consultants; 21% NGO/multilaterals; 5% private sector, 1% Media; 1% Other.)

**2023:** 83 collaborators, 64% new (45% Academia/Think tanks; 5% Govts; 15% ind. consultants; 25% NGO/multilaterals; 2,5% Media; 7,5% Other)

<sup>11</sup> According to the 2022 Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) tracker, the split is as follows: 3 based in South Eastern Asia; 5 based in South America; 1 based in Central America; 4 based in Southern Africa; 2 based in Western Africa; 3 based in Eastern Africa; 42 based in Europe; 3 based in North America.

include collaborations with partners in the Global South outside the context of in-country workshops and research undertaken to inform these. This is partly due to established networks and challenges identifying experts from the Global South,<sup>12</sup> language skills necessary for collaborations in languages other than English, as well as expertise in the topics researched. When working with Global South researchers, particularly those based in-country, U4 has taken steps to protect individuals' identities where there are risks associated with working on politically sensitive matters. This includes using pseudonyms for publications.

In addition, U4 has a relatively small team of 10 advisers and the Director. This means that it is challenging for U4 to maintain local networks around the world that could cover the diverse range of topics that U4 works on (from healthcare in Moldova to natural resources in Zambia). U4 should therefore continue to draw on the networks of partner agencies as well as U4's network of international collaborators as it covers new topics in new countries.

Several interviewees raised the matter of language, and how English being the dominant language in the anti-corruption space might limit the types of perspectives that are platformed. U4 has examples of efforts to platform diverse voices and experiences (see **Annex 9** for details). FGD participants also highlighted U4's potential to platform the work and capabilities of a more diverse range of corruption-focused NGOs, beyond the best-known international NGOs that usually dominate global fora and discussions.

Furthermore, U4's 2023 training offer included self-paced training courses in French on natural resources (*Corruption and wildlife trafficking; Corruption in the forestry sector; and Corruption in the extractive industries*), as well as a self-paced course on *Managing ethical misconduct and low-level corruption cases*. In 2023, U4 also rolled out their *Essentials of anti-corruption I: The basics* course in Ukrainian. This course is also offered in English, French, Spanish and Arabic. Simultaneous interpretation is often used in ICEs, and relevant workshop materials are translated into local languages.<sup>13</sup> Other organisations, e.g., multilateral organisations that work on anti-corruption, have translated U4's resources to facilitate their use in the regions they work in. While the engagement is welcome, reach of the products appears to be more challenging in communities (e.g., the Francophone community) where U4 does not have the same level of presence and brand recognition as it does in the anglophone community. Continued engagement with U4's bilateral, multilateral and NGO partners could be useful to increase the reach of U4's work in non-English speaking countries.

### *Use of international networks and partnerships*

There is a broad range of NGO, journalistic and multilateral organisations that work on anti-corruption, as well as other organisations that specialise in other thematic areas but have been taking an anti-corruption lens or programme within their mandate (for example, in the context

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<sup>12</sup> This includes challenges identifying who counts as an expert from the Global South – someone based in the Global South, regardless of origin, a national from a Global South country (who might be working, for example, at a university based in the Global North), or someone who is both a national of and resident in a country in the Global South.

<sup>13</sup> Please see **Annex 8** on the details of course uptake in 2023, per courses offered in different languages, and **Annex 9** on the provision of U4's reports in different languages.

of election integrity and money in politics, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) has an anti-corruption workstream). This is in addition to academic institutions and individual researchers that focus on U4's thematic areas. U4 collaborates with a broad range of these organisations through international conferences and across the range of U4 products.

U4's work has had demonstrable influence on the global agenda. U4's work on mainstreaming gender in anti-corruption, as an active member of the UNCAC Coalition, and significantly contributing to [passing Resolution 10/10](#) at the CoSP, is a strong example of U4's leadership at the global level. A number of advisers raised that this was an inspiring achievement, despite acknowledging the practical limitations of putting some of the global resolutions into practice and achieving tangible results. Work is also on-going with the UNCAC Coalition in the context of environmental crime. Generally, U4's engagement with the UNCAC Coalition was highly appreciated by U4 partners. Some U4 partners also raised that U4 being part of UNCAC Coalition provided them with a better understanding of the discussions within the civil society coalition.

U4's expertise is recognised within international donor and organisation networks. For example, U4 is a knowledge partner for the [Global Network on Anti-Corruption, Transparency and Accountability](#) – led by WHO with a range of multilateral and bilateral donors involved. U4 has also been invited to join donor networks on Ukraine – such as the [Ukraine Reform Working Group](#) run by German Marshall Fund for Ukraine, funded by USAID and the UK. Such networks can be valuable in disseminating U4's work to audiences that have the scope to incorporate the considerations and recommendations within their work. U4's partners have also catalysed important partnerships, such as Norad linking U4 up with WHO, and Sweden with the Global Fund for Women; and Germany suggesting a partnership with the UNCAC Coalition.

Both civil society and multilateral organisation representatives that participated in the FGDs highlighted that U4's research is particularly valuable for their work, respectively, for advocacy and policy development. There is potential to build on U4's strengths to enhance U4's international partnerships and collaborations, particularly to increase the uptake of U4's products (including through a range of diverse formats such as video and radio), as discussed in the recommendations section. FGD participants suggested that U4 should expand its partnership work with academia beyond funding calls where U4 is essentially the client, to engaging in equal partnerships, e.g., collaborating in the context of external research funding.

