FINAL EVALUATION

of the Regional Joint Programme

EU 4 Gender Equality:
Together Against Gender Stereotypes and Gender-based Violence

Funded by the European Union

UNFPA

UN WOMEN

TOGETHER AGAINST
GENDER STEREOTYPES AND
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
#eu4genderequality

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Abbreviations and Figures

List of Acronyms

CEDAW	United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
COE	Council of Europe
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSO	Civil society organization
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
EaP	Eastern Partnership
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
EU	European Union
EU4GE	EU 4 Gender Equality "Together against gender stereotypes and gender-based violence" programme
FBO	Faith-based organization
GBSS	Gender-biased sex selection abortion
IDP	Internally displaced persons
IMAGES	International Men & Gender Equality Survey
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer
LNOB	Leave no one behind
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECD DAC	Organization for Economic Cooperation Development Assistance Committee
PSC	Programme Steering Committee
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TOC	Theory of change
TOR	Terms of reference
TWG	Technical Working Group
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNFPA EECA RO	UNFPA Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia
UNJP4GE	UN Joint Programme for Gender Equality
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UN Women ECA RO	UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office

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Executive Summary

Background

The three-year regional programme "EU 4 Gender Equality: Together against gender stereotypes and gender-based violence" (EU4GE) strengthened women's and men's equal rights and opportunities by shifting social perceptions, challenging gender stereotypes and increasing men's participation in unpaid domestic and care work. It is the first regional programme covering gender equality in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. EU4GE was funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented jointly by UN Women and UNFPA. The programme was implemented in the EaP countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

The Programme targeted government bodies, civil society organizations, the private sector, women and men and girls and boys in the six countries. The overall goal of the Programme is to strengthen equal rights and opportunities for women and men by shifting social perceptions and creating behavioural change relating to gender stereotypes, as well as by increasing men's participation in unpaid care work and the prevention of gender-based violence.

There are 3 Objectives (with respective outputs) attached to this goal:

1) Shifting societal perceptions around gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms which limit women's rights

- **Output 1.1:** Increased awareness of country-specific norms and stereotypes: the public is more aware of rights to reduce the impact of stereotypes and change the roles of men and women
- **Output 1.2:** Actions taken and behaviours changed in key areas by targeted audiences and decision-makers to improve equality of opportunities and realization of women's rights including with regard to employment opportunities

2) Men's involvement in the caretaking of their children and participation in Fathers' programmes have increased

- **Output 2.1:** Targeted citizens, governments, medical providers, and professionals are aware of the benefits of involving men in prenatal check-ups and in fathers' groups
- **Output 2.2:** Men are provided with relevant support, guidance, and means to get involved in caretaking and advocacy of gender- transformative approaches related to parental leave

3) Social workers (mediators) and CSOs have increased knowledge and tools on how to conduct evidence-based violence prevention programmes targeting perpetrators of domestic violence

- **Output 3.1:** Evidence-based violence prevention programmes for perpetrators used in EU member states and a few prevention programmes for perpetrators are being tested in some EaP countries

Context

While considerable progress has been made in the EaP region, many challenges to achieving gender equality still exist in these countries. A number of these challenges have been identified over the past several years, including: a high prevalence of violence against women, gender-biased sex selection, child marriage, an unequal distribution of household responsibilities among women and men, limited economic opportunities for women, a gender wage gap, and a wave of conservative sentiments spreading throughout the region where a complex interplay of different factors, including patriarchal social norms that confine women mainly to their reproductive and maternal responsibilities.

Evaluation Purpose and Objectives

This evaluation is the final joint evaluation of the EU4GE programme, taking place during the last year of project implementation and covering the period from 1 March 2020 to 28 February 2023. It was jointly commissioned by UN Women and UNFPA.

The purpose of the evaluation is to:

- Contribute to effective programming, organizational learning and accountability through a summative approach;
- Provide knowledge management on gender norms and stereotypes in the region where the project is implemented;
- Provide specific recommendations as to the priority areas including interventions that require continued support and successful interventions for expansion, and to make recommendations on prioritizing interventions to maximize impact; and
- Offer lessons learned as part of its formative approach.

The objectives of the evaluation are to:

- Assess the relevance and coherence of the programme at the national and regional level, as well as its alignment with the needs of the intended beneficiaries and with international agreements and conventions on gender equality and women's empowerment;
- Assess the organizational efficiency of the programme in relation to delivering the desired results of the programme;
- Assess the effectiveness related to achievement of the programme results as identified in the programme document, as well as unintended outcomes and the added value of the joint programing approach and programming at the regional level;
- Assess the sustainability of the programme's results;
- Analyze how the human rights-based approach and gender equality principles were integrated in the design and implementation of the programme;
- Identify and validate lessons learned, good practices, and innovations of efforts that support gender equality and human rights in this area of work; and
- Provide recommendations with respect to future work related to the provision of holistic services, including engagement of women, men, boys, and girls in promoting respectful relationships and gender equality.

The evaluation was envisioned and conducted as both summative and formative, applying the OECD-DAC criteria and a cross-cutting human rights and gender equality lens.

Uses

The intended uses of the evaluation are to contribute to effective programming, organizational learning, accountability, knowledge management in the region, and strategic decision making on future programming.

The targeted users of the evaluation are civil society organizations, government counterparts, regional institutions, development partners in the region, UN agencies and the personnel of UN Women and UNFPA in EaP countries, the Regional Offices, and the donor (the EU).

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation followed the principles of gender-responsive evaluations by incorporating a systemic approach to the analysis that included:

- The broader human rights context within the region and its impact on the design and implementation of the Programme;
- Disaggregation of data between groups of stakeholders to identify trends, commonalities and differences of experience;
- Assessing the extent to which rights holders, including those experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, participated in programme intervention planning, design, implementation and decision-making;
- Assessing the extent to which sustainability was built into the intervention through the empowerment and capacity building of women and men, and groups of rights holders and duty bearers; and
- Assessing the extent to which a human rights-based and gender-responsive approach was incorporated into the design, monitoring and reporting of programme interventions.

Data collection was conducted across all six countries and at the regional level through a wide array of data collection methods. In Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova, data collection was conducted in-person. In Ukraine, Belarus and at the regional offices and headquarters of the two agencies, all interviews were conducted virtually. Data collection was structured to make best use of informant time and information. Where possible and relevant to the informant, data collection methods explored questions across all criteria. Beneficiary interviews and focus groups were targeted towards exploring the experience and impact of participation in the intervention.

A mixed methods approach using both qualitative and quantitative data including numeric data (baseline and annual reporting numbers) provided by the Programme Team, data provided by informants where available, and data provided by responses to the surveys was used to triangulate and verify data, increasing the internal reliability and consistency of findings.

To the extent possible, the evaluation used a participatory approach to ensure the perspective and voices of stakeholders and beneficiaries were taken into account, paying specific attention to the inclusion of women and individuals and groups who experience multiple or intersecting vulnerabilities, including women with disabilities.

Key Findings

The Evaluation Team produced 13 key findings within the categories of Relevance, Coherence, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment/Human Rights, and Sustainability.

RELEVANCE	
1	The design features of the Programme - flexible, locally adaptable, based in agency strengths - allowed the Programme to remain relevant and resilient across a disparate region and in a time of significant upheaval.
COHERENCE	
2	The commitment by both agencies to the joint programme modality contributed to the Programme's successes. There are lessons from the first phase that would amplify these successes.
3	The regional modality offered economies of scale, knowledge sharing and an innovative modality that can be built upon in the next phase.
EFFECTIVENESS	
4	In the context of upheaval in the region, the Programme was markedly effective, with several standout interventions across the region.
5	The subgrants modality and an innovative approach were key enablers of other successes in the Programme.
6	Certain elements of the Programme warrant a revised approach for Phase Two.
EFFICIENCY	
7	Team members from both agencies and at the regional and country levels are important contributors to the success of this Programme.
8	The communications approach was effective but not optimally efficient.
9	A lot was accomplished inside the resource envelope, but the broad reach of the Programme resulted in some use of resources beyond the Programme's financial allocation.
10	The Programme's Phase I measurement approach captured the numbers and stories of participants in the Programme. There is room to use the successes of the first phase as an opportunity to generate conversation between agencies and with the donor about valuing the links between interventions and outcomes, the value of innovation and pilots, and the theory of long-term social norm change.
GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT/HUMAN RIGHTS	
11	Leave No One Behind is not cross-cutting.
12	The Programme's interventions have built a foundation for social norms transformation across personal, interpersonal, institutional, and societal norms.
SUSTAINABILITY	
13	Given the uncertain context and unconventional programme approach, the Programme's foundation building products and capacity building focus are important elements of sustainability.

Lessons Learned

The Evaluation Team identified three lessons learned:

Country readiness must be well understood at the outset of the Programme to ensure contextual Programme design.

Each of the six countries in this Regional Programme, while similar in many respects, were at a different place with respect to a number of the social norms this Programme sought to address. For example, the social infrastructure to engage in perpetrator programming, the prevalence of GBSS abortions, the social and legal acceptance of the LGBTIQ community, and the connotations associated with the term 'gender' were all quite different across the countries. Consequently, activities and communications had to be adjusted in some countries to account for these realities and, in the case of the perpetrator programming, the overall outcomes were not fully met. While the two agencies have a depth of understanding of the realities in all six countries and the Programme Team was quite considered, a country readiness assessment tailored to the specifics of the Programme would be useful in programmes such as this, particularly given the shifting landscape of the region.

Positive relations with the donor are critical in complex programmes.

This Programme was complicated — the original plan involved 6 countries and a wide array of activities, and the context of the region and the pandemic added extra layers of complexity. In addition to conventional annual formal reporting, the Programme Team maintained regular and transparent conversations with the donor, both at the Regional Programme management level and with the delegations in each country. This relationship played a key role in quick, responsive programme adaptation; creative discussions about innovation and piloting; and honest, supportive conversations about responding to challenges. Critically, this relationship will help both the agencies and the donor to continue to find meaningful and innovative ways to sustain gains in the complex environment and advance regional and global dialogue on social norm change.

Controversial topics require a combination of strategy and boldness.

Changing social norms necessarily involves engaging people in uncomfortable, difficult and sometimes culturally or politically taboo topics. This Programme struggled at times with finding the appropriate balance between strategic choices of language that would ensure larger buy-in and watering down the discourse on the difficult topics. In particular, across more than one country, the Programme avoided the use of the word 'gender' because it may be imbued with uncomfortable connotations in that country. While this meant wider participation in programming, in some places it also drew criticism from partners who felt the deeper social norm had not been adequately challenged. There were similar tensions in some countries with respect to working with men and boys rather than maintaining a focus strictly on women and girls. There are positive examples in the Programme of interventions that tackled deeply rooted norms and socially difficult conversations. Across the region, the Programme worked with conventionally conservative religious leaders, and in Belarus, the Programme conducted interventions with fathers in highly conservative regions, and with women who are addicts and recently imprisoned. Striking the balance between strategic language and bold actions is an important consideration for programmes working on controversial topics.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Evaluation Team made three conclusions and four recommendations under these conclusions:

CONCLUSION 1:

The commitment of the two agencies and the donor to try unconventional approaches to design and structure created opportunities for the sum of the Programme to be greater than its parts.

To the credit of the two agencies and the donor, the design of this Programme was forward-thinking from the outset. The approach of user-centred design and adaptability allowed for meaningful programming in a complex environment. The choice to use both flagship programming and innovative subgrants showcased the strengths of each organization, expanded the stakeholder base, and contributed to the empowerment of the civil society in each country. The regional modality contributed to an expanded output by building networks (both internally and between partners) and shared resources. However, the innovative design and approach of the Programme were neither adequately captured in the Theory of Change nor in the measurement framework. Where the Programme structure was imperfect, the technical expertise and dedication of the Programme Team members ensured success. There are significant opportunities to learn from the first phase — capitalizing on the gains made and strengthening the joint commitment. *(Findings 1, 2, 3, 5, 7)*

RECOMMENDATION 1: In Phase II programme development, the two agencies and the EU should clearly articulate the commitment to flexibility and innovation in programme design and delivery, and to strengthening the agencies' commitment to tackling social norms in this challenging region.

RECOMMENDATION 2: UN Women and UNFPA should reaffirm their commitment to a joint Programme and regional structure, reframing and communicating the nature of the commitment to more clearly articulate the shared goals. This includes reconstructing the 50/50 split approach and reconceptualizing the concept of a shared commitment.

CONCLUSION 2:

The Programme's interventions had a broad spectrum of meaningful impact during the first phase, finding creative ways to challenge stereotypes and social norms.

One of the hallmarks of the Programme was a wide-ranging set of creative interventions that engaged individuals, groups and topics that are less frequently found in the agencies' other programming. These interventions proved largely effective, albeit frequently in localized ways. Direct engagement with fathers, religious leaders, and youth provided individual opportunities for empowerment; there are strong instances of success in these interventions. Curriculum embedded in schools and training institutes for religious leaders and medical professionals introduced the next generation of leaders to gender equality principles. A wide array of innovative social campaigns reinforced the messaging, reaching millions of people across the region.

Small grants to grassroots-led civil society organizations supported innovative and targeted local programming. Some programming choices were less aligned to the larger goals of the Programme or to the context of the countries. *(Findings 4, 5, 6, 8)*

RECOMMENDATION 3: Programming resources should be reframed to ensure optimal allocation.

CONCLUSION 3:

The Programme contributed to longer-term social norms transformation, although there is greater work to do to ensure this contribution is understood and sustained.

The Programme's contribution to the longer-term goal of social norms change can be understood across personal, interpersonal, institutional and societal socio-ecological dimensions, creating an interconnected foundation for change, albeit in localized, small-scale or non-continuous ways. Consequently, this first phase of the Programme can be considered to have 'proved' the model of its design. However, there is significant work to be done before the start of the next phase to refine the Programme's understanding of its approach to transformation, including the role of LNOB principles, a longer-term measurement framework, a realistic financial plan and a clearer sustainability model. *(Findings 9, 10, 11, 12, 13)*

RECOMMENDATION 4: The agencies and the EU should develop a clear, shared approach to understanding, articulating and valuing the Programme's contribution to long-term social norms change. This may mean accepting and valuing a certain amount of uncertainty.

1. Context and Programme Overview

1.1 Context

The three-year regional programme "EU 4 Gender Equality: Together against gender stereotypes and gender-based violence" (EU4GE) strengthened women's and men's equal rights and opportunities by shifting social perceptions, challenging gender stereotypes and increasing men's participation in unpaid domestic and care work. It is the first regional programme covering gender equality in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. EU4GE was funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented jointly by UN Women and UNFPA. The Programme was implemented in the EaP countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

The Programme targeted government bodies, civil society organizations, the private sector, women and men and girls and boys in the six countries. It implemented a series of intervention strategies designed to promote social change and address underlying structural gender barriers and norms, with particular emphasis on changing gender-stereotyped behaviour, strengthening men's involvement in parenting and sharing domestic chores, and reducing the number of victims of violence through targeted violence prevention interventions with perpetrator groups.