FGD participants suggested engaging the broader anti-corruption community during work planning to deconflict focus work. One participant mentioned that organisations have found out too late, once work was underway, that they were working on similar issues within different organisations and that earlier discussions could help better tailor in-depth research projects. More broadly, some FGD participants suggested that U4 could be more active in publicising and disseminating its research to a wider range of stakeholders, given the high quality of the work, and that U4's partners could also be more active in promoting U4's visibility across the broader anti-corruption community.

#### 4. Efficiency

The section addresses six organisational assessment questions.

#### 4.1 Management and administration structure

U4 is the largest centre within CMI, delivering more varied activities each year than other CMI research centres. U4 is more than a research centre, being focused on timely delivery of a complex, multi-donor-funded, activity-led annual workplan.

The U4 management team has recently expanded and now consists of the U4 Director, the Deputy Director and a Programme Coordinator, reflecting the increased size and complexity of leading and managing U4. The U4 Director has a 100% leadership role (whereas other CMI research directors also spend 50% of their time conducting research). The Director is both the manager of the centre and its chief representative externally. In addition to quality assurance and expenditure approval, the U4 Director has responsibility for partner relations and stakeholder engagement. CMI also emphasises the U4 Director's leadership on human resources within CMI's policy framework, including ensuring work-life balance and good staff relations.

U4 has strengthened its programme management processes during the Strategy period. The former finance and administration function has been replaced by a wider programme coordination role, with a range of operational responsibilities, focused on developing, monitoring, reporting and ensuring efficient delivery of the workplan, including procurement, partner fund management and financial reporting. The Programme Coordinator also has an important budget allocation function. A new Project Officer has also recently been recruited, after a two-year hiatus, and is supporting the programme coordinator in key areas such as monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

U4 has institutionalised a mandatory team meeting each Monday. While the management sets the agenda, staff contribute suggestions through a 'thread board'. Separate management and operations meetings are held every Tuesday, providing management with the opportunity to discuss budget, performance and delivery issues. The Director also aims to convene one or more staff retreats each year. The autumn retreat is an opportunity to discuss the annual workplan and raise strategic challenges.

The staff survey and interviews with CMI and U4 staff surfaced several inter-related management challenges, with the potential to affect organisational efficiency and effectiveness. The issues centre on U4's positioning within CMI, its flat organisational hierarchy, and the suitability of its project management systems, particularly around prioritisation and results management.

##### *Navigating organisational change within CMI*

U4 is an organisation that engages both in independent, applied research and the provision of services to partners. One of its organisational challenges is the striking a balance between accommodating the autonomy of CMI researchers and their role in delivering a donor-funded workplan and producing practitioner-focused products tailored to partner needs.

One area where this dilemma manifests is around the role of U4's Director, in terms of striking a balance between directing or supervising individual activities, providing strategic direction and the external representation of U4. Some team members take the view that a flat organisational hierarchy, with staff reporting straight to the Director, leaves the Director too involved in day-to-

day operations. It puts a burden on the Director to oversee research work directly, including by providing quality assurance, leaving less time for strategic engagement with external stakeholders. The latter role is considered particularly important by partners.

In interviews, partners stressed that U4 should be staffed by motivated researchers, but also focused on donor needs and priorities and not led solely by the research interests of the team. This leaves the Director with a difficult balance to maintain between serving donor needs and interests, remaining relevant in the anti-corruption research community, and ensuring that staff remain motivated to deliver against the Strategy.

For U4, navigating organisational change within CMI can be challenging. CMI's regulations and policies have been developed for all its centres, rather than tailored to the specific needs of U4, which creates some challenges. U4 is not a legal entity and is governed by CMI's legal and regulatory policy framework. CMI management systems continue to evolve and efforts have been taken to ensure U4 is better integrated to CMI more broadly. This includes strengthening policy, financial and operational linkages, particularly on collaborative research projects. CMI research staff periodically support U4 activities, including the Helpdesk facility. Ties and lines of accountability extend beyond management. For example, the U4 communications team reports to the CMI Communications Director. There are pros and cons to such integration. While the U4 communications team benefits from CMI technical support, the external reporting arrangement to CMI can inadvertently serve to weaken important information flows between the communications team and the U4 management team, at times resulting in sub-optimal performance.

#### *Challenges of introducing programme management systems*

There is some consensus across the team that U4 would benefit from a more developed programme management system, to enable it to plan holistically what happens, when, with whom and at what cost. Yet, while advisers recognise the value of project management, they are sometimes reluctant to be held accountable for delivering according to an organisational plan, particularly if it implies a more hands-on overarching management style with less individual operational autonomy for advisers.

Advisers stated a preference for efficient, user-friendly and light touch project management. The challenge is that the current projectised approach, whereby activities are planned and delivered as discrete workstreams, impedes efficiencies and often leads to annual underspends, when some activities are prioritised at the expense of others. The alternative would be to move towards a more programmatic approach, focused on understanding how different activities combine to deliver U4's strategic objectives. This would enable U4 to create synergies across its activities and reduce transaction costs. For instance, U4 could introduce a focus on promoting specific improvements in partner capacities and practices, focusing its planning on identifying the right combination of activities to deliver its intended outcomes. However, this would entail a significant change to the business model, which would need to be developed incrementally over time.

## Human resource and technical capacity

CMI's human resource department is responsible for the recruitment of U4 staff, in consultation with U4 management. This includes determining salaries and benefits and supporting new staff to settle.

U4 staff benefit from CMI human resource policies within the framework of Norwegian labour law which gives primacy to working conditions and ensuring work-life balance. U4's strategic goal 'the organisation we want to become' also recognises the importance of a positive work environment.