The "EU 4 Gender Equality: Together against gender stereotypes and gender-based violence" is complemented by the ongoing EU4GE Reform HelpDesk Programme (2021-2024), a programme implemented by Niras (a consultancy firm) which is focused on creating normative change through policy and legislative action by providing demand driven support to the governments in the EaP Region.[1]

While considerable progress has been made in the region, many challenges to achieving gender equality still exist in these countries. A number of these challenges have been identified over the past several years, including: a high prevalence of violence against women, gender-biased sex selection (GBSS), child marriage, an unequal distribution of household responsibilities among women and men, limited economic opportunities for women, a gender wage gap, and a wave of conservative sentiments spreading throughout the region where a complex interplay of different factors, including patriarchal social norms, confine women mainly to their reproductive and maternal responsibilities.[2]

1 In line with the Council Conclusions of 12 October 2020, and in light of Belarus' involvement in the Russian military aggression against Ukraine (recognised in the European Council Conclusions of February 2022), the EU has stopped engaging with Belarusian authorities. However, it continues to engage with, and has even increased support to, the Belarusian civil society, including within the framework of this Regional Programme.

2 UN Joint Contribution to EU4Gender Equality, Annex 1 – Proposal, p4.

External factors have impacted the delivery of the Programme. Just as the Programme launched in March 2020, COVID-19 began to spread rapidly across the world. The pandemic exposed and exacerbated the gendered impact of pre-existing structural inequalities in social, political, and economic systems. As elsewhere, women in the six target countries were more greatly affected by economic disempowerment and domestic violence.

The pandemic also interrupted many ongoing EU4GE programme activities/initiatives, forcing changes and cancellations in planned activities. At the onset of the pandemic, the Programme's workplan was adjusted, and all activities were transformed into an online/virtual mode. The national quarantines, lockdowns, states of emergencies and travel restrictions imposed in five Programme countries in response to the COVID-19 pandemic caused the cancellation of physical gatherings and events that in turn resulted in delays in the Programme launch and further implementation.[3] These measures also resulted in travel budget savings. In Belarus, despite the absence of a lockdown or any serious restrictive measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, international organizations, most of the CSOs, and private companies switched to remote work and refrained from holding any offline public events and training sessions. The Programme inception phase was extended by three months to reflect the effects of the pandemic on Programme implementation, including additional priorities in Programme countries and difficulties faced during quarantine and lockdowns.

In addition to challenges posed by COVID-19, the Programme's operational environment was characterized by war, unprecedented security concerns and political conflicts in the Programme countries. On 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation launched an invasion of Ukraine**.** The Russian invasion triggered a humanitarian catastrophe in Ukraine and the neighbouring countries that accepted thousands of Ukrainian refugees.[4] The vast majority of these refugees were women and children. The war has also had a major effect on Programme implementation, particularly in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, but also throughout the region. This has meant that many original activities and programming plans were not able to start or continue since the onset of the war. The Programme has also adapted many of its efforts to meet the immediate humanitarian, psychological and physical needs of affected populations.

War and escalating tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan have also delayed and altered programming in the two countries.

In Belarus, the social and political situation has remained fraught since protests erupted after the August 2020 presidential election.[5] High levels of social tension and fear posed difficulties in developing and supporting civil initiatives, conducting in-person group work (programmes for fathers, trainings for specialists, etc.) and implementing correctional programmes for perpetrators. The team in Belarus has had to adapt its programming continuously due to the liquidation of many civil society organization partners, including those promoting gender equality and working to prevent domestic violence. In December 2021, Belarus introduced criminal liability for organizing or participating in the activities of unregistered and liquidated organizations. Many CSO specialists had to leave the country for security reasons, with some maintaining online contact with the Programme.

3 EU4GE First Annual Report to the EU (2021), p9.
4 EU4GE Second Annual Report to the EU (2022), p9.
5 EU4GE Second Annual Report to the EU (2022), p10.

1.2 Programme Overview

The overall goal of the programme is to strengthen equal rights and opportunities for women and men by shifting social perceptions and creating behavioural change relating to gender stereotypes, as well as by increasing men's participation in unpaid care work and the prevention of gender-based violence.

There are 3 Objectives (with respective outputs) attached to this goal:

1) Shifting societal perceptions around gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms which limit women's rights

- **Output 1.1:** Increased awareness of country-specific norms and stereotypes: the public is more aware of rights to reduce the impact of stereotypes and change the roles of men and women
- **Output 1.2:** Actions taken and behaviours changed in key areas by targeted audiences and decision-makers to improve equality of opportunities and realization of women's rights including with regard to employment opportunities

2) Men's involvement in the caretaking of their children and participation in Fathers' programmes have increased

- **Output 2.1:** Targeted citizens, governments, medical providers, and professionals are aware of the benefits of involving men in prenatal check-ups and in fathers' groups
- **Output 2.2:** Men are provided with relevant support, guidance, and means to get involved in caretaking and advocacy of gender-transformative approaches related to parental leave

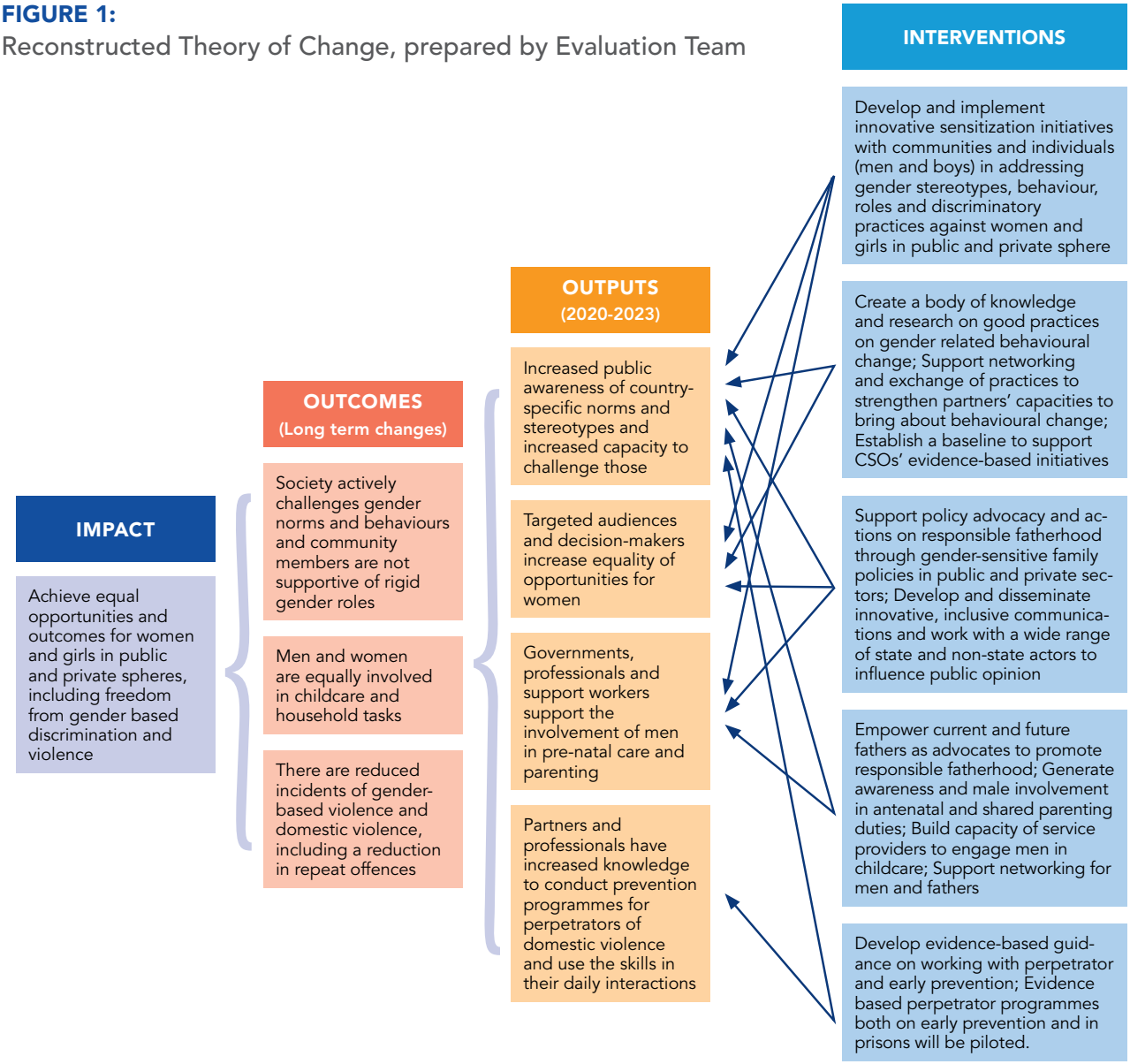
3) Social workers (mediators) and CSOs have increased knowledge and tools on how to conduct evidence-based violence prevention programmes targeting perpetrators of domestic violence.

- **Output 3.1:** Evidence-based violence prevention programmes for perpetrators used in EU member states and a few prevention programmes for perpetrators are being tested in some EaP countries

The geographic scope of the Programme in the six Eastern Partnership countries is outlined above. The demographic scope comprises: women and girls, including those subjected to particular and intersectional marginalization, men and boys, government bodies, civil society organizations, the private sector, and professionals in the respective countries.

The Programme's Theory of Change was reconstructed in the Inception Phase of the evaluation based on interviews and through an Inception Workshop with the Programme Team.

FIGURE 1:
Reconstructed Theory of Change, prepared by Evaluation Team



Target Groups:

- Women and girls, including marginalized women such as Roma women, internally displaced women, LGBTQI, women living with HIV, women with disabilities, and survivors of GBV and DV
- Men and boys, including fathers
- Perpetrators of gender-based violence and youth
- Medical professionals
- Community Leaders and decision-makers
- Private Sector
- Media
- Academia

Assumptions:

(i) Political will of states to enforce gender equality commitments in line with SDGs and international standards are in place

(ii) An integrated approach to prevention is effective to change social norms and attitudes

(iii) Changes in attitude, beliefs and practices will result in changes in behaviours

(iv) Community mobilization targeting women, men, girls and boys and other stakeholders, including traditional and faith leaders, media, civil society is an efficient tool to address root causes of gender inequality and discrimination

Barriers:

(i) Traditional stereotyped gender roles, patriarchal norms and notions of masculinity limit women's rights and opportunities

(ii) Prevailing customs and practices as a root cause of the gender inequality in social and economic spheres, educational outcomes, and representation in public life and decision-making

(ii) Discriminatory practices support male dominance and high prevalence of VAW and impunity

(iv) Women's unpaid work is not recognized and re-distributed

(v) Political commitments are not translated into actions, with insufficient political commitments and resources

(vi) Insufficient public-private partnership for promotion of gender equality and women's human rights

Human Resources

The Programme's Human Resources structure comprises regional and country team members, along with regional and country oversight and advice. The Programme was implemented jointly by UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (UN Women ECARO) and the UNFPA Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (UNFPA EECARO) under the overall supervision of the respective Regional Directors based in Istanbul (Türkiye) and with the support and strategic guidance of the Programme Steering Committee. A Regional Team composed of a Project Manager, Programme Associate, Finance Associate and Communications Officer led the overall programme administration and implemented the regional component. Implementation at the country level was led by UN Women and UNFPA country offices. The objectives and approaches of this Programme placed national ownership at the centre, as all the proposed interventions are intended to build national and local capacity with investment in institutions to lead policy and programme interventions through partnerships and knowledge-sharing networks.

Financial Resources

The budget of this programme was EUR 7,875,000. The European Commission contribution amounted to EUR 7,500,000, which was distributed equally between UN Women and UNFPA. UN Women and UNFPA contributed EUR 375,000 from their core resources over the course of the 3-year period (including the four month no-cost extension), split equally between each agency. The budget has undergone one review and one amendment over the course of the Programme.

1.3 Stakeholder Analysis

The Programme engaged with a broad range of partners, stakeholders and rights holders at national and local levels, and across government, civil society, academia, the media and the private sector. The Programme's approach to stakeholder engagement was quite broad, involving rights holders and other stakeholders in design, modification and capacity building, as well as in the implementation of programming itself.

A list of stakeholders, including partners and rights holders, and their roles in the Programme is attached in Annex 6.

2. Evaluation Purpose, Scope and Uses

2.1 Purpose

This evaluation is the final joint evaluation of the EU4GE project, taking place during the last year of project implementation and covering the period from 1 March 2020 to 28 February 2023. It was jointly commissioned by UN Women and UNFPA. The purpose of the evaluation is to:

- Contribute to effective programming, organizational learning and accountability through a summative approach;
- Provide knowledge management on gender norms and stereotypes in the region where the Programme is implemented;
- Provide specific recommendations as to the priority areas including interventions that require continued support, successful interventions for expansion, and to make recommendations on prioritizing interventions to maximize impact; and
- Offer lessons learned as part of its formative approach.

As set out in the Evaluation Terms of Reference (found in Annex 7) the objectives of the evaluation are to:

- Assess the relevance and coherence of the project at the national and regional level, as well as its alignment with the needs of the intended beneficiaries and with international agreements and conventions on gender equality and women's empowerment;
- Assess the organizational efficiency of the Programme in relation to delivering the desired results of the Programme;
- Assess the effectiveness related to achievement of the Programme results as identified in the project document, as well as unintended outcomes and the added value of the joint programing approach and programming at the regional level;
- Assess the sustainability of the Programme's results;
- Analyze how the human rights-based approach and gender equality principles were integrated in the design and implementation of the Programme;
- Identify and validate lessons learned, good practices, and innovations of efforts that support gender equality and human rights in this area of work; and
- Provide recommendations with respect to future work related to the provision of holistic services, including engagement of women, men, boys, and girls in promoting respectful relationships and gender equality.

The evaluation was envisioned and conducted as both summative and formative, applying the OECD-DAC criteria and a cross-cutting human rights and gender equality lens.

2.2 Scope

This Programme covers both country-specific and regional activities. The evaluation covers both. The evaluation assessed all project outcomes and outputs and covered all planned and implemented activities.

The geographic scope of the evaluation is the six Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) in which the Programme is implemented. While the leadership and regional components of the Programme are based in Istanbul in the regional offices of UN Women and UNFPA, the programming impacts are in the six countries. The Programme operated in an interconnected fashion, with shared Programme documentation, regular team meetings and common programming elements. The regional components, including CSO grants and knowledge sharing efforts, included country team members.

2.3 Uses

The intended uses of the evaluation are to contribute to effective programming, organizational learning, accountability, knowledge management in the region and strategic decision making on future programming.

The targeted users of the evaluation are civil society organizations, government counterparts, regional institutions, development partners in the region, UN agencies and the personnel of UN Women and UNFPA in the Eastern partnership countries, the Regional Offices and the donor (the EU). The chart below aligns users and uses of the evaluation.