All U4 staff are offered permanent contracts and thematic advisers are encouraged to develop their research careers within CMI. This creates institutional stability and promotes a long-term approach to staff development: many staff acquire deeper research skills, and some have learnt new languages. U4 staff are also encouraged to contribute to other CMI research projects where relevant. While CMI has sought to recognise the career pathways for those who do less research, some U4 staff feel overlooked by an institutional culture that tends to incentivise original research output over knowledge synthesis.

U4 maintains gender balance among its staff, underpinned by a gender and inclusion policy, and also employs a gender specialist. This has enabled it to strengthen gender capacities across the team and developed a thematic workstream on anti-corruption and gender, for which U4 now has built a solid reputation among partners and the anti-corruption community.

U4 focuses on recruiting thematic advisers that have both academic and practitioner experience, enabling them to pursue research interests in an academic environment, while providing practical advice to partners. U4 believes it has the right mix of people to implement the Strategy, despite its thematic breadth, although team members note that it can at times be hard to pivot to new themes without bringing in new permanent advisers, which can be a slow process under Norwegian labour laws. Some donors are of the view that U4 should hire more staff on shorter term contracts (e.g., 1-2 years), to enable faster scale up in new countries, such as Ukraine, or to pivot towards new thematic areas where it lacks in-house knowledge or capacities.

The policy of requiring staff to be Bergen-based also has benefits and limitations. While CMI recruits and offers relocation packages, not all suitably qualified candidates are able to relocate, and this policy may inadvertently reduce the size of the available talent pool.

### *Outsourcing expertise*

In addition to its long-standing collaboration with Transparency International on the Helpdesk facility, U4 periodically contracts external experts on a short-term basis. These specialists support U4 advisers, including with the facilitation of ICEs and online courses, and often write or co-author Helpdesks responses and adviser-led research. U4 occasionally draws on technical expertise from other parts of CMI, often experienced researchers with in-depth country knowledge (e.g., Mozambique, Afghanistan). Cultivating a small pool trusted short-term collaborators helps ensure consistent and timely delivery, although some U4 staff note there is always the risk of creating a "bit of an echo-chamber".

Several donors are of a view that U4 should outsource more of its work, particularly in areas where it does not have linguistic, thematic or country capacity. Advisers recognise the benefits of such external collaboration; as one noted, it is good to “bring in expertise I do not have”, “to confront new ideas”, and to “not be alone with my thoughts”. Yet U4 are also conscious of the risks associated with developing new thematic areas that rely heavily on external consultants. It has tended not to offer fixed term contracts (1-2 years), due to concerns about the additional management and quality assurance burden and the need to manage potential risks to the U4 brand.

## 4.2 Performance monitoring and quality assurance system

At the start of the Strategy period, U4 set out to strengthen its monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) systems. According to U4 documentation, this is part of a commitment to capturing results, with a view to drawing out lessons and recommendations for future endeavours, to ‘learning and advising better’, to provide insights as to the effectiveness of anti-corruption interventions and programmes, and to document real change and demonstrate the value of U4’s work.<sup>14</sup>

U4’s results management system is underpinned by a programmatic theory of change and a logical framework.<sup>15</sup> The logframe includes a mixture of outcome and output indicators (**Box 2** lists indicators used to measure progress towards Goal 2: working with partners to develop a coherent, global approach to anti-corruption).<sup>16</sup>

### Box 3: Selection of indicators to track progress against Goal 2

- Pathways of impact stories based on U4 work to strengthen the coordination and development of joint positions among our partners
- U4 partners act jointly on issues of common concern (e.g., UNCAC at 10<sup>th</sup> CoSP)
- Number of U4 partner fora addressing the development of a joint U4 partner approach
- Examples of advice addressing coordination or development of joint positions among partners and other development actors
- Number of in-depth, expert-led online training courses and self-paced modules run

U4 has sought to strengthen its means of collecting data and verifying results, particularly ‘pathways for change’. This has included the production of periodic impact stories or case studies,<sup>17</sup> user surveys, website analytics, course questionnaires and post workshop surveys. U4 also draws on Helpdesk report data monitoring from Transparency International and its own internal workplan progress reports. U4 has also negotiated harmonised reporting against the annual work plan, although indicator reporting is at times tailored to specific partners and there is less focus on outcome reporting.

<sup>14</sup> U4 Goal Narratives: *Turning our new strategy into action*

<sup>15</sup> U4 Theory of Change and U4 Logical Framework for 2022-2026

<sup>16</sup> This list is not exhaustive and included other indicators related to research publications and courses

<sup>17</sup> Generating impact: guidance on drafting impact stories

However, it is apparent that the MEL system introduced at the outset of the Strategy period has proved too complex and cumbersome, and has not been utilised effectively. U4 lacks a dedicated MEL capacity, and depends on reporting by staff. It can be burdensome on the team to collect data regularly against all the indicators, and to collate and analyse the available data. The online user survey, a longstanding means of generating feedback, has not been deployed since 2021. This is attributed to falling response rates and high transaction costs, and the fact that previous survey results had seldom led to changes.<sup>18</sup> Most of the available data tracks activities or outputs. The MTR itself provides an alternative source of feedback from external stakeholders, but is not able to generate robust findings on outcomes.

The U4 staff survey and interviews suggest mixed opinions across the team and among partners regarding the efficacy of U4's MEL approach. 44.4% of staff survey respondents are of a view that U4 performance monitoring and quality assurance systems sufficiently and accurately capture results and lead to internal learning and adjustments or improvements. The remaining 55.5% of staff survey respondents were unsure or disagreed. One respondent noted "an improvement in MEL during the period", ensuring the system is not too cumbersome, collecting only useful information, particularly in support of annual reporting against resourced workplan activity lines (e.g., blogs, publications, Helpdesk answers, facilitated courses, ICEs). There have also been some improvements in term of measuring outcomes (e.g., course completion rates, website traffic, publication citations and references of U4 work, results of outreach, particularly in terms of engagement in international fora).<sup>19</sup> Others noted that U4 was too activity led, insufficiently focused on outcomes and lacked a systematic approach to tracking goal areas (output) and intermediate outcome indicators.

One of U4's organisational priorities is to 'make our impact clearer'.<sup>20</sup> While advisers recognised the difficulty of capturing complex change through quantitative indicators, they also reported having insufficient time to produce impact stories, given the challenges of implementing a demanding workplan. Advisers are also aware of how challenging it can be to assess the impact of anti-corruption programmes, including analysing the contribution of U4's work to organisational change. There is interest within U4 for improving capacity to identify outcomes and assess U4 contribution to outcomes.

Partners also expressed interest in an enhanced U4 capacity to focus on outcomes as well as capture and learn from outcomes, use of Helpdesk answers, effect of ICEs and extent of different donor agency staff participation in and results of self-paced workshops, among others. Partners were of the view that U4 could be better at tracking outcomes and telling impact stories if it worked differently and focused more on outcome-led opportunities. U4's role in [passing](#)

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<sup>18</sup> U4 user survey responses peaked in 2015, with 334 respondents. Since then, response rate as steadily declined year on year, with 169 respondents in 2020. The U4 and MTR teams disseminated the 2024 user survey across a variety of relevant users, including newsletter subscribers, participants in workshops and trainings during the strategy period, receiving 322 responses, on part with 2015 figures.

<sup>19</sup> U4 Annual Reports 2022, 2023

<sup>20</sup> U4 Steering Committee Meeting Minutes, 2022

[Resolution 10/10](#) was highlighted by U4 partners, staff and users as an example where U4 worked collaboratively towards achieving a pre-defined tangible result (see also **Section 3.4**).

On organisational learning, the team routinely shares information and insights, but the learning model is recognised by staff as personal and delivery-focused, rather than institutionalised and outcome-focused. Some advisers noted that they learnt by doing, as a result of undertaking research, facilitating in-country workshops or online courses or participating in international anti-corruption fora, and by occasionally undertaking external evaluations for donor projects. As motivated people, they found opportunities to learn according to their preferences, but recognised that, given the mobility of staff, the team’s analytical know-how needs to be captured in ways that enable U4 and its partners to benefit as a whole. While some are of the view that there is “insufficient time or resources to properly capture, analyse or learn about our work”, others note that U4 draws out lessons from their activities, for instance by holding debriefs after online courses and digital events. The MTR is also considered an institutionalised means of assessing results and learning in an environment where there is often little time to “pause and reflect”. However, U4 recognises scope for improvement in terms of how it captures and learns from the results of its work.

With the additional data collected by the MTR, U4 now has quite good 360-degree feedback from stakeholders on the value of its services. Moreover, analysis of course uptake and completion rates (see above), by theme and language also provide insights into those courses with most participant traction. Yet such evidence does not always inform adaptation. If effectiveness data is not used to inform decision-making, then there is a question whether there is a need to pay more attention to analysing such data, beyond what the MTR can provide.

U4 has the option of shifting towards a more outcome-focused operating model. This would require greater investment in outcome mapping and monitoring, and a shift in its strategy-setting and work planning towards identifying outcomes, whether at the global level or in specific countries, and working collaboratively with other actors to pursue shared goals. Such a change would also entail richer engagement with some partners.

While this is an option for U4 to explore, it would need to be introduced incrementally, as opportunities arise, adopting more of an advocacy-centred collective action model for some specific opportunities, in parallel to U4’s existing activities.

### 4.3 Risk identification and mitigation

During the Strategy period, U4 has sought to systemise its approach to risk analysis and mitigation. A risk register was developed that identifies 29 risks across three main categories: funding, institutional, and strategic, including communications. U4’s risk management plan also sets out to mitigate any negative effects of its activities on climate change and the environment.<sup>21</sup> As part of U4’s plan to turn its new Strategy into action, it also identified key risks and mitigation plans for each strategic goal.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Risk Analysis for the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre (Revised June 2023)

<sup>22</sup> U4 Goal Narratives: Turning our new strategy into action

Responsibility for risk mitigation is broadly distributed between CMI and across U4. While CMI and U4 management are largely responsible for mitigating funding and institutional risks, U4 management and advisers are responsible for addressing strategic risks, particularly those related to delivery of the annual work plan. Of the 29 identified risks, the majority are rated as 'low' probability, including those risks considered to have potentially 'serious' consequences.<sup>23</sup>

U4 staff survey respondents expressed mixed views of the risk management approach. 22.2% of respondents believed U4 was clearly focused on identifying, tracking and mitigating organisational risks, while others were unsure (33.3%) or disagreed (44.4%). Partners, with some exceptions, were less interested in U4 risk management capacities and systems.

One U4 respondent noted that the team did not have the time to update the risk register or formally report against risk as resources were already overstretched. Another commented that the register was useful for attaching to donor proposals, but the actual practice of tracking risk was less systematised. U4's approach to managing risks was seen by some staff as ad hoc.