Intended User	Effective programming	Organizational learning	Accountability	Regional knowledge management	Strategic decision making
Civil society organizations	X	X	X		
Government counterparts	X	X	X		X
Regional institutions	X	X	X	X	X
Development partners in the region	X	X		X	X
Personnel of UN Women and UNFPA in the Eastern partnership countries	X	X	X	X	X
Regional Office	X	X	X	X	X

3. Evaluation Methodology

3.1 Methodology Overview

Considering the mandate of both UN Women and UNFPA to incorporate human rights and gender equality in all work, and the UNFPA and UN Women evaluation policies that promote the integration of women's rights and gender equality principles and human rights-based principles, these principles were incorporated into the evaluation methodology across all OECD-DAC evaluation criteria.[6] The evaluation followed the principles of gender-responsive evaluations by incorporating a systemic approach to the analysis that included:

- The broader human rights context within the region and its impact on the design and implementation of the Programme;
- Disaggregation of data between groups of stakeholders to identify trends, commonalities and differences of experience;
- Assessing the extent to which rights holders, including those experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, participated in intervention planning, design, implementation and decision-making in the Programme;
- Assessing the extent to which sustainability was built into the intervention through empowerment and capacity building of women and men, and groups of rights holders and duty bearers; and
- Assessing the extent to which a human rights-based and gender-responsive approach was incorporated into the design, monitoring and reporting of Programme interventions.

The evaluation matrix is in Annex 4.

A mixed methods approach using both qualitative and quantitative data including numeric data (baseline and annual reporting numbers) provided by the Programme Team, data provided by informants where available, and data provided by responses to the surveys (see the Questionnaire in Annex 4), was used to triangulate and verify data, increasing the internal reliability and consistency of findings.

The Programme Team advised the Evaluation Team that a follow-up assessment of beneficiaries was planned for the end of programme period to complement the baseline survey conducted in the first year of the Programme. However, that assessment had not been completed by the time of this evaluation and was therefore not available for use.

To the extent possible, the evaluation used a participatory approach to ensure the perspective and voices of stakeholders and beneficiaries were taken into account, paying specific attention to the inclusion of women, individuals and groups who experience multiple or intersecting vulnerabilities, including women with disabilities.

6 The Evaluation Team was guided by the following documents and guidance: Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in 26 Evaluation - Towards UNEG Guidance; UNEG Handbook for Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality Perspectives in Evaluations in the UN System; UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation, Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct.

3.2 Ethical Approach

The evaluation followed the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Ethical Guiding Principles, including consideration of the following: 1) respect for dignity and diversity; 2) right to self-determination; 3) fair representation; 4) ethical protocols for vulnerable groups; 5) redress; 6) confidentiality; and 7) avoidance of harm.

The evaluation's data collection protocol, developed in the Inception phase and followed throughout the data collection process, included protocols for confidentiality and anonymity of informants, transparency of process, an informed consent checklist that included special provisions for vulnerable populations or especially sensitive topics, and a process for safe storage of collected data. The protocol was informed by and aligned to the UN Women Information Security Policy and UNEG guidance with respect to gender-responsive and human rights approaches to data collection and quality assurance.

During the data collection phase of the evaluation, the Evaluation Team met with a series of beneficiaries, including fathers, teachers, health care providers, and displaced women. For fathers and displaced women, the Evaluation Team identified the psychologist or other support person locally attached to each group. In some cases, that person was physically present in the focus group. In the remainder of cases, the person was identified and available for support.

In accordance with the WHO Guidelines for researching violence against women,[7] no focus groups or interviews targeted survivors of gender-based violence, as there was no need to engage this target group as a part of the evaluation's data collection process. However, given that the Evaluation Team met with women beneficiaries in other contexts, including displaced women and women receiving economic empowerment support, the Evaluation Team included safety and confidentiality safeguards. These safeguards included building an Evaluation Team of members with specialized GBV/trauma-informed research and interviewing experience; advanced understanding of local supports; transparency with respect to the purpose, use, storage, and confidentiality protocols for the information; and questions that focused on their engagement with the Programme and not on their personal experiences or traumas.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted across all six countries and at the regional level through a wide array of data collection methods. In Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova, data collection was conducted in-person. In Ukraine, Belarus and at the regional offices and headquarters of the two agencies, all interviews were conducted virtually. Data collection was structured to make best use of informant time and information. Where possible and relevant to the informant, data collection methods explored questions across all criteria. Beneficiary interviews and focus groups were targeted towards exploring the experience and impact of participation in the intervention.

Document Review: Over 100 documents were reviewed, including Programme documents and reports to donors, Programme products, and secondary sources. A list of reviewed documents is in Annex 5.

7 Ethical and safety recommendations for intervention research on violence against women. Building on lessons from the WHO publication: *Putting women first: ethical and safety recommendations for research on domestic violence against women*. Geneva: World Health Organization. February 2016.

A note on sampling: In coordination with the EU4GE Team, the Evaluation Team identified key categories of stakeholders to be interviewed (government, CSO, media, academia, beneficiaries, influencers, UN staff and EC). The EU4GE Team created the list of stakeholders in Annex 6. The Evaluation Team then designed an interview slate of a maximum of 20-25 structured interviews per country. Within these parameters, the Evaluation Team requested that the EU4GE country teams create a proposed interview slate sample of the most relevant stakeholders based on their knowledge of the stakeholders' involvement and comprising stakeholders from each category. The Evaluation Team reviewed the list and added additional interviews based on categorical gaps and additional research capacity. With respect to beneficiaries, the Evaluation Team understood that, particularly in Ukraine and Belarus, no beneficiary participation could be guaranteed. Consequently, the Evaluation Team requested 1-2 focus groups of up to 10 participants in each country if possible. The EU4GE Team worked with partners in each country to develop focus groups. In the end, 18 focus groups were held in the 6 countries, which is more than originally planned.

A similar non-probability sampling method was used for the surveys. The Evaluation Team identified eligibility criteria for survey respondents, and the EU4GE Teams then created lists of individuals within those criteria. The surveys were distributed either by the EU4GE Team or the Evaluation Team to the individuals on the lists, and anonymous responses were sent directly to the Evaluation Team.

Staff and Stakeholder Interviews: 96 interviews were conducted with 160 people (116 identified as women and 44 identified as men), including Programme Team members, implementing partners, CSOs, government partners, media, academia, private sector partners, EC DG NEAR in Brussels, EU delegations in each country and the regional offices of both agencies. These interviews were conducted with individuals representing organizations on the stakeholder list in Annex 6. However, due to ongoing and evolving concerns related to confidentiality and safety for informants in the region, the list does not identify the specific organizations or individuals that provided interviews.

Beneficiaries: 17 focus group discussions with over 150 beneficiaries were held across the six countries. Beneficiaries included fathers, religious leaders, teachers, health care professionals, women, youth, etc.

The evaluation did not include women survivors of GBV as a target group for interviews. However, there were focus group discussions with displaced people and with women with disabilities.

Surveys: Two surveys, the results of which can be found in Annex 3, were conducted across the region and in each country:

- Joint Programme Modality Survey, surveying the broad Programme team in each agency across all six countries. 55 recipients, 22 responses (21 identified as women, 1 identified as a man) (40% response rate).
- Social Norm Influencer Survey, sent out in each country to individuals who participated in the Programme as social norms influencers. 52 recipients, 50 responses (24 identified as women, 24 identified as men, 1 identified as non-binary, 1 preferred not to say) (96% response rate).

3.4 Data Analysis Methods

The evaluation applied a theory-based approach and took a participatory approach that incorporated outcomes mapping. This approach allowed for opportunities for learning while still ensuring accountability for outcomes and identifying options for future decision-making. The evaluation methodology applied the OECD-DAC criteria, including relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability as well as the criterion of gender equality and human rights, which was also incorporated as cross-cutting with the other criteria.

Across the evaluation, a variety of data analysis methods were applied, including a comparative/quantitative analysis of the baseline and periodic indicators, a contribution analysis to understand the change in specific areas, such as the contribution of the Papa Schools to the mindsets of fathers and the contribution of work with religious leaders to their relationships with their parishioners. The work related to transformation applied a socio-ecological analysis.

Three case studies were prepared to support planning for the next phase of the Programme and to provide insight into the application of some of the corporate objectives of UN Women and UNFPA. Case studies were chosen during the Inception phase, including as part of the discussion at the Inception Workshop and in consultation with the Programme team lead and evaluation management group. The criteria for determining the case study topics were that the case studies should (a) meaningfully advance the planning and discussion for the next phase of the Programme and/or (b) provide guidance on a topic/corporate objective that the two agencies are interested in beyond this specific programme.

The three case studies, found in Annex 1, are:

1. Programme adaptability and resilience
2. Inter-agency cooperation and joint programming approach
3. The Programme's contribution to social norms change.

3.5 Evaluation Management Arrangements

The evaluation management arrangements were set out in the evaluation Terms of Reference in Annex 7 and modified at the Inception Workshop. A threefold management structure was established, consisting of a joint Evaluation Steering Committee, a joint Evaluation Management Group, and a multi-country evaluation reference group.

The roles and responsibilities for the management of the evaluation are set out below:

Evaluation Steering Committee (ESC)	• Key accountable body responsible to endorse evaluation report and development of evaluation Management Response • Co-chaired by UN Women ECA Regional Director and UNFPA EECA Regional Director and including the Regional Programme Manager and the UN Women and UNFPA Heads of Offices in the countries where the programme is implemented, as well as the EC Programme Focal Point in Brussels
Evaluation Management Group (EMG)	• Provided oversight and quality assurance to the evaluation process, including clearance of deliverables before submission to the ESC for endorsement • Co-led by the UN Women Regional Evaluation Specialist and UNFPA Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Advisor
Evaluation Reference Groups in each country	• Fostered a participatory approach by participating in field visit debrief, facilitating access of the evaluation team to information sources, providing comments on the preliminary findings and draft final report • Consisted of EU representative and selected key stakeholders in each country
Task Manager	• Oversaw the evaluation process and coordinated the quality assurance process and day-to-day management of the evaluation • UN Women Regional Evaluation Specialist

The evaluation was conducted by CALIBRATE, an independent consulting firm with extensive expertise in gender and human rights-based evaluations. A biography of the Evaluation team is in Annex 8.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Risks

At the Inception Phase, the Evaluation Team identified some risks and mitigation measures. Those are reproduced here, along with the outcomes.

Foreseen Risks	Mitigation Strategies Employed	Outcomes
COVID-19 global pandemic: The COVID-19 pandemic has implications that potentially limit mobility inside countries, international travel, and in-person interviews.	• The Evaluation Team was prepared to use its experience and virtual tools for conducting entirely virtual evaluations during the pandemic and to deploy its national consultants for local engagement. However, COVID-19 did not interfere with the travel arrangements or data collection in the region.	COVID-19 did not prove to be a limiting factor in data collection.
War in Ukraine	• The Evaluation Team consulted with the Programme Team in Ukraine and agreed on a relatively iterative data collection strategy, relying on programme documents, team members and using virtual stakeholder interviews and focus groups for validation where and when possible over the data collection period of January and February. • The Evaluation Team relied on arrangements made by the UN Women and UNFPA offices and conducted interviews through an interpreter.	The Evaluation Team conducted 11 interviews and 1 focus group in Ukraine.
Political Unrest in Belarus	• The Evaluation Team consulted with the programme team in Belarus and relied on programme documents and team members, completing virtual stakeholder interviews in February. • A national consultant for Belarus was engaged by the Evaluation Team to support data collection and analysis. The national consultant conducted interviews directly (virtually) to minimize the concern that participants had for their safety.	In Belarus, the Evaluation Team conducted 6 interviews and 1 focus group.
Short data collection timeline	• The timeline for data collection was short. The Evaluation Team compensated for the shortened timeline by assigning in-person field visits to three international experts, allowing visits to occur to multiple countries simultaneously. • The Evaluation Team stayed in continuous contact with the Regional Programme Team and evaluation task manager to ensure transparency with respect to timing.	In-person data collection took place as planned with no delays. The Evaluation Team visited 4 countries in 3 weeks. There was some delay in interviews at the regional level and in Belarus, but the delays did not significantly impact the timing for the production of the final report.

4. Findings

The Evaluation Team concludes that this is a highly successful Programme. The dedicated expert team met the Programme commitments in a complex and volatile environment, delivering results that participants and partners valued. This first phase of this Programme laid meaningful foundations by testing innovative programming and communication approaches, implemented through an ecological approach to social norms change. There are lessons to learn from elements of the Programme's modality, structure and choices of programming, as well as opportunities to use the successes of the first phase to elevate ongoing global dialogue for understanding and valuing long-term social norms transformation.

4.1 Relevance

The Relevance criterion asks: Is the intervention doing the right things? The evaluation tested the following assumptions:

- The design of the Programme addressed the needs of target groups;
- Beneficiaries were involved in the Programme's conceptualization and design process;
- The Programme was consistent with regional and national strategies on gender equality and EVAW;
- Gender and human rights principles and priorities were integrated into the Programme design and implementation; and
- Adjustments were made in order to adapt to COVID-19, the war in Ukraine and other external factors, as well as the resulting emerging needs of women and girls.

FINDING 1:

The design features of the Programme — flexible, locally adaptable, based in agency strengths — allowed the Programme to remain relevant and resilient across a disparate region and in a time of significant upheaval.

The Programme is relevant "to strengthen equal rights and opportunities for women and men through shifting social perceptions, gender stereotypes and men's participation in caretaking."[8] Gender norms and stereotypes play a predominant role in the experiences of women and girls and the status of gender equality in the six participating countries and in the region.[9]

The overarching goals of the Programme align with the mandates of the two UN agencies and the EU, with national and international commitments made by each country, and with the identified needs and concerns of women and girls in the region. The Programme countries are at varying stages of EU membership. The requirements for becoming a member include commitments towards gender equality.[10]

The baseline study conducted by the Programme in 2020-2021 reinforced the alignment of programme activities and the specific areas of concern, particularly highlighting the need to work directly with men and boys to create social norm change.

The baseline study identified a number of positive findings when it comes to narrowing the gender equality gap. Respondents in each country were more likely than not to feel that there has been progress in gender equality since their childhood. Most respondents also tended not to believe that a person's gender was a factor when it came to professional performance or succeeding in a political role. However, the survey also showed that non-egalitarian perceptions and norms remain pervasive across the EaP countries, with women still bearing most of the burden of household chores and caregiving responsibilities and being held to a "higher standard" than men when it comes to issues like the acceptance of having sex before marriage.[11]

Despite a general alignment on certain areas of concern across the six countries, there were differences, contrasts and conflicts in the region. This presented challenges in terms of ensuring that the Programme and its activities were sufficiently designed for, and remained relevant to, partners, stakeholders and beneficiaries in each of the countries.

The Evaluation Team notes that the Programme's initial design was useful in responding to those challenges. The Theory of Change was detailed enough to support the argument for the link between specific activities and the outputs, and broad enough to allow for flexibility in strategies between countries and at different times in the Programme. The starting intention of the EU and the UN agencies was to embrace iterative design and try small pilots to address gender concerns identified by the local communities. The Programme's selection of interventions aligned with the comparative advantage of each agency, drawing on existing relationships and reputation, which made these interventions more effective. These design structures were not perfect, but overall, the benefits of a well-designed and flexible Theory of Change and a programme design based on existing strengths and a common willingness to 'try new things' allowed for a Programme that was resonant and relevant across a disparate region. More elaboration is presented in the sections below.

This model was tested repeatedly throughout this phase of the Programme, as the region endured the impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic, political turmoil and the liquidation of the civil society organizations in Belarus, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the war in Ukraine, which has had and continues to have devastating impacts in Ukraine while presenting humanitarian challenges across the region. The region has experienced

8 UN Joint Contribution to EU4Gender Equality, Annex 1 – Proposal, p4.

9 Ibid.

10 Ukraine and Moldova are candidate counties, Georgia is awaiting candidacy, Armenia is a member of the Eastern Partnership, Azerbaijan is a partner in the EU-Azerbaijan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and Belarus has suspended participation in the Eastern Partnership.