The CMI management are clearly focused on mitigating broader financial and institutional risks, including risks related to financial security and those of an institutional/management nature, this includes the wellbeing of the staff and the extent to which U4 is culturally integrated into CMI. There are some concerns that while U4 staff are passionate and committed to their work, they can lose sight of the need for a better work-life balance, which may have health consequences. Mitigating this risk was prioritised by CMI as part of the recruitment of the new U4 Director.

From our discussions with the U4 team, it is clear that U4 managers and advisers are more closely sighted on delivery risks, particularly those associated with ICEs, responsiveness to Helpdesk inquiries and, to a lesser extent, low levels of online course participation, as well as the broader risk of them not completing the annual workplan on time.

U4 also monitors partner-related risk, including funding risks related to political changes in partner governments as well as risk related to partner country prioritisation. In some cases, partner risks can be harder for U4 to foresee. For instance, the closure of Norway's bilateral aid programme in Uganda and Sweden's bilateral aid programme in Cambodia had been unforeseen and cut short planned U4 activities in those two countries.

Some U4 staff believed that risk analysis could be more nuanced. For instance, AI is considered as both an emergent risk by some and an opportunity by others. The communications team noted that an AI search engine was the biggest user of the AI database. Several partners noted that AI had implications for the creation of U4 knowledge products, including Helpdesk answers and online course content creation, for instance. U4 recognises the complexity of the issue and there is clearly a need for more detailed analysis and discussion on the topic.

#### 4.4 Governance structures

U4 has a two-tier governance structure. One is internal, involving CMI directors, the CMI board and the U4 Director, the other is external, involving the U4 Director and the U4 partners. This

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<sup>23</sup> Risks are rated by U4 as either low, moderate or serious

latter partnership governance arrangement provides strategic guidance and oversight of U4 through the Steering Committee mechanism and is the main focus of our discussion.

The U4 Steering Committee is comprised of the eight funding partners and the U4 management team. Oversight is deliberately light-touch, as many partner agencies have been supporting U4 for more than 20 years and have a high degree of trust and confidence in the partnership. There is also a strong desire among members to limit Steering Committee transaction costs.

The mechanism is centred on an annual meeting of the Steering Committee, a two-day decision-making event, usually hosted in November or December by the lead donor. Much of the decision-making centres on reaching agreement over the contents of the annual workplan and budget, including the proposed ICE plans, numbers of expert-led courses, partner fora, and HQ visits. The meeting also provides opportunity to discuss funding, particularly during periods of financial uncertainty. One of the tasks of the SCM is to agree the lead donor for the following year. This is a convening role rotated annually among members.

In recent years, there has also been increased work on donor convening around anti-corruption events. Some donors have also used the SCM for donor coordination, which allows partners to learn from each other about internal priorities, upcoming projects and thoughts in developing common positions on specific anti-corruption issues and processes, both before and after the SCM. This year the UK, in its role as lead donor, has agreed to convene a pre-meeting for U4 partners.

Opinions of U4 staff survey respondents and interviewees regarding the functionality of the SCM were mixed, with a larger number of survey respondents either unsure or in disagreement. Some believed that the efficacy of the SCM depended more on the individual members than the forum as a whole. Some members were experienced while others were new to the role. Levels of influence that U4 contact points have within their own organisations also differ. Some partners were seen by U4 staff as engaged and demanding, while for others the U4 partnership was lower down their list of priorities, reflecting the range of and shifts in priorities within donor governments and the competing demands on partner staff. Some within U4 suggest a need for more streamlined and formal decision-making structures, although some partner focal points noted that they were not the decision-makers within their own agencies. Other partners saw the SCM as an opportunity to take a more active role in U4 work planning, as donors “know where the game is being played”. They did not see the SCM as an exercise in rubber stamping the presented annual workplan, but as a forum for ensuring the contents reflected where the donor energy was and the upcoming opportunities for collective action, ensuring a more outcome focused workplan.

Conversely some U4 advisers stated that their workplan was seldom challenged by partners, and there are mixed views as to the extent to which partners should be involved at that level. One adviser thought that donors ‘should not have the last word’, citing the importance of researcher independence. Although others in U4 thought research funded by the U4 partnership should be treated differently from CMI research funded by long-term grants from research councils. The 12-month work planning cycle was also noted as a potential constraint, particularly given the

desire to be more outcome focused when outcomes can often take longer than one year to materialise and require multi-year planning.

### *Lead donor role*

There is some consensus within U4 and among partner focal points that the role of the lead donor could be better defined. As one partner noted, ‘there is no memo that outlines the role’. U4 staff are clearly interested in a lead donor who is supportive of U4, someone who can ‘chase and discipline’ the group as well help U4 solve problems, for instance, to open up discussions on issues in advance of annual SCMs, and at times to act as a mediator between U4 and other partners, for instance on ICE selection and workshop timing, and periodically, to support the development of the terms of reference for the MTR. U4 believes that partner focal points can also help drive effectiveness, by taking the work U4 does to their relevant government departments and ministries, encouraging their colleagues to enrol in and complete the training modules, for instance. For some in U4, they can also help improve research quality, be “peer reviewers”, “sparring partners”, and as one adviser commented, “tell us to hit the right notes”.

Partners recognise the importance of clarifying the responsibilities of the lead donor. They mostly concern hosting the meeting, setting the agenda, and “helping us get our ducks in a row” prior to the meeting and, for some, exploring the potential for further coordination across the group, exploiting the “like-minded” opportunities. Although it is recognised that such responsibilities can be inhibited by the diverse role that U4’s partner focal points play in their own organisations as well as their differing strategic priorities, time constraints and organisational mandates.

## **4.5 Funding**

U4’s annual budget has grown over the Strategy period (**Table 3**). In 2024, U4’s annual income was NOK 38.23m,<sup>24</sup> representing an increase of 45% (NOK 11.81m) compared to 2022. Membership income from core partners grew by 35% over the same two-year period. The bulk of funds represents a multi-year commitment made by U4’s eight bilateral donors, including three of the four founding partners.<sup>25</sup>

*Table 3: Growth in the U4 budget over the Strategy period (NOK millions)*

<b>Fund type</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>
<b>Membership</b>	18.19	20.02	24.50
<b>Earmarked</b>	6.05	6.47	5.93
<b>Carry over</b>	2.18	5.05	7.80
<b>Total</b>	26.42	31.54	38.23

### *Funding predictability*

Analysis of partnership funding commitments over the strategic period suggests U4 is well funded (**Table 3**). The multi-year pool funded arrangement is well suited to U4’s operational model. U4 also benefits from being nested within CMI, offering it a degree of financial security, which can

<sup>24</sup> U4’s annual income for 2024 is approximately 30m NOK without the additional carry over balance.

<sup>25</sup> Norway, Sweden and the UK

be helpful when there are budget constraints in partner countries. This was one of the reasons why the founding four donors agreed to the CMI proposal to create a permanent home for U4. U4 has since become the ‘jewel in CMI’s crown’, accounting for 25% (30m NOK) of CMI’s 120m annual income. In addition to core funding, U4 also benefits from a stable level of annual earmarked funding. For instance, Norad topped up its membership contribution with additional funds ring-fenced for health activities in 2020 and then included it in the 2022-2026 contract.

U4 is considered a long-term partner by its core donors. It continues to be ranked high among other established anti-corruption institutions, including Transparency International, and the Basel Institute on Governance as well as multilateral institutions with a focus on anti-corruption (e.g., OECD). Funding predictability has generally improved after the disruptive effects of COVID-19 on some aid budgets and anti-corruption initiatives remain high on some partner government agendas. As one partner noted, “it is not hard to justify support to U4”.

### *Funding risks*

U4 recognised several funding risks at the outset of the 2022-26 Strategy period. For those with serious consequences (e.g., a partner not renewing their agreement), their likelihood of materialising was deemed ‘low’. The financial risk factors included in the U4 risk register were considered to be more related to U4 underperformance than to changes in the partner funding environment. While the funding picture for the current Strategy period remains relatively positive, some partners are concerned that future commitment at the same level cannot be guaranteed. While U4 is considered a “low-cost ticket” by several partners, securing approval for multi-year funding is becoming more challenging, as a degree of short-termism creeps in and some partners face funding constraints and are unlikely to be able to increase amounts in the future, some partner commitments may even need to be cut. This short termism can pose a challenge when trying to adopt a multi-year approach to outcome based, operational planning.

In these cases, departments with broader responsibility for supporting staff development, civil society or research organisations can similarly find it harder to distinguish between U4 and other organisations that work on anti-corruption. The anti-corruption space is now more competitive and, for some partners, while U4 offers good value for money, “U4’s niche is not so clear”. This has implications in terms of U4’s approach to its ways of working, its thematic prioritisation and its global positioning more broadly.

### *Securing future funding support*

Looking forward, the changes in the anti-corruption sector and in the donor funding environment pose potential risks for U4. Hitherto, U4’s approach to fundraising has been relatively ad hoc, often constrained by other management demands. Former Directors have taken steps to renew ties with some lapsed donors (Netherlands, Belgium) and reached out to philanthropic organisations, but these organisations are often less interested in basket funding arrangements. U4 has been cautious about allowing larger donors such as USAID and the European Union (EU) to “join the U4 club”, for fear of “being swamped”, not just through heightened demands for ICES or Helpdesk responses, but a result of the increased transaction costs associated with servicing

larger donors, including heavy reporting requirements. U4 has always benefitted from relatively light touch harmonised reporting agreed with its small group of core partners.

U4 has accepted funding from non-member donors, such as USAID, for discrete project initiatives. Though there is a view among some partners that U4 should not expand beyond its core partnership group and instead concentrate more on serving “the people that are funding it now” rather than taking on too many new assignments. This view chimes with some U4 staff, where “good enough is to continue with and satisfy what we have”. It is considered risky to take on too much and fall short. There is value in serving a small community of trusted, like-minded donors and not trying to overexpand. As one U4 staffer noted, it is easier for U4 to ensure a balance of interests working with a smaller group.

For some partners, funding stability is also contingent on U4 having more internal champions in partner agencies and working harder to develop a broader coalition of support. Partner fora and HQ visits, often linked to SCMs, are deemed important by partners, not just ‘doing the rounds’ or broadening the reach of U4’s technical offer, but deepening the relationship with seniors in partner agencies and government departments more broadly.

## Conclusions and recommendations

### Conclusions

U4 is broadly seen as a high performing and well-respected organisation. U4 balances competing demands on the organisation from its partners, host institution (CMI) and the challenges associated with working on a sensitive topic such as corruption. The range of products delivered by U4 – spanning research, training and convening – are seen by U4 partners and the broader anti-corruption community as an important part of the anti-corruption landscape.