11 Research on Existing Gender Stereotypes in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – Draft, Annex 2.

a retrenchment of human rights, particularly with respect to gender equality, as increasing conservatism, authoritarianism and concepts of 'traditional values' rise in popularity.

The EU4GE programme was resilient and adaptive in the face of tremendous challenges and upheaval. It is an example of the positive impact that adaptability and flexibility in design and ongoing implementation can have upon social norms programmes.

The Programme Team made effective adaptations to programme activities during COVID-19. They assessed the emerging and changing needs of the target groups through evidence-based approaches. UN Women and UNFPA focused at the country level on holding consultations on the Programme's scope and relevance of the initial planned interventions and results with key stakeholders, including representatives of national governments, civil society organizations, faith-based organizations and private-sector partners. A Rapid Gender Assessment was conducted in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus on the impact of COVID-19. These consultations informed the revision of the Programme's logframe and its country-specific indicators, resulting in adaptations to the Programme.

The Evaluation Team noted examples of technical adaptations during the COVID-19 pandemic. While some planned project activities were postponed or cancelled as a result of the pandemic, many regional and country-level activities were adapted and delivered virtually. This shift to online and virtual services enabled a broader reach to stakeholders that may otherwise not have been able to engage in certain activities. Funds that had originally been allocated for travel and in-person costs were also reallocated to other activities and budget lines.

The Programme also made effective adaptations to the activities in the face of conflict and war. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, the escalation of conflict on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border and escalating political unrest in Belarus has greatly impacted the programming in these countries, with ripple effects felt across the region. The Programme has adapted many of its efforts to meet the immediate humanitarian, psychological and physical needs of affected populations, particularly in Ukraine. As CSOs were liquidated and activists fled Belarus, the Programme used consultancy contract modalities that enabled civil society activists to continue to work remotely with the Programme outside Belarus. Stakeholders in Armenia and Belarus noted that the EU allowed EU4GE programmes to be promoted and implemented without UN/EU logos or project titles in some contexts due to political tensions. This rare flexibility around communication rules enabled the delivery of the core components of the programming to continue.

The flexibility of the donor and Programme Team enabled the success of the Programme during these challenges. Country stakeholders noted that the overarching flexibility demonstrated by UN teams and the donor also empowered stakeholders to adapt their own programming to the changing contexts. The Evaluation Team heard from both donor representatives and team members that a key enabler was the regular and transparent communication between donor and team members. This positive approach allowed for quick decision-making in response to urgent needs.

More details on the Programme's approach to adaptability can be found in Case Study 1 (Annex 1). The design strengths of this Programme provide lessons for the next phase, as the need for Programme resilience in the face of upheaval is likely to continue.

UNEXPECTED RESULT

The polarizing impact of the Ukraine war

The unexpected implications of the Ukraine war are well documented in Case Study 1 on Adaptability. In one instance, the Evaluation Team heard that war was having additional effects through the polarization of political and social views within Georgia:

"The Ukraine war created a polarization that rose up quickly. The regions are very different in their challenges . . . we couldn't predict the impact of the war."

(Georgia, CSO)

4.2 Coherence

The Coherence criterion asks: How well does the intervention fit? The evaluation tested the following assumptions:

- The Programme achieved synergies between UNFPA and UN Women portfolios and the work of the UN Country Teams;
- The Programme achieved synergies between UNFPA, UN Women and country stakeholders and partners; and
- UN Women and UNFPA possess comparative advantages in this area of work as compared to other UN entities and relevant stakeholders.

FINDING 2:

The commitment by both agencies to the joint programme modality contributed to the Programme's successes. There are lessons from the first phase that would amplify these successes.

The Regional Programme was designed jointly by UN Women and UNFPA. The agencies made specific choices about the modality, including a 50/50 split of the administration of the project and a shared Regional Team. According to the Project Proposal:

"UNFPA and UN Women commit to implementing this Programme jointly and developing an implementation mechanism that fosters the joined-up nature of the respective agencies' work, as this is expected to contribute significantly to the aggregate results of the Programme.

The Programme meets the following criteria:

- Common strategic results and needs for integrated programmatic response;
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities, based on comparative advantages of each entity;
- Adequate capacity to implement planned activities, including shared technical expertise;
- Complementary implementation capacities at the country level.

As such, the Programme will be implemented based on co-partnership principles and approaches, with **both UN Women and UNFPA co-leading, operating as one, delivering as one and communicating as one**. [emphasis in original]"[12]

This approach represented a new opportunity for the two agencies in the EaP region in terms of a new model of cooperation on critical gender issues at leadership and operational levels, and a different approach to the division of administrative functions.

The Evaluation Team concluded that the use of a joint programme to tackle this challenging subject matter generated benefits beyond the reach of each agency individually. Each agency chose interventions that represented their comparative advantage in the region. UNFPA chose flagship programming related to work with men and boys, including the Papa Schools and work with health care professionals. UN Women focused their work on empowering civil society through subgrants, building their capacity for supporting innovation and targeting vulnerable groups. Both agencies implemented public campaigns. The successes of the programme interventions can be credited to the expertise that each agency brought to their work. It also provided some exposure for each agency's personnel to the other agency's strengths. The team atmosphere and positive focus on knowledge sharing inside the Programme contributed to this exposure. (See Finding 7 for more on this).

> "The programme did signal a change in the way we were interacting, definitely at the regional level. It was important to send the message through this programme to our country level colleagues that we are working together in a joint way."
>
> **(Joint Programme Modality Survey)**

This approach broadened the stakeholder base for both agencies – both in terms of exposure to each other's 'traditional' partners and stakeholders in the countries, but also in terms of exposure to new regional and international partners. The Programme generated new stakeholders for the two agencies, including communications organizations and media partners who took part in the campaigns, and new private sector partners who became exposed to concepts around family friendly policies. Some new stakeholders, particularly communications organizations contracted by the Programme to do design communication campaigns, described the ways in which they have become gender advocates.

Structurally, the joint programme approach capitalized on some synergies, especially with respect to communications. In Moldova, the two agencies shared a communications resource for the Programme, to strong success. In Georgia, where each agency provided a communications resource, they worked closely together, building on each other's expertise and avoiding duplication of efforts where possible. Regionally, the team structure included a communications officer who supported Programme communications for both agencies.

12 UN Joint Contribution to EU4Gender Equality, Annex 1 – Proposal, p36.

However, the model was imperfect, and there are opportunities to improve on the joint programming aspects of the Programme that could provide significant gains in efficiency and effectiveness. One challenge is that many aspects of the internal UN system do not make joint programming easy, and indeed, even work against it. At a conceptual level, the UN funding model sets up agencies to compete for donor money, stakeholder attention and subject matter 'ownership' and to lead on specific areas of work. At an operational level, each agency has its own reporting and procurement models, uses different IT systems and different performance measures. These built-in barriers require extraordinary steps on the part of agencies to surmount.

This Programme did not fully overcome these challenges. The notion of a 50/50 split did not perfectly manifest itself, either conceptually or administratively. Conceptually, this approach kept each agency inside its own sphere of influence and expertise, perhaps to joint detriment. Each agency chose its activities and remained somewhat siloed from the work of the other agency. While the Programme Teams were exposed to the work of each other's agencies, that is not the same as being fully engaged with each other's work. There was room for more joint work that would have allowed the teams to learn from the innovative approaches of the other agencies.

While the Evaluation Team noted instances of a joint mentality and positive cooperation between agencies at the country level, the Programme was not able to fully surmount the competition between agencies. The Evaluation Team found that there was insufficient common commitment between agencies at the country level, leading to complaints about the division of funds or labour and questions about the appropriateness of either agency working with a stakeholder or on a specific topic area. While these complaints are balanced against many instances of positive relations and more cooperation than existed previously in some of the countries, they were still prevalent enough to suggest that the commitment to cooperation made at the regional level was not adequately communicated or taken on board by the country offices. Rather, the Programme was interpreted as each agency doing 50% of a project, rather than each agency participating in 100% of a project, with defined tasks. Alternately, there was a perception that one agency was required to do more with the money than the other. This is a leadership challenge both in terms of framing the commitment in a more holistic way and communicating the expectation and opportunity of the commitment.

"The roles and division of labour should be more discussed during the programme design. Roles should be based rather on Programme expertise, not modalities."

(Joint Programme Survey)

"The staff lacks belonging to an agency; sometimes siloed by one and blamed by another on not integrating enough…the staffing at national level is also not coherent and structured in a similar way which leads to hierarchy between local coordinator positions for both agencies or even lack of a position in one agency."

(Joint Programme Survey)

"There is a discrepancy of funds between UNFPA and UN Women. The staffing and remuneration was not sufficient to perform the programme tasks."

(Joint Programme Survey)

Administratively, the model of a 50/50 split presented a challenge in the face of the two entirely different operational models of the agencies. The Evaluation Team notes the many benefits of a joint Regional Team leading the project (explored in Findings 3 and 7) and agrees that this element of the model was a good choice. However, the particulars of splitting 50/50 inside that regional team present opportunities to improve. In order for each agency to perform their 50% of the administration, the shared team found themselves with two email addresses, two different reporting systems to satisfy, two procurement models to navigate, and, of course, two different agency mandates. This created a significant amount of duplication and unnecessary effort for the team personnel, whose time could have been better spent elsewhere. It is noteworthy that the efforts of a strong team ensured that these challenges did not appear to impede the successes of the actual Programme. However, it did require time by the Regional Team that could have been better spent, given the relatively small funding envelope. Case Study 2 (Annex 1) explores these themes in more depth.

FINDING 3:

The regional modality offered economies of scale, knowledge sharing and an innovative modality that can be built upon in the next phase.

The regional Programme is a unique element of the joint programming modality. From its inception, the inclusion of the regional structure was viewed as an opportunity to test aggregate results by finding economies of scale, engaging in a broader application of knowledge sharing and network building, and directly administering components of the Programme regionally rather than through a country office.

Complementing country-level efforts, the regional modality promoted multi-country knowledge exchange and sharing of efforts across offices and countries. The Manual on Papa Schools, Compendium on Effective Fatherhood Programmes, Resource Package for engaging fathers in prenatal care, and Training Package for health professionals were key documents that helped to drive the actions of the country Programme Teams during the early stages of the Programme. Additional regional content, including a guide for working with perpetrators of gender-based violence, while not yet regionally implemented, have been readied for application across the region. These common guides allow for rapid scale and reduced duplication of effort in the future.

In Year Three, the Programme expanded the regional modality to include grants for three CSOs to implement cross-country initiatives addressing harmful social norms and gender stereotypes. In addition to the creative and innovative benefits of this approach (explored in Finding 5), the regional monitoring of CSOs made it possible to act centrally and in harmony in all Programme countries. The Evaluation Team heard from stakeholders that country-office monitoring of regional CSO grants would not have been as effective, considering the political tensions between the Programme countries.

"[Regional projects] are a good way to know the different needs of the country offices' demand and interests. Critical thinking is improved – this wouldn't happen with just country by country. It takes you out of your own environment and blind spots. From a regional perspective, it's a bird's eye view. The cross-fertilization across countries, looking at the evolution of, for example, grantee processes. Call for proposals where you have everything under the sun and select the best one where you can ensure cross-fertilization. These are the initiatives that we like, that can be used and upscaled in different countries."

(UN agency interviewee)

Practically, there were unprecedented challenges with the regional construct due to COVID-19 and instability in the region. The potential of the Regional Programme was largely not fully realized until the third year. Due to war in Ukraine, conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and political tensions between Ukraine and Belarus, some country stakeholders refused to participate in initiatives with stakeholders in other countries, hindering regional programming and information sharing amongst CSOs, despite the efforts of the Regional Team. However, by year three, regional sharing had increased, and an all-Programme meeting in Istanbul took place in July 2022. This meeting brought approximately 70 EU4GE project partners together to share information about their projects and good practices for advancing gender equality and social norm change. The Evaluation Team repeatedly heard about the value of the Istanbul meeting from stakeholders across the Programme, particularly in terms of creating a platform for networking and learning about specific programming.

Internally, some aspects of the regional modality presented structural challenges. UN Women does not have an office presence in Armenia, Azerbaijan or Belarus. In order to ensure that the regional subgrants were appropriately monitored on the ground, UN Women hired consultants. This model has mixed results, as it was entirely dependent on the quality and dedication of the consultants. In Armenia, the model worked well. In Belarus, a UN Women representative has only recently been appointed.

Despite these challenges, benefits were reaped from the regional modality. Both implementing partners and UN team members shared that they felt a sense of belonging and joint effort by participating in a Regional Programme despite the hurdles. The external support provided by the Regional Team to Country Programme Teams was particularly felt by colleagues in Belarus. The Evaluation Team heard that the support provided by the Regional Team helped the Belarus Team remain connected to regional projects and the implementation of the overall programme, as other elements of the Belarus programme could no longer be offered.

Phase Two represents an opportunity to capitalize on the benefits of the regional modality, building from the lessons learned from the first phase of the Programme and the products already created. Creativity will continue to be required to ensure that the particularities of the region are reflected but do not create barriers to success.

4.3 Effectiveness

The Effectiveness criterion asks: Is the intervention achieving its objectives? The evaluation tested the following assumptions:

- The expected results of the Programme were achieved;
- Unforeseen results, either positive or negative, were captured and analyzed;[13]
- Innovative strategies and approaches were introduced; and
- The Programme made positive use of pilot programming.

FINDING 4:

In the context of upheaval in the region, the Programme was markedly effective, with several standout interventions across the region.

The Programme largely accomplished its objectives, exceeding its targets for many measures (both quantitatively and qualitatively) within the context of the challenges that arose over the past three years. Stakeholders overwhelmingly had only positive things to say about the outputs and the value of the work, sentiments that were validated by the observations of the Evaluation Team.

As an example, one country stakeholder told the Evaluation Team:

> "The last thing I want to add is to express gratitude for this Programme. It is hard for me to even think about what would happen without the Programme. I'm grateful for its sheer existence. We are incredibly happy to get involved even more in the future."
>
> **(Country Stakeholder)**

There are a great many interventions that were effective within the Programme. The interventions explored below were offered in most or all of the countries and stand out as success stories for the Programme:

Papa Schools: The Evaluation Team found that expansion and adaptation of the UNFPA Papa Schools model was a very effective intervention. The schools provided culturally relevant spaces for fathers, and in some instances, families, to learn about the importance of men's fatherhood responsibilities in a variety of ways. The Programme Team created the Manual on Papa Schools and the Regional Resource Package, based on the Promundo model, which was then tailored to each country. Within countries, the model was further tailored to local contexts.

13 Discussion of unexpected issues and programme responses are included throughout this evaluation, particularly in Case Study 1 on Adaptability. In interviews, the Evaluation Team gathered direct responses to the question on whether anything unexpected occurred in the programme, either positive or negative.

The Evaluation Team noted effective adaptations of the Papa School model in conflict situations. For example, in Ukraine, the TatoHubs (e.g. Papa school models) adapted to effectively meet the changing needs of a population during the conflict. Such adaptations included online sessions, psychotherapy sessions to address war traumas, family and children's activities, and the provision of hygiene kits and shelter for internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The Programme engaged 3,819 men over the 3-year project, well surpassing the Year 3 Target of 1,240. The Evaluation Team heard anecdotes of direct, life-changing impacts upon beneficiaries and their families. See the following testimonials from male beneficiaries of Papa Schools:

"I regret that I didn't get this information before I got married. I feel it should be compulsory. My own thoughts are changing. It makes me want to research more on how to be a better father. I've been accumulating knowledge, psychological research, to help with that. I thought I was a good father; I see I had the knowledge to be a good father, but I was not a good father. I am so lucky I was able to come here."

"When I started, I thought I didn't need it. I have a son, and I am a very good father. Everything is perfect. But the speaker drew a clock on the whiteboard and asked me to draw the daily schedule, and I see that I have only 1 hour with my son. After that, I extended our time together from 1 to 4 hours. I can see the progress – the difference in my son."

"I came from a family where I had a Papa that I didn't want to be like. Abusive. Here, we learn about how to deal with violence. I am a single man, I am not even married, but I really think I will use it when I get married."

These stories of personal impact are complemented by examples of additional social norm impacts at the interpersonal, institutional, and societal levels across the region.

UNEXPECTED RESULT

The success of including mothers in Papa Schools:

The Evaluation Team heard from stakeholders in Ukraine about the benefits of including women and mothers in Papa Schools trainings that were originally meant for men only. As one stakeholder explained,

"We always wanted the group to be for men only and were focused on getting as many men as possible to join the group. At some point, we realised women wanted to join in. We started letting moms into the group. We did most offline but also online. Over time, if I look at statistics, it was a surprising development that this was so positive. People responded so well to the joint sessions. It has become an advantage."

(Ukraine, Papa School Facilitator)

Communication Campaigns and activities

The communication campaigns to promote gender equality and address harmful social norms reached 35.6 million people[14] through a variety of formats, including through conventional media, social media, advertisements, theatre, hackathons, and other initiatives. These campaigns were initiated in a multitude of ways across the spectrum of programme modality, including through in-country programme interventions, regional subgrants, and directly through partner agencies. The scope and number of communication activities ensured that the messages from the Programme were continuously accessible to the public. This is particularly true of the social media campaigns involving TikTok and ChatBot that allowed continuous engagement via the internet among youth.

The campaigns effectively adapted to the changing contexts in order to promote effective programming. For example, as part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Regional Programme created an advocacy campaign on challenging gender stereotypes related to the division of childcare and other unpaid care work responsibilities (as women's care responsibilities increased during COVID-19). As a result of the war in Ukraine, planned campaigns on fatherhood and gender stereotypes were adapted to reflect the realities of war. Campaigns addressed the difficulties of the separation of children from their fathers fighting in the war. Campaigns and other media on gender stereotypes were also adapted to showcase the role of women during wartime.

In the survey targeting social norm influencers implemented by the Evaluation Team, several respondents provided specific examples about why they felt these campaigns and social media initiatives were successful. The shared anecdotes of men, women, and youth reaching out to them to share gratitude and personal examples of how they had been impacted (see Annex 3 for the full survey results).

One country stakeholder explained the value of using TikTok to engage youth in Ukraine:

> "We feel that using TikTok is prevention, and it is better to use prevention than cure. A lot is targeted towards men and boys. What we see in feedback is they want this to be brought into school, and I'd love that. I can see them bringing these ideas and gaining clarity about the unhealthy nature of gender bias and toxic masculinity — they'd get motivated to embrace change. For me, it is an efficient project, and we should continue and go to rural communities, offline, and continue this educational method through the platform they adore."
>
> **(CSO Small grant stakeholder)**

14 As reported in Annual Reports to the EU by the EU4GE Programme Team: 3.3 million (year 1), 10 million (year 2), and 22.3 million (year 3) people reached by communications campaigns. This does not include the no-cost extension period from February to June 2023 and therefore does not reflect final figures.

UNEXPECTED RESULT

The Evaluation Team heard from stakeholders that the extent of their media reach was unexpected:

"Our organization is very good at these PR events, but we didn't necessarily think it would go viral, though! It was surprising that it had over 3 million views on media platforms. You can't always plan that or know."

(Civil society organization, Azerbaijan)

In addition**,** these campaigns also increased the knowledge on gender equality among the private companies contracted for conducting communication campaigns, as they had not previously worked to promote gender equality.

Religious leadership: The Evaluation Team noted that engagement with religious leadership was effective in a variety of ways. The Evaluation Team repeatedly heard about the unique influence and broad societal access that priests, imams, and other religious leaders have in the EaP countries. The Evaluation Team noted innovative activities between faith-based organizations (FBOs) and other institutions on issues of GBV and gender stereotypes, including social workers, armed forces in Armenia, and educational institutions. The Evaluation Team heard that given the heavy influence of religious leaders and organizations within the EaP, having them engaged in the Programming is vital to reaching as many individuals as possible. By both training FBOs as beneficiaries and engaging with them as partners, the Programme has managed to engage the potential for social norm change across all four elements of the model.

The Evaluation Team noted impacts about changing attitudes surrounding GBV and gender issues that religious leaders have gained through this Programme. There is evidence of some social norm changes occurring, particularly at the personal, interpersonal and institutional levels:

"I remember there being some discussions between priests in other regions about whether this training was allowed. There was a case of serious abuse, and I said they needed to divorce – the other brothers were against my view and so we discussed and talked about the seriousness of the violence and the risks, and I convinced them that when safety is an issue, divorce might be the only option. This is a change in mentality with the priests."

(Religious Leader)

"Sometimes a woman asks me to pray to God to bring punishment on her abuser, but we need to do more than prayer. We need to get them real help."

(Religious leader)

"If we reduced or stopped, we would be replaced by radical groups doing the opposite messaging."

(Faith-based organization)

Examples of Religious Leadership Engagement

- In Armenia, the Programme collaborated with the World Council of Churches Armenia Round Table Foundation to train priests and social workers on GBV and men's engagement in childcare.
- In Azerbaijan, gender-transformative content has been embedded within curriculums within the Theology Institute. Several manuals were also produced on gender issues and women's rights.
- In Georgia, a high-level forum with representatives from multiple faiths was held to discuss domestic violence and the role of religious leaders in addressing and preventing it. The Programme also worked with multiple faith leaders to create a booklet with excerpts from the major religious texts that contain reference to gender equality.
- In Moldova, the Programme worked with the CSO IFIS and the Metropolitanate of Moldova to develop a Guide on healthy relationships for couples. Church leaders have been trained on domestic violence and have implemented local awareness raising activities on domestic violence.

Engaging with Youth: The Evaluation Team noted a wide array of effective approaches in engaging youth in the Programme, including through social media, video campaigns, festivals, hackathons, school curriculums and activities, girls' activities, and the empowerment of youth CSOs. The Programme capitalized on this by using effective methods of engaging with youth, often in fun ways: e.g., through entertaining videos, sport and other activities at camp, etc. One innovative example was the use of interactive theatre through the Youth for Social Change Initiative (Georgia), the Insitum Virtues Civilis (Moldova) and the Theatre for Change (Armenia) organizations.

The Evaluation Team heard from country stakeholders about the effectiveness of engaging youth in social norm change. Many stakeholders stressed that young people are more open to change and challenging gender stereotypes than older generations:

> "In the older generation, change is harder. Young people are more progressive and think differently. They have a vision that needs to be shared and supported."
>
> **(Country stakeholder)**

The Evaluation Team also noted that children and youth were also included in some Papa School programming. For example, in Ukraine, children attended Master Classes with their fathers, where they played games, developed skills, and had fun with their fathers while learning about gender equality. This recognition of the importance of activities with children to showcase responsible fatherhood was very effective.

UNEXPECTED RESULT

Gender Equality

One stakeholder from Belarus highlighted that they were surprised at youth interest in gender equality issues, particularly given governmental framing of gender.

"I was pleasantly surprised that we had many youth participants sincerely interested in gender equality and in the programme — especially in the time of darkness for gender equality, when propaganda and authorities tried to misuse the idea and make this idea extremist and anti-governmental."

(Belarus, CSO)

FINDING 5:

The subgrants modality and an innovative approach were key enablers of other successes in the Programme.

The subgrants modality and an overall innovative mindset by the Programme Team and the donor allowed the Programme to include user-centred, grassroots-led and iteratively designed interventions — concepts that are less familiar in conventional UN programming but that are active enablers of social norm change.[15]

The subgrants component of the Programme was led by UN Women, showcasing that agency's strengths in supporting and empowering civil society through creative programming. The subgrants to CSOs enabled country stakeholders to pitch and implement their ideas, based on their own experience and evidence related to the specific and local target audience. Concepts were not rigid; rather, the Calls for Proposals welcomed new, creative or innovative ideas. These resulting programming created new avenues of reaching a larger audience.

Examples of the diversity of programmes supported by the subgrants:

- Mainstreaming gender equality in school textbooks in Georgia (Centre for Civil Integration and Inter-Ethnic Relations (CCIIR), Georgia)
- Addressing gender stereotypes among young girls and boys related to ICT/STEM (I AO ADTI EDUCAT, Moldova)
- Preventing and eliminating gender bias through a TikTok campaign with influencers (Pislyazavtra NGO, Ukraine)
- Addressing gender-biased sex selection (Armavir Development Center NGO, Armenia)
- Supporting the employment and parental rights of vulnerable women (Positive Movement, Belarus)

15 See: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0140673614616834 The Lancet Vol 385, Issue 9977, 18-24 April 2015, Pages 1580-1589 "From work with men and boys to changes of social norms and reduction of inequities in gender relations: a conceptual shift in prevention of violence against women and girls" Jewkes, Flood, Lang.

The regional approach to the subgrants modality (discussed in Finding 3) enabled CSOs to step beyond the traditional roles they play with the country offices and gave them access to a network of colleagues across the region. The Year 3 Call for Proposals specifically focused on cross-country initiatives, enabling broader relationship building across the countries.

The Evaluation Team also noted that it was through the subgrants modality that the Programme offered targeted programming in line with Leave No One Behind principle, including women and girls with disabilities, women and girls that have experienced drug/alcohol addiction and incarceration, sex workers, LGBTIQ individuals, and internally displaced people and other vulnerable groups impacted by war.

The Programme's innovative mindset was not limited to the subgrants modality. Across the Programme, the agencies encouraged an innovation-based approach to user-centred design, piloting and learning, and creative solutions.

Unconventional Teaching and Communication Tools: The Evaluation Team noted the use of many examples of unconventional teaching tools to reach targeted audiences. These innovative approaches often relied on fun or otherwise interesting ways of reaching different groups of people:

- Interactive theatre in several countries was used to teach about gender roles, responsible fatherhood and women and girls' empowerment — aptly referred to as "edutainment" by a country stakeholder.
- Ukrainian TatoHubs offered unconventional "Master Classes" for fathers and their children to take part in together, including yoga classes, cooking classes, doll making, etc.
- The Forest School from Azerbaijan offered both "youth" and "father" camps promoting gender equality, responsible fatherhood and the value of girls.
- Hackathons (Armenia, Azerbaijan) were an innovative communication technique that enabled the Programme to engage with young people on brainstorming responses to difficult problems.
- The Pislyazavtra NGO (Ukraine) led the creation of the educational assistant (ChatBoT) on Telegram to promote greater understanding of gender equality, gender-based discrimination and gender stereotypes.

FINDING 6:

Certain elements of the Programme warrant a revised approach for Phase Two.

Phase I of the EU4GE Programme contained 'pilot programme' elements that enabled the testing of innovative and creative approaches to social norm change. The development of Phase II of the Programme presents an opportunity to:

- Modify or remove elements of the pilot phase that did not fit as well into the mandate;
- Refocus pilot programme initiatives to be more impactful, institutionalized and scaled up; and
- Design initiatives that respond to the changing priorities and circumstances of the region and individual programme countries

The Evaluation Team highlights the following areas:

Perpetrators: The Evaluation Team acknowledges that work with perpetrators is an important element of social norms change, especially regarding efforts to address GBV. The Evaluation Team noted progress in this area, including:

- The development of Regional Guidance on Working with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence and Early Intervention, Eastern Partnership Region.
- Country Reviews relating to aligning with perpetrator programmes: e.g., a review of national policy and legislation (Armenia); of international best practices (Georgia); and of the National Perpetrators Response Mechanism (Ukraine).
- 11 stakeholders from Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine attended a study tour to Scotland to learn about the Caledonian model on ways to improve methods of working with perpetrators of GBV. Additionally, 74 people attended an online workshop highlighting lessons learned from the study tour.
- Development of training programmes for those working with perpetrators of DV (Armenia, Georgia, Moldova).

However, the Evaluation Team also observed that this was a challenging area for the Programme. In the Programme design, Objective 3 is solely dedicated to a focus on programming for perpetrators of domestic violence. The original expectation of this objective was that violence prevention programmes already implemented in EU member states would be piloted in some EaP countries.[16] This objective, while aligned to the overall goal, did not align to the context or readiness for this work across the region. With the exception of Georgia, it appears that none of the other countries were fully ready to actually deliver programming, either because the civil society is not developed sufficiently in this area or because there is insufficient adoption of protections for survivors, such as effective legislation and services. The objective and plan were revised in Year 1 reporting to reflect this reality. Over the course of the three years, actual programming was only delivered in Georgia, for 275 perpetrators. In the evaluation interviews, many stakeholders questioned the role and value of this work, particularly given the pressing realities of the region and the possibility that fewer funds would be allocated to Phase II of the Programme.

Health Care Professionals: The Evaluation Team observed that the Programme engaged with healthcare providers to varying degrees across the Programme countries. The Evaluation Team noted positive impacts arising from these engagements, particularly regarding training and education for healthcare providers on how to better include fathers in pre- and post-natal care.

A promising model emerged in Azerbaijan, where accredited courses are offered through an online portal that allows healthcare providers across the country, including in rural and remote regions that are typically underserved, to access training. The courses were also widely promoted to healthcare professionals via talk shows and videos with prominent health professionals.

The Evaluation Team recommends that in Phase II, efforts should focus on advocating for the conversion of optional healthcare provider curriculums and professional development models to mandatory elements of healthcare training and licensing. Support for mandatory training for healthcare professionals emerged in interviews, particularly in Armenia:

> "Here, the Papa School programme is accredited, where the health workers take courses to learn how to train papas. The pregnancy consulting would be great to make mandatory."
>
> **(Armenia, Government Official)**

16 UN Joint Contribution to EU4Gender Equality, Annex 1 – Proposal, p31.

Because most trainings relating to fatherhood and GBV are optional, doctors holding and promoting stereotypes can self-select out of these trainings. The Evaluation Team heard from stakeholders that stereotypes held by healthcare providers can act as a block to the efforts of the programme:

"Our health professionals only speak with mothers and grandfathers, not fathers. Sometimes they even ask fathers to leave to speak with mothers only."

(Armenia, Government Official)

"Doctors are not all ready to work with the fathers, and fathers likely are not ready to be totally part of this."

(Armenia, Government Official)

"The majority of medical professionals are not ready for these topics and are very conservative."