### Relevance

U4’s work remains relevant to the anti-corruption community and to U4 partners. The breadth of topics covered has catered to a broad range of partner and institutional priorities and has allowed U4 to build up a valued source of knowledge on corruption and anti-corruption. To maintain the breadth of anti-corruption work but also to more clearly articulate U4’s original research contributions, the MTR recommends U4 move to a two-year planning cycle with fewer core focus areas, linked to multi-year funding. Focus areas should be identified following collaborative engagements with U4 partner agencies and the broader anti-corruption community.

## Effectiveness

U4 products are used by partners in a variety of ways, including shaping programmes and training staff. U4's work on gender with UNCAC was consistently raised by U4 staff, partners and broader anti-corruption community stakeholders as a strong example of its leadership role at the international level. U4 partners further valued U4's convening power, which in 2024 gathered U4 partners at and before the SCM and during international conferences.

While U4 tracks activities set out in its annual workplan, it does not consistently track information on delivery against the outcomes contained in its Strategy or results framework, making it difficult for the MTR to generate robust findings on outcomes. Nevertheless, by engaging with U4 partner representatives, U4 product users and collaborators, as well as U4 staff, the MTR built on U4's M&E data and identified additional instances of use of U4's products around the globe.

## Efficiency

Broadly, U4 has the structure, systems and skills to operate efficiently. It has been able to consistently plan and deliver a large and thematically complex workplan of partner/practitioner-facing activities from within an academic setting. It has proved able to balance original research with knowledge synthesis and training activities.

However, as U4 has grown in terms of budget, staff and thematic scope, its project management model, premised on advisor-led, activity-based annual workplans, is coming under pressure. Recent years have been characterised by underspends in some areas, as the team has been forced to prioritise in the face of a growing thematic spread. The focus on efficient delivery of activities and outputs on time and to budget has also meant less focus on delivering goals and outcomes under the Strategy.

U4 governance arrangements are also focused on approval of annual workplans and negotiating ICE priorities, among other activities, and less on identifying opportunities that are most likely to contribute to U4's strategic objectives. If U4 is to move towards a more outcome-focused or programmatic approach to delivery, it may call for more intensive engagement from partners.

U4's core partners are clearly committed to their long-term partnership with U4, and they consider that the case for investing in U4 remains strong. Yet shifts in the domestic funding landscape for many partners means that long-term funding can no longer be taken for granted. U4 may wish to explore developing stronger ties national partners, at both the technical and political levels.

## Recommendations

### *Core Recommendations for U4*

#### **1. Undertake a strategic review of priority themes to focus original research on fewer themes**

U4's topics should continue to cover both breadth and depth to ensure that it remains at the forefront of anti-corruption work and also caters to donor priorities. Priority topics should be the subject of dedicated research, while broader topics can be addressed through lighter products, including the Helpdesk, partner fora and webinars.

To ensure that only the most relevant topics remain within the priority list, U4 could undertake a strategic review of its topic areas. This could be in the form of a two-day retreat with U4 partners, to jointly identify a small number (e.g., 4) of thematic areas for U4 to prioritise. The prioritisation could be based on U4 partner priorities, emerging issues and research, statistics of uptake of products from different thematic areas as well as U4's comparative advantage in the context of other organisations' work. Such a retreat could also be an opportunity to discuss any additional formats of work that U4 partners might find useful.

## **2. Move the workplan process to a two-year cycle**

To ensure a longer-term approach, the workplan process could be moved to a two-year cycle. This would allow for a longer consultation process, and strategic planning of activities and communications for each thematic area – including original research and accompanying blogs, webinars, translation into other languages, conferences for presentation, etc. Given the need to respond to emerging issues and donor priorities, flexibility should be incorporated in the workplan – i.e., only a proportion of advisers' time (e.g., 50%) should be allocated to pre-defined activities for the two-year workplans and a significant proportion (e.g., 50%) should be allocated to the broader thematic areas identified by U4 and remain available for U4 to respond to emerging U4 partner priorities and global challenges and issues.

## **3. Increase the role that U4 plays in international fora**

U4 should consider taking on a more significant role in international fora, building on the CoSP experience. Partners suggested U4 could play both a convening role for partner agencies and thought leader role in shaping international processes such as a revision of the UNCAC review mechanism, bringing the anti-corruption perspective to the Addis Agenda on Financing for Development, the Pact for the Future or more specific thematic fora such as the Conference of State Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. This would leverage U4's comparative advantage as a network of like-minded donors, as compared to networks such as the EU Team Europe Democracy or the OECD Anti-Corruption Task Force that are more bureaucratic and offer fewer possibilities for informal exchange.

## **4. More consistently track results against Strategy goals, and gradually move towards and outcome-focused results monitoring and planning**

U4 should more consistently track progress towards its Strategy goals, in order to generate more learning to inform the next iteration of the Strategy. U4 should also consider moving incrementally towards outcome-focused work planning, selecting clusters of activities that work towards outcomes at the global or country levels, to supplement its current activity-based planning. These processes will require more active partner engagement in the planning stage and moving beyond one-year planning cycle. U4 and its partners may wish to pilot such an approach, identifying and co-producing a small number of outcomes premised on forthcoming opportunities and partner priorities.

## **5. Review the roles and responsibilities of the management team**

The appointment of a new Director opens up an opportunity for reflection on how to streamline management and quality assurance processes, including by clarifying the authority of the Deputy Director. CMI and U4 should also review current line reporting arrangements governing the U4 communications team, with a view to improving internal information flows, and responsiveness, including strengthening feedback loops on website usage and online course performance. U4 should also consider undertaking a more detailed analysis of its workplan-based project management system, with a view to identifying opportunities to shifting towards more outcome-focused programme management.

### *Quick win recommendations for U4*

#### **6. Engage partners in a structured manner during the workplan development process**

More structured engagement with partners during Strategy and workplan development would help to strengthen the U4 network. This could be in the form of online sessions to discuss emerging trends, priorities and ideas. Partner focal points could choose to participate in these thematic discussions according to their availability, expertise and interests, and potentially also involve technical specialists from within their agencies.

#### **7. Provide easy-to-share resources to U4 focal points to increase the reach of U4's products within partner agencies and other government departments**

To facilitate partner focal point outreach to other teams and agencies within their own agencies and governments, U4 could send partner focal points thematic emails periodically for forwarding to relevant teams. These could be focused on new research or training offers, and highlight the availability of other U4 resources on the thematic area. The emails could include the types of stakeholders that would benefit from receiving the email (e.g., on listing the anti-money laundering authorities, regulators and the private sector for training on IFFs), and also be geared at audiences that may not be familiar with U4 (for example, it could include a short introduction about U4). Such "easy to forward" resources could also be tailored for country-based staff to share with national stakeholders.

#### **8. Systematically gather user feedback during conferences, after presentations and provide an option to provide feedback on U4 publications**

To improve the capture of results and use of U4's work, include a link or QR code at the end of newsletters, publications, trainings and presentations at conferences, and encourage readers and audience members to share how they have benefited from or used U4's materials.

#### **9. Continue fostering relationships with a broad range of departments and agencies in U4 partner countries**

To support progress towards Goal 4, U4 should continue fostering relationships and collaborating with a broad range of departments within partner agencies, beyond focal points, to advance U4's strategic goal of pushing anti-corruption up the agenda in partners' home countries.

#### **10. Map other organisations' work on anti-corruption**

To aid in the preparation of the strategic retreat, U4 should consider mapping other organisations working in the anti-corruption area, and their mandates, thematic areas of expertise and service offers. It should use this mapping both to refine U4's own niche and comparative advantage, and to seek opportunities for increased collaboration on thematic areas, as part of U4's convening work. It would also be useful for U4 to map partners' aid policies, anti-corruption strategies, country presence and thematic priorities, to facilitate alignment with partners' priorities.

### **11. Instate an annual individual check-in call with U4 partners**

U4 should consider an annual individual country management check-in call with each of the U4 partners, to update on key developments at U4 and solicit feedback.

### **12. Continue the provision of content in diverse languages**

U4 should continue the provision of content in other languages, including Spanish and French, and review where this could be expanded. Combine this with an enhanced communications effort, leveraging the partner networks and reaching out to donor communities that operate in the respective languages.

### **13. U4 product-specific recommendations**

#### *SCM:*

13.1: Consider the possibility of **hosting the SCM in Bergen in alternate years**, to allow the focal points to engage with the entire U4 team while minimising travel.

#### *HQ visits:*

13.2: Undertake **post-HQ visit evaluations together with the partner agency**.

13.3: Include the U4 Director in HQ visits where possible.

#### *Training:*

13.4: Explore the feasibility of **providing quarterly updates** to U4 focal points on the numbers of people taking online courses from their government agencies for internal reporting purposes.

#### *Helpdesk:*

13.5: For **Helpdesk feedback**, consider having a feedback call, where not only feedback on the answer could be solicited, but also impact stories/how the product helped shape policies or programmes.

13.6: Explore the feasibility of **tiered offering under the Helpdesk** – for example, including shorter and longer pieces, or compilations of resources.

#### *ICEs:*

13.7: To **increase the likelihood of in-country workshops leading to sustained achievements**, amend the workshop selection criteria to strengthen sustainability

requirements. Selection criteria could favour proposals submitted in partnership with a local organisation, and require robust follow-up plans.

13.8: Consider expanding the use of multi-country or international engagements.

#### **14. Consider expanding the use of fixed-term staff contracts**

U4 should review its outsourcing policy and practice, particularly with a view to adopting a more systemised approach to the recruitment of short-term consultants, including the use of fixed term contracts and graduate interns and in so doing, discuss ways of horizon scanning, developing new thematic engagement or service lines without relying on the availability of core advisory staff to own and lead the process.

#### *Recommendations for U4 partners*

The following six partner recommendations are linked to many of the above recommendations and highlight the importance of joint agreement and engagement on key recommendations

**15. U4 focal points should nominate thematic specialists to engage with U4, where possible.**

**16. U4 focal points should actively participate in U4 Strategy and workplan development, and help to identify strategic outcomes for U4 to pursue.**

**17. U4 focal points should actively share U4 materials with in-country staff, ministry staff and other stakeholders in home countries.**

**18. U4 focal points should more actively support U4 mechanisms to collect user feedback, including by following up with Helpdesk users to identify impact stories.**

**19. U4 focal points should discuss broadening the scope of the lead partner role.** Responsibilities might include convening thematic discussions among partners, SCM agenda framing, problem solving, coordination and enhancing effectiveness, for instance through facilitating discussions on strategic goals and outcomes. A revised terms of reference for the role could be developed. A process could be introduced whereby outgoing focal points prepare a handover memorandum to brief the new incumbent on ongoing activities.

**20. U4 focal points should facilitate U4 engagement with seniors in their department, as well as with other departments who have an anti-corruption interest and mandate (e.g., Justice, Trade, Treasury).** This would help to strengthen internal coalition of support among partner governments for U4's work.

# Agulhas

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