(Belarus, CSO)

A mandatory introduction of these concepts in medical school and continued education could potentially help to challenge these stereotypes earlier in a doctor's career. Mandatory training and curriculum content would also largely contribute to sustainability and enhanced ownership of these initiatives to government and state institutions.

Normative advocacy work: There appears to be a complex, interlinked relationship between normative and advocacy work and programmatic interventions in the mandate of the two agencies and in their approaches to pursuing their mandates. There is bound to be overlap in normative efforts, which tend to be longer-term, and specific intervention planning. In other words, it would be unsurprising to find that there are multiple and concurrent programmes that support or include the same legislative change.

The Evaluation Team heard from multiple informants and verified through the Programme documents that normative advocacy was intended to be a small portion of the EU4GE: Together against Gender Stereotypes and Gender-based Violence Programme. Indeed, there are other programmes operating within the region and in each country that are specifically dedicated to this work. The EU4GE Reform HelpDesk Programme (2021-2024), is for example focused on creating normative change through policy and legislative action by providing demand driven support to the governments.

In the case of this Programme, the Evaluation Team heard repeatedly that normative and advocacy work was an area of the EU4GE Programme that occupied a lot of staff time and expertise. This work spanned advocacy within both the public and private sector. The Evaluation Team heard that some of the normative work aligned with other programming in the agency. For example, there are multiple programmes in the region working on legislative and policy changes for parental leave.

Given the large number of interventions in a relatively small programme — and while the interventions were aligned to the Programme outcomes — the extent of the normative efforts did not entirely fit with the rest of the approach of this Programme and, at least anecdotally, took more staff time than it yielded benefits. Future programming would benefit from an alignment of normative and advocacy efforts across the agencies and UN Country Teams (UNCTs) to reduce duplication and ensure effective use of resources.

Normative Work Examples	
Azerbaijan	UNFPA has undertaken longstanding advocacy to pass a law granting two paid weeks of paternity leave. For example, three governmental representatives and representatives of two CSOs participated in the Study Tour to Sweden to learn about Swedish experiences relating to parental/paternity leave legislation. Within Azerbaijan, Programme stakeholders participated with lawmakers in a TV programme entitled "How to Protect Gender Equality in the Family" and a radio show entitled "Parental Leave Based on Gender Equality", both of which discussed the benefits of gender equitable parental leave policies.
Georgia	UNFPA has undertaken much work on paternity and parental leave advocacy, including adapting the Equimundo animated video "It's about time: case of parental leave," creating a compendium on family-friendly policies for government and private sector representatives (with UNJP4GE), and strengthening partnerships and increasing advocacy with private sector companies on increasing the uptake of paternity/ parental leave.
Ukraine	UNFPA undertook advocacy in support of a paid 14-day paternity leave for fathers.
Armenia	UNFPA is revising maternity school courses and introducing UNFPA guidelines to involve fathers in prenatal and postnatal care in the Reproductive Health Strategy and Action Plan for 2022-2026. They are also supporting the adapted version of the Papa School Manual being introduced in the curriculum for the Continuous Medical Education course of the National Institute of Health.

4.4 Efficiency

The Efficiency criterion asks: How well are resources being used? The evaluation tested the following assumptions:

- Resources at the country and regional level were allocated strategically; and
- The joint programme modality supported efficient and effective results.

FINDING 7:

Team members from both agencies and at the regional and country levels are important contributors to the success of this Programme.

The positive experiences that partners and stakeholders had with this Programme can be meaningfully attributed to the personalities, expertise, and efforts of UN personnel. This finding was reported widely to the Evaluation Team and validated by observation. The Evaluation Team heard repeatedly about, and agrees with, the strengths of the Programme Team as technical experts, strong leaders and positive co-workers. These findings pertain to team members at both the regional and the country level.

The Evaluation Team noted elements of teamwork that supported synergy inside the Programme at all levels. The Evaluation Team heard from many stakeholders that the staff at the regional office, including the financial and communications team, were vital to the success of the Programme. Similarly, the Country Programme leads were viewed positively by stakeholders. See comments from country stakeholder interviews and UN Staff member responses to the Joint Programming Modality Survey:

"We are thankful for people on the ground – UNFPA and UN Women. They do the work."

(Country stakeholder)

"UN Women brings a powerful voice and provides expertise and access to the international community that no one else could."

(Country stakeholder)

"UNFPA are not just managers, but also experts. They know about the issues and the solutions – they are real experts in these issues."

(Country stakeholder)

"Both agencies utilize considerable knowledge globally, regionally and from the local level, and play a facilitating and convening role to involve all actors in the achievement of stated results."

(UN staff member)

Internally, team members commented favourably on the team approach and noted regular positive communication with and access to their peers across the region and a shared dedication to the work.[17] However, some interviewees also felt that the Programme demonstrated undue reliance on the skills, expertise and overtime provided by the Programme Teams – masking some of the potential impacts of flaws in the structure and operations. Country staff reported having to work beyond the time period allotted for the Programme and needing to mobilize administrative and technical support from office personnel who were not actually engaged in this project. As UN Staff member respondents to the Joint Programming Modality survey explained:

"The dedication of both the regional and country teams helped overcome [challenges,] which however results in unhealthy work-life balance and less job satisfaction."

"It was sometimes difficult to mobilize administrative and technical support within the office as office staff (not dedicated specifically for the project) have a lot of other priorities. Additionally, the GBV component required engagement of GBV colleagues who were also overwhelmed by their own responsibilities. This was overcome by unpaid substantial overtime, additional efforts in networking and follow-up with colleagues."

17 See, in particular, Joint Programme Survey questions 16-18.

FINDING 8:

The communications approach was effective but not optimally efficient.

Communications are a key feature and a success story for the Programme. The many unique forms of communications allowed the Programme to reach both global and targeted audiences in many ways, through TikTok programming, Chatbots, murals, theatre performances and puppet shows, festival promotions, hackathons and other innovative approaches. Through communication activities over the three-year programme, over 35.6 million people[18] across the region were reached by messages of equality, elimination of harmful gender stereotypes, prevention violence against women and girls, and increasing men's involvement in fatherhood [refer to Finding 4 for more details]. Many of the storytelling products were used by the agencies and the donor to advance knowledge beyond the scope of the Programme.

UNEXPECTED RESULT

Father Festivals

The Evaluation Team heard from multiple stakeholders about the unexpected success and popularity of Father Festivals and associated communication campaigns:

"We did not expect that Father/Daughter events would be that popular. Fathers are more conservative. Fathers are working, they have financial issues and don't really have free time. After announcing the festival, many people called us. We had limited places and had to turn people away."

(Civil society organization, Azerbaijan)

"The way that fathers responded so positively, particularly in regions we didn't expect. I was surprised especially in the Southern region, which is patriarchal, to have so many men involved. So, it wasn't that I thought it would fail, we had other things in the past where we had Festivals and things with fathers and girls. But just the amount of people who came and who seemed to enjoy it!"

(Civil society organization, Azerbaijan)

"People were surprised by the Father's Day celebrations, and we were surprised by how much they enjoyed it!"

(Armenia, Media)

Inside the agencies, the Evaluation Team noted synergy between the two agencies with respect to communications. For example, in Moldova, the two agencies took on a shared communications resource. In Georgia, the two agencies allocated a communications officer from each agency to work jointly. At the regional level, the Programme Managers noted excellent formal reporting and a strong working relationship that included regular and transparent

18 As reported in Annual Reports to the EU by the EU4GE Programme Team: 3.3 million (year 1), 10 million (year 2), and 22.3 million (year 3) people reached by communications campaigns. This does not include the no-cost extension period from February to June 2023 and therefore does not reflect final figures.

communications, including regular biweekly meetings with the Programme Manager in Brussels. UN Team Members had overwhelmingly positive views on the vital role of the regional leads and communications staff in ensuring communications success:

- In response to a question about the main success factors of the programme in the Joint Programming Modality Survey, one UN Team member listed "skillful communication officer and willingness to create out of the box communication activities."
- Interview: "The regional component was really helpful and supportive — especially with respect to finances and communications." (UN Team Member)

These positive outputs and efforts are to be commended, particularly in the face of a flawed approvals process for communications and promotional materials. This is a criticism to be considered both by the agency regional offices and the donor. Team members and partners alike expressed frustration with the multi-tiered approvals process, describing the process as complicated and causing unnecessary delays. Anecdotes from country offices and partners revealed a disconnect between the EU/regional office requirements and responsive, locally applicable, modern communications approaches and tools. Examples provided anecdotally include:

- Requiring key stakeholders to be listed in short promotional posts, using up the character limits and limiting what can be said in the post;
- Requiring unaffiliated, third parties to include stakeholder lists in their posts about programmes;
- Requiring exact logo measurements, even when this does not fit in the medium (e.g. Having to make the text on a postcard very small in order to fit a disproportionately large logo);
- Requiring the creation of communication materials in routine, internal trainings, where there is no external promotion involved; and
- Having to write materials in English in order to be approved by the Regional Team, when the materials itself are being sent out only in the language of the country. This then required redrafting in most countries.

The positive results of the communications work in this Programme is impressive and the efforts of the team can be used more wisely in the future with a reconsidered approach to communications, including a realistic assessment of how communications methods have changed content and what elements of the content already prepared can be reused.

FINDING 9:

A lot was accomplished inside the resource envelope, but the broad reach of the Programme resulted in some use of resources beyond the Programme's financial allocation.

The overall budget for the Programme was €7,500,000 split between six countries and the Regional Team over three years. While this is not an insignificant amount, nor is this a large budget when stretched over multiple activities and small grants. The Programme's current (not finalized) delivery rate is high– 83% for UNFPA and 90% for UN Women with an understandable dip to 71% for Belarus. This delivery rate suggests that the Programme was appropriately funded for the work.

However, the Evaluation Team heard repeatedly that, both inside the UN agencies and with partner organizations, in order to accomplish the Programme outputs, more resources were required than were provided through the Programme itself. As one UN Team member respondent explained, ***"The lack of funding was compensated by the synergy with other projects."***

With respect to the UN agencies in the countries, this meant that staff not allocated to the Programme were pulled in, with communications officers and other Programme staff putting in extra hours. The same can be said at the regional level, where staff were using extra hours to operate across multiple reporting systems. At the country level, the Evaluation Team heard repeatedly that budgets for other programmes were stretched to include support to this Programme or that this Programme was used to add onto or otherwise support other programming. This use of funds is an understandable approach allowing country offices to support all their valuable work but can make it challenging to assess whether a particular programme is adequately/appropriately resourced.

"…a very small budget and a lot of work…the project has been understaffed and so we have to use our other project staff to support it"

(Country Programme Team)

With respect to partners, the Evaluation Team heard across multiple countries that civil society partners provided more labour and resourcing than they were financially allocated, both in the delivery of programming and in meeting the reporting and communications expectations. It is not uncommon for UN agency programmes to expect that civil society partners will contribute their own resources to projects for administration and oversight. However, in the context of small grants and innovative partnerships, this expectation may be disproportionate to the amount of the grant or the ability of a grassroots organization.

"The perception of international grants is that it is a lot of money but it was very small… it was more effort and time for us than we were compensated for"

(Programme Implementing Partner)

It should be noted that this evaluation is not a financial audit, and this finding is anecdotal rather than as a result of a spending review. However, the concern was raised repeatedly by the Programme Teams and partners in each country. A realistic understanding of how much funding is required to achieve the outputs will be critical for planning in the next phase.

FINDING 10:

The Programme's Phase I measurement approach captured the numbers and stories of participants in the Programme. There is room to use the successes of the first phase as an opportunity to generate conversation between agencies and with the donor about valuing the links between interventions and outcomes, the value of innovation and pilots, and the theory of long-term social norm change.

"The activities do not link to the results…but I haven't seen any UN partners who have successfully suggested how to measure the changes at the social norm level….an experiment only works when you have a clear focus and you understand what you want at the end."

(UN agency interviewee)

The evaluability assessment in the Inception Phase reviewed the Programme's measurement framework and logframe and rated the Programme indicators as adequate-strong, providing sufficient data for measurement but lacking in measurability and specificity in some areas. The logframe used over the three years successfully allowed the Programme to count the number of people participating and engaging with the Programme interventions. To enhance the counts provided by the logframe measures, the Programme made good use of qualitative, storytelling and programming highlights as a way of describing, understanding and sharing the impact of the interventions. The Evaluation Team heard from the Programme partners, EU country delegations and the DG NEAR office that the storytelling aspects of the successes provided insight into progress and were used to communicate the Programme's progress to a wider network.

However, there is a series of disconnects in the measurement approach, which create an unclear understanding of the expected impact at the country team and partner level and an inability to have meaningful or realistic planning discussions. These issues are broader than and largely beyond the work of Programme itself — between outputs (counting) and impact, between conventional programming and pilots/innovation, and between the current impacts and the long-term contributions to social norm change.

a) Between outputs and impact

The logframe contains very few measures that value the steps from interventions to outputs to outcomes, as per the aspiration in the Theory of Change. As is evident in Figure 4 below, there is no meaningful measurement link in the logframe between the counting measures for the interventions at the output level and the higher-level indicator. This may be as much of an issue with the Theory of Change as it is with the measurements chosen. Both elements will need to be reconciled at the start of the next phase, to ensure that the Programme is capturing and measuring the impacts of its work.

FIGURE 2:
Snapshot of Objective 1, Outputs and Indicators[19]

Result	Indicator
Objective 1: Shifting men and boy's societal perceptions and behaviour around gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms in favour of equal rights and opportunities for women and girls.	**Indicator 1a:** Number of legal and policy frameworks adopted to change gender discriminatory behaviours and attitudes in support of equal rights and opportunities for women and girls, and improved men's caretaking practices.
Output 1.1: Increased awareness of country specific norms and stereotypes: the public is more aware of rights to reduce the impact of stereotypes and change the roles of men and women	**Indicator 1.1a:** Number of women, men, girls and boys with an increased understanding of gender stereotypes and gender equality **Indicator 1.1b:** Number of women and men, girls and boys out of those covered by local initiatives, who are acting as local advocates
Output 1.2: Actions taken and behaviours changed in key areas by targeted audiences and decision-makers to improve equality of opportunities and realization of women's rights including their employment opportunities	**Indicator 1.2a:** Number of knowledge products developed and disseminated in the EaP region to support evidence-based programming and initiatives in changing gender stereotypes, patriarchal norms and behaviours **Indicator 1.2b:** Number of regional knowledge sharing actions targeting CSOs supported by the programme **Indicator 1.2c:** Number of transformative programmes and initiatives implemented by CSOs addressing gender stereotypes and behaviour change (targeting youth, faith-based and grassroots organizations) **Indicator 1.2d:** Number of men and women, boys and girls reached by CSO actions

All UN agency programming is nested inside country and corporate reporting and should inform those measurements. While this Programme is used to contribute to UNSDCF reporting in countries and to regional (Strategic Note) and global (Strategic Plan) reporting for each agency, other than the SDGs, those measures do not form a direct part of the measurement chain laid out by the logframe. As a result, there is not a neat connection between the Programme activities and ambitions and the overall goals of the agencies and country UNCTs. This is perhaps a missed opportunity. There are gender and social norms commitments at all levels that can provide guidance and cohesiveness, and which may also compel a greater internal dialogue about the long-term value of social norms change and the contribution of individual programming.

19 Annex II logframe revised Nov 2021 Programme Team, table prepared by Evaluation Team.

b) Between conventional programming and pilots/innovation

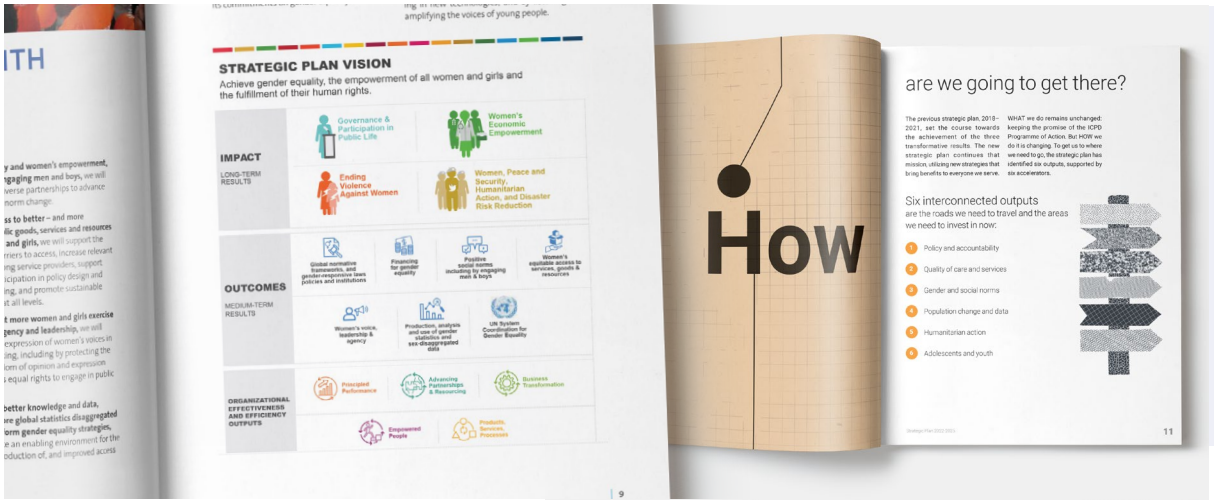
Neither this Programme nor the two agencies more broadly have agreed upon frameworks for measuring pilots and innovative programming, or for measuring this Programme's impact on long-term transformation. Neither of these concepts is aligned well with the conventional measurements of development programming, the expectations of donors, or funding cycles.

However, the immediate-term value of innovation and pilots is an important element of this Programme. Many of this Programme's positive outputs came from innovative, short-term interventions and, while they will have been part of the participation counting measures, there are no measures that count the value of the 'attempt' and the lessons learned.

Both agencies are committed to different approaches, and both have global flagship programmes dedicated to innovation.[20] Both of these agency approaches reference high level performance management concepts – UN Women says "evaluate gender-responsive impacts by using a data-driven approach" and UNFPA says "scaling innovations that have proven to be effective and impactful." These are important concepts, and the Programme Team would be encouraged to connect with global teams to seek guidance on converting these concepts into measures.

c) Between the current impacts and the long-term contributions to social norm change

Across the two agencies, there are social norms change commitments and measures at the country, regional and headquarters levels. In each country, there are UNCT measures that speak to social norms change with respect to gender equality, and at a global level there are commitments on social norms change at and among the UN development agencies.[21] This Programme and its outputs will be an important contributor to those measures and to ongoing global work to capture the value proposition of long term social norms change. Finding 13 explores a model for understanding programming contributions to long term social norms transformation.



UN Women Strategic Plan 2022-2025 identifies positive social norms including by engaging men and boys as a cross-cutting systemic outcome with medium-term results expected.

UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025 identifies Gender and Social Norms as one of six interconnected outputs.

20 UN Women has an Innovation Facility, see: https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2019/Innovation-for-gender-equality-en.pdf; and UNFPA has an innovation approach, see https://www.unfpa.org/innovation.

21 UN Women Strategic Plan 2022-2025, see: https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2021/UN-Women-Strategic-Plan-2022-2025-brochure-en.pdf; and UNFPA Strategic Plan, see https://www.unfpa.org/strategic-plan-2022.

The Programme Team and the agencies are cautioned against rigidity in their search for a meaningful measurement framework for long-term social norm change. Rather, they are encouraged to seek alignment of data to a larger theoretical concept and theory of change (TOC), conducting contribution-style analysis with respect to programming and looking to larger data points about social norm change conducted at long-range intervals such as the baseline survey and its follow up in this Programme, as well as regular IMAGES surveys and other relevant data.

As discussed above, there can be levels of measurement to capture change at each stage of a TOC. Valuing innovation and iteration and understanding how social change works is critical to getting it right in a measurement framework. These concepts have not been fully perfected anywhere and the Programme is encouraged to find support at the global level and to connect to other programmes and projects to deepen the measurement theory and links. Likewise, the agencies are encouraged to view this already impactful Programme as presenting a unique opportunity to use a successful Phase 1 as a testing ground for a meaningful, realistic, and innovative discussion on how to value programming that is less traditional.

4.5 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment / Human Rights

The Gender Equality and Human Rights criterion asks: Does the intervention work for transformation in gender equality and human rights? The evaluation tested the following assumptions:

- The Programme fostered the participation of CSOs and women's organizations;
- The Programme achieved resulted for targeted vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities;
- The Programme provided accountability and protection to its beneficiaries; and
- The Programme made a meaningful contribution to transformative social norms change.

FINDING 11:

Leave No One Behind is not cross-cutting.

The Programme proposal states: "It emphasizes including No One Left Behind as the main overarching principle and targets improving the lives of women and girls, men and boys and enabling new practices in the institutions involved or targeted by the actions, such as prenatal care services and actors involved in violence prevention programmes targeting perpetrators."[22]

During the Inception Workshop for the evaluation, as a part of the reconstruction of the Theory of Change, the Programme Team identified 'marginalized women such as Roma women, internally displaced women, LGBTIQ, women living with HIV, women with disabilities, and survivors of GBV and DV' as target groups. Internally displaced women were a target group that was already significant in numbers in the region, and which grew exponentially across the region during the Programme period as a result of the war in Ukraine.

22 UN Joint Contribution to EU4Gender Equality, Annex 1 – Proposal, p9.

Despite the proposal statement, the Evaluation Team found no evidence that the LNOB principle was cross-cutting across the Programme or that this was an expectation, despite the statement above.[23] Most of the Programme's interventions were, at best, inclusive in an 'ad hoc' manner, in that they did not seek to specifically exclude targeted groups, where it made sense.

That is not to say that the target groups did not have any programming. The subgrants process provided funding for interventions that targeted:

- Women with disabilities (GE, AR, AZ, BY, MD),
- Survivors of GBV (GE),
- Internally displaced women (UA, MD)
- Women with addictions and women recently imprisoned (BY)
- Women living in rural areas (AZ)

As a result of the changing context, flagship programming such as the Papa Schools pivoted to respond to the needs of target groups, in particular in Ukraine where Papa Schools moved quickly to support internally displaced families and women survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. The Evaluation Team noted that this pivot and the localized and intensive nature of the subgrants allowed for very direct engagement and support of the target groups.

It is an open question as to whether a Programme that is seeking to impact broadly-held negative social and cultural norms should necessarily require that the interventions include cross-cutting LNOB principles. It is arguable that the answer is no, that the broad approach actually taken by the interventions in this case is required to make an impact in social discourse and in the actions of men and boys. In other words, the Evaluation Team does not consider the fact that LNOB was not cross-cutting and instead was implemented as specific interventions in localized ways to be a concern. It will be important for the Programme Team to determine the priorities and treatment with respect to LNOB principles.

FINDING 12:

The Programme's interventions have built a foundation for social norms transformation across personal, interpersonal, institutional and societal norms.

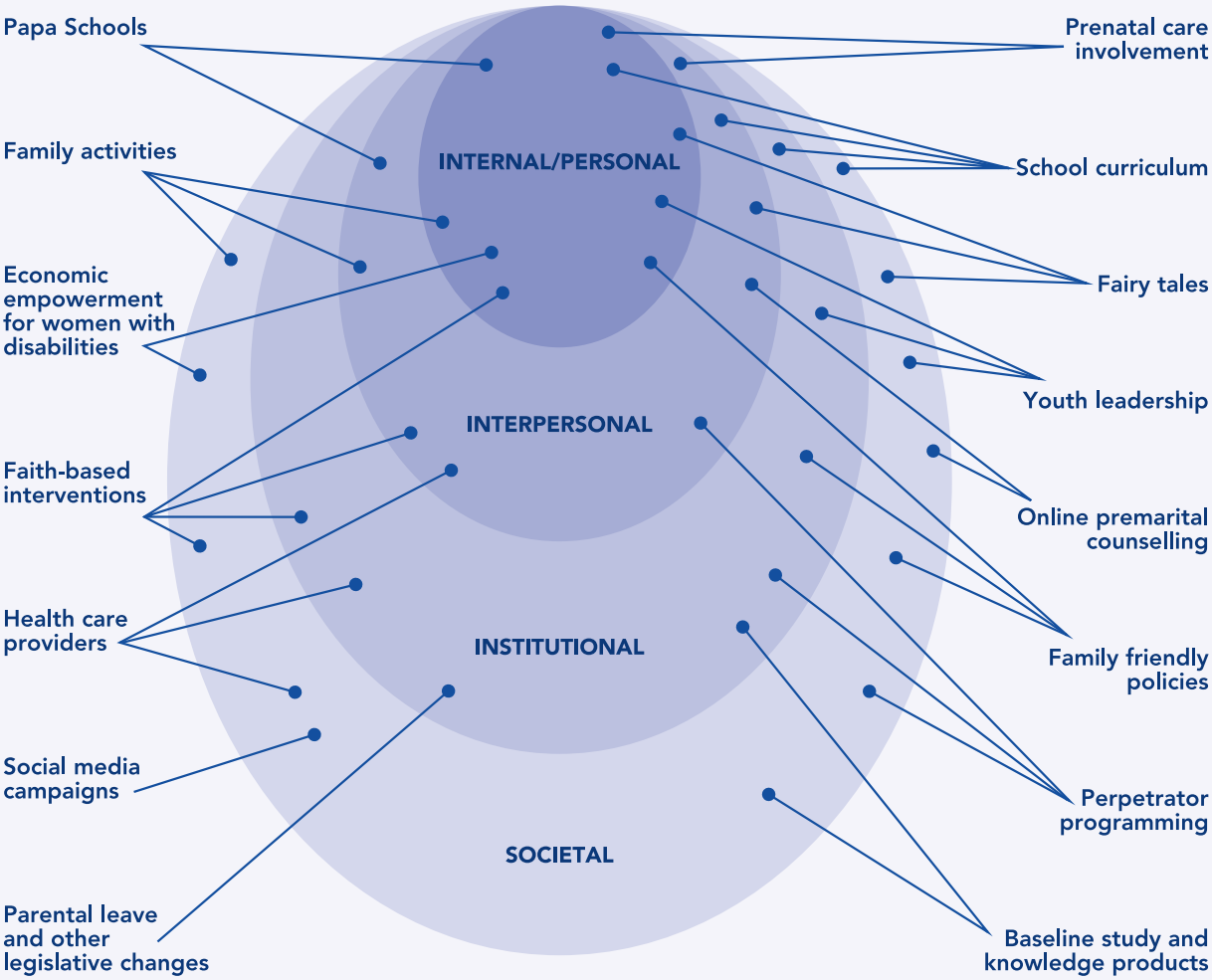
Changing social norms, through changed human behaviour and social constructs, is a long-term goal beyond the scope of any one programme, including this one. Consequently, the critical question is, how does each programme individually contribute to an overall movement of social norm change? Each agency has a larger outcome in their respective strategic plans that speaks to social norms change, but the underlying theories are not well-established or commonly agreed upon, either in academic literature or between international development agencies, including between UN Women and UNFPA. Rather, this is an area of ongoing and iterative growth.

23 Note that programme partners were asked this question directly by the Evaluation Team.

This is not merely an academic concern. A lack of understanding of the broader goals of the Programme was raised by Programme Team members and partners/stakeholders, especially with respect to an ability to understand relationships between individual interventions and the long-term picture. Likewise, this lack of a common 'agreement' at the global level prevents deeper dialogue with donors and inhibits creative long-term thinking. The Evaluation Team understands that there are efforts within each agency to wrestle with and refine this challenging concept, attempting to strike a balance between the need for some degree of certainty and the kind of innovative, iterative and flexible approach that an area such as social norms requires.

The Programme itself attempted to define its contribution through its Theory of Change (then revised during this evaluation's Inception Phase). While the theory makes plausible links from the interventions to longer term goals, it is not directly or overtly tied to a broader theoretical approach. In Case Study 3, the Evaluation Team applies a socio-ecological approach to understanding the Programme's contributions, looking at the array of Programme interventions and their impact at the personal, interpersonal, institutional and societal levels.

FIGURE 3:
Programme Interventions mapped on socio-ecological model, prepared by Evaluation Team



Interventions at the **personal** level, including Papa Schools, prenatal care training, and support for women with disabilities, were largely successful, and individual beneficiaries were able to articulate and act on internal changes to their belief systems. However, while the impact was deep, it was limited to a localized and small number of individuals, while requiring a high degree of resources to implement.

Interventions at the **interpersonal** level, such as engaging fathers and children together or working with service providers on their service to clients, patients or parishioners were similarly effective but localized. An additional complication at this level that the Programme faced is confronting the social norms that inform the thinking of the service providers themselves, in that they may hold their own ingrained stereotypes or may be afraid to be perceived as straying from the socially held views. The Programme made meaningful efforts to surmount these challenges.

At the **institutional** level, the work fell into three areas – legislative and policy shifts with a focus on parental leave provisions and national action plans, implementing family friendly policies in the private sector, and embedding gender equality curriculum in schools and professional training institutes. The most significant successes in this area were with respect to the curricula interventions, where there were impacts across most of the countries. Legislative and policy change, as well as work in the private sector, is frequently a longer-term outcome. These efforts were additionally impacted by the shifting context in many of the countries. However, the work done during this phase of the Programme will support future normative and advocacy work.

At the **societal** level, the Programme ran a wide array of social campaigns reaching over 35 million people on a number of topics and in a variety of ways. While campaigns alone are not effective in changing a social norm, they contribute in the long term to transformation by keeping provocative concepts alive in social discourse and reinforcing the internal processes happening with individuals. The resources created in this phase of the Programme can be re-used and scaled to continue this important element of transformation with limited additional effort.

As evident from Figure 5, a deeper understanding of the Programme's contributions comes from assessing the impact across the ecological system. While interventions may have their greatest impact at one level, understanding how they impact and support change in the larger ecosystem is valuable. A number of contributions, including Papa Schools, engagement with religious leaders, working with youth, and some of the social campaigns, were clearly impactful in an intersectional way across the ecosystem. Case Study 3 in Annex 1 explores these concepts further.

The combination of focus at each level and interventions that bring a more ecological approach suggests that this Programme has made a meaningful contribution both in the immediate term and in setting a foundation for longer term change. It is noted however that many of the interventions remain relatively small in scale or not yet fully realized. It would be useful to assess future interventions against a model of impact across the ecosystem to ensure that the Programme is realizing the largest long-term impact against its efforts.

4.6 Sustainability

The Sustainability criterion asks: Will the benefits last? The evaluation tested the following assumptions:

- The Programme generated country and regional ownership of the results;
- The Programme promoted replication and up-scaling of successful practices; and
- The Programme generated and shared knowledge and lessons learned.

FINDING 13:

Given the uncertain context and unconventional programme approach, the Programme's foundation-building products and capacity building focus are important elements of sustainability.

A traditional inquiry into sustainability considers questions such as whether there is national ownership (governmental or otherwise) of programme delivery and outcomes, whether civil society is sufficiently empowered and, where necessary, capable of service delivery, and whether the UN agency can step away from the programme delivery. The Evaluation Team saw evidence of these sustainability concepts in the Papa Schools component of the Programme. In Azerbaijan, the government is already hosting the Papa School programming in its local facilities. In Georgia, the civil society and private sector hosts of the Papa Schools are ready and able to continue programming. The Evaluation Team was advised that, prior to the war, the TatoHubs (Papa Schools) were working with regional and local authorities to transition ownership of the programme. Similar efforts are underway in Armenia but with little success to date.

The unconventional nature of many elements of this Programme – innovative pilots, short term grants, social campaigns – suggests that some traditional sustainability concepts attached to conventional large-scale interventions, particularly concepts around continuing the Programming without UN engagement, are not meaningful measures. Phase 1 of the Programme was focused on experimenting with an array of approaches in small ways – with short time periods, limited funding and small scope. These types of interventions leave behind some Programming material and important lessons learned.

The political context in the region also contributes to the thesis that sustainability should be measured in foundation building, content creation, and capacity building in civil society.

There are a number of foundational elements that this Programme has created that contribute to the long-term impacts and will support sustainable efforts when the context is more conducive:

- The Programme introduced curricula into medical, theology, university, elementary and high schools. Those materials have already begun to be taught in many places.
- The Programme produced manuals and guides for perpetrator programming, for Papa Schools, for healthcare professionals. Those manuals and guides are ready to be used across the region.
- The Programme generated knowledge products, including the baseline survey and the rapid COVID-19 assessment. These knowledge products have already begun to inform other programming in the countries and in the region.
- The Programme created campaign content in a variety of media that can be replicated and scaled.

Knowledge sharing and capacity building was a key strength of the Programme. Relationships were created and strengthened between UN teams, partner NGOs, CSOs, governments, health institutions, educational institutions, and religious institutions. The Evaluation Team noted that the Programme provided technical assistance, training, and other forms of support to civil society organizations to enhance their capacity. These efforts helped to create a multiplier effect of the Programme, as partners and CSOs became inspired through capacity building to expand work and share their knowledge further.

UNEXPECTED RESULT

Support of Local Authorities:

The Evaluation Team heard from stakeholders that they were surprised at the level of support from local authorities, particularly relating to initiatives involving sensitive topics:

"I was very surprised by the reaction of the Local Authorities. They are now involved in all our communications. We have a new Memorandum of Understanding, and we have done trainings and accessibility training. We now have close cooperation with other programmes on social assistance and refugees. This relationship was developed through this programme."

(Moldova, CSO)

"It was so surprising for us to see that state institutions were so willing to work with us. They didn't want NGO's addressing family issues before. But now they are open to us doing it, and to us using community-based strategies."

(Armenia, CSO)

The Evaluation Team heard that some CSOs experienced a visible rise in their profile within the country. The increased network and high-profile work helped some organizations obtain funding from certain donors and programmes for the first time. The Evaluation Team also heard that CSOs that did not originally engage in gender issues (e.g., communications organizations, youth organizations) felt confident incorporating gender issues into their future programming. For example, in Armenia, the Interactive Theatre has now incorporated productions on gender into their regular performance list. The Evaluation Team noted that the training of local leaders to deliver programming has helped to create organizational capacity. UN Teams approved organizations to use and adapt models in their own work, creating greater sustainability. For example, a medical professional stakeholder in Georgia explained:

"Our biggest achievement is that we didn't just do the trainings ourselves but instead empowered the locally-based leaders to train. Then, they asked us if they could use the model in their own capacity. UN Women approved them to continue to use it; we created sustainability this way."

The empowerment of CSOs to be flexible and adaptable during the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict, and war is also a key structural enabler of future social norm change and sustainability. For example, partners in Belarus noted that the support they received from the Programme at the start of the pandemic to increase their online presence was invaluable in continuing their work following the political upheaval.

Given the long-term nature of social norms change, it is incumbent on the Programme Team to work within the context to ensure that, as much as possible, each intervention considers options for sustainability, building leave-behind products and finding creative ways to support dedicated partners. As with other aspects of a social norms change programme, this may require an entirely unconventional model and means of measuring success.

Examples of capacity-building and knowledge sharing:

- Stakeholders from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova benefited from a study tour to Sweden to learn from Swedish experiences surrounding the promotion of men's participation in caretaking and fathers' programmes.
- 11 Stakeholders from Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine benefited from a study tour to Scotland to learn about the Caledonian model on addressing domestic violence and ways to improve methods of working with perpetrators of GBV.
- 70 partners and stakeholders from the six EaP countries attended the Projects Partners Meeting in Istanbul to share experiences and good practices for tackling gender stereotypes and harmful social norms.

5. Lessons Learned

Country readiness must be well understood at the outset of the Programme to ensure contextual Programme design:

Each of the six countries in this Regional Programme, while similar in many respects, were at a different place with respect to a number of the social norms this Programme sought to address. For example, the social infrastructure to engage in perpetrator programming, the prevalence of GBSS abortion, the social and legal acceptance of the LGBTIQ community, and the connotations associated with the term 'gender' were all quite different across the countries. Consequently, activities and communications had to be adjusted in some countries to account for these realities and, in the case of the perpetrator programming, the overall outcomes were not fully met. While the two agencies have a depth of understanding of the realities in all six countries and the Programme Team was quite considered, a country readiness assessment tailored to the specifics of the Programme would be useful in programmes such as this, particularly given the shifting landscape of the region.

Positive relations with the donor are critical in complex programmes:

This Programme was complicated — the original plan involved 6 countries and a wide array of activities, and the context of the region and the pandemic added extra layers of complexity. In addition to conventional annual formal reporting, the Programme Team maintained regular and transparent conversations with the donor, both at the Regional Programme management level and with the delegations in each country. This relationship played a key role in quick, responsive programme adaptation, creative discussions about innovation and piloting, and honest, supportive conversations about responding to challenges. Critically, this relationship will help both the agencies and the donor to continue to find meaningful and innovative ways to sustain gains in the complex environment and advance regional and global dialogue on social norm change.

Controversial topics require a combination of strategy and boldness:

Changing social norms necessarily involves engaging people in uncomfortable, difficult and sometimes culturally or politically taboo topics. This Programme struggled at times with finding the appropriate balance between strategic choices of language that would ensure larger buy-in and watering down the discourse on the difficult topics. In particular, across more than one country, the Programme avoided the use of the word 'gender' because it may be imbued with uncomfortable connotations in that country. While this meant wider participation in programming, in some places it also drew criticism from partners who felt the deeper social norm had not been adequately challenged. There were similar tensions in some countries with respect to working with men and boys rather than maintaining a focus strictly on women and girls. There are positive examples of Programme interventions that tackled deeply rooted norms and socially difficult conversations. Across the region, the Programme worked with conventionally conservative religious leaders and in Belarus, the Programme conducted interventions with fathers in highly conservative regions, and with women who are addicts and recently imprisoned. Striking the balance between strategic language and bold actions is an important consideration for programmes working on controversial topics.

6. Conclusions

This section provides overall conclusions and corresponding recommendations. The recommendations have been drafted following a consultative approach with the Evaluation Reference Group, the Programme Team and the Programme management. Each recommendation is tied to corresponding findings and conclusions and includes actions for consideration in the next phase of the Programme.

CONCLUSION 1:

The commitment of the two agencies and the donor to try unconventional approaches to design and structure created opportunities for the sum of the Programme to be greater than its parts.

To the credit of the two agencies and the donor, the design of this Programme was forward-thinking from the outset. The approach of user-centred design and adaptability allowed for meaningful programming in a complex environment. The choice to use both flagship programming and innovative subgrants showcased the strengths of each organization, expanded the stakeholder base, and contributed to the empowerment of the civil society in each country. The regional modality contributed to an expanded output by building networks (both internally and between partners) and shared resources. However, the innovative design and approach of the programme were not adequately captured in the Theory of Change or in the measurement framework. Where the programme structure was imperfect, the technical expertise and dedication of the Programme Team members ensured success. There are significant opportunities to learn from the first phase — capitalizing on the gains made and strengthening joint commitment. *(Findings 1, 2, 3, 5, 7)*

CONCLUSION 2:

The Programme's interventions had a broad spectrum of meaningful impact during the first phase, finding creative ways to challenge stereotypes and social norms.

One of the hallmarks of the Programme was a wide-ranging set of creative interventions that engaged individuals, groups and topics that are less frequently found in the agencies' other programming. These interventions proved largely effective, albeit frequently in localized ways.

Direct engagement with fathers, religious leaders, and youth provided individual opportunities for empowerment; there are strong instances of success in these interventions. Embedded curriculum in schools and the training institutes for religious leaders and medical professionals introduced the next generation of leaders to gender equality principles. A wide array of innovative social campaigns reinforced the messaging, reaching millions of people across the region. Small grants to grassroots-led civil society organizations supported innovative and targeted local programming. Some programming choices were less aligned to the larger goals of the Programme or to the context of the countries. *(Findings 4, 5, 6, 8)*

CONCLUSION 3:

The Programme contributed to longer-term social norms transformation, although there is greater work to do to ensure this contribution is understood and sustained.

The Programme's contribution to the longer-term goal of social norms change can be understood across personal, interpersonal, institutional and societal socio-ecological dimensions, creating an interconnected foundation for change, albeit in localized, small-scale or non-continuous ways. Consequently, this first phase of the Programme can be considered to have 'proved' the model of its design. However, there is significant work to be done before the start of the next phase to refine the Programme's understanding of its approach to transformation, including the role of LNOB principles, a longer-term measurement framework, a realistic financial plan and a clearer sustainability model. *(Findings 9, 10, 11, 12, 13)*

7. Recommendations

This section provides recommendations that correspond to the findings and conclusions. The recommendations have been drafted following a consultative approach with the Evaluation Reference Group, the Programme Team and the Programme management. Each recommendation is tied to corresponding findings and conclusions and includes actions for consideration in the next phase of the Programme.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

In Phase II programme development, the two agencies and the EU should clearly articulate the commitment to flexibility and innovation in programme design and delivery and to strengthening the agencies' commitment to tackling social norms in this challenging region.

This recommendation flows from Conclusion 1 and Findings 1, 2, 3, 7. Phase II presents an opportunity to capitalize on the design strengths of the Programme (innovation, adaptability and grassroots subgranting) to advance social norms transformation. These elements should be more clearly articulated both at the TOC level and as a part of the measurement framework in order to properly understand their impact. The strengths of this Programme can be a model for broader corporate approaches on social norms transformation.

In addition, the strengths of the Programme require alignment with the challenges facing the region, including the immediate and aftereffects of the war in Ukraine, the challenges facing civil society in Belarus and the region-wide retrenching of authoritarian values.

Evaluation Team's Proposed Actions for Implementation	Responsibility (Programme team, UN Women and UNFPA regional offices, Agency HQs, EU)	Timing (immediate, first year, ongoing)
Develop shared TOC and measurement framework that articulates and values experimentation, innovation, and adaptability, and aligns with the agency's corporate approaches.	Programme Team, UN Women, UNFPA regional offices, EU	Immediate
Conduct a user-centred design workshop with programme partners as a part of Phase II design.	Programme Team	First year
Emphasize subgrants modality as a means of affecting grassroots transformation.	Programme Team, UN Women, UNFPA regional offices, EU	Immediate
Develop specific strategies and interventions for enhancing programming and supporting partners in Belarus, adapting to the increasing humanitarian impacts of the war in Ukraine across the region, and responding to a retrenching of authoritarian values in the region.	Programme Team, UN Women, UNFPA regional offices, EU	First year

RECOMMENDATION 2:

UN Women and UNFPA should reaffirm their commitment to a joint Programme and regional structure, reframing and communicating the nature of the commitment to more clearly articulate shared goals. This includes reconstructing the 50/50 split approach and reconceptualizing the concept of a shared commitment.

This recommendation flows from Conclusion 1 and Findings 1, 2, 3, 7. While the joint programme modality employed in this Programme provided some benefits, it did not entirely surmount the inherent structural challenges that joint programmes present. There is an opportunity, either in Phase II or in learning for future joint programmes for the agencies to experiment with alternative administrative structures, shared programming, and enhanced internal communications that provide direction and support to staff across the region. This will be particularly important in countries that do not have a UN Women presence. Regional knowledge sharing, although hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic, was a strength for this Programme that can be increased going forward.

Evaluation Team's Proposed Actions for Implementation	Responsibility	Timing
For future joint programmes consider alternatives to administrative 50/50 split: • Eliminate the dual reporting obligations and other duplicative actions at the regional level; and/or • Eliminate the administrative split and agree that one agency will administer the Programme; or • Restructure the split (i.e.: one agency conducts reporting and procurement, the other agency provides communications).	UN Women, UNFPA regional offices	Immediate
Select one or two Phase II interventions that have shared delivery between agencies as an opportunity to test a reduction in a siloed approach and to increase shared learning.	Programme Team, UN Women, UNFPA regional offices	Immediate
Develop internal and external communications that clearly articulate shared commitment and country office expectations.	Programme Team, UN Women, UNFPA regional offices	Immediate
Develop a shared approach to administering the Programme in countries without a UN Women presence.	Programme Team, UN Women, UNFPA regional offices	First year
Increase regional knowledge sharing activities and regionally shared interventions.	Programme Team	Ongoing

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Programming resources should be reframed to ensure optimal allocation.

This recommendation flows from Conclusion 2 and Findings 4, 5, 6, 8. While overall, this Programme made successful use of the resources, there are lessons from Phase I that can enhance resource allocation in the next phase, including ensuring a realistic understanding (based on country readiness, cost, and newly arising political or geographic challenges) of which interventions can be conducted successfully as well as which interventions most successfully target current need.

Communications work, a critical element of the Programme's success, can be streamlined in the Programme Team to avoid duplication. A reframed approach to understanding modern communications needs, such as the immediacy of social media, will be required if communications are to be successful.

Evaluation Team's Proposed Actions for Implementation	Responsibility	Timing
Conduct a programme assessment to determine the most contextually appropriate areas of focus and avoid selecting interventions that cannot be conducted.	Programme Team	Immediate
Conduct a strategic mapping exercise that identifies the most challenging issues and ensure that the Programme prioritizes responsive interventions.	Programme Team	First year
Conduct a financial and resources review of Phase I that realistically assesses the cost of Programme interventions.	Programme Team	Immediate
Reduce or reframe programming that does not align with country readiness (such as perpetrator programming) or is already part of other core activities (such as normative work).	Programme Team	Immediate
Align staffing resources around shared tasks, such as communications and reporting.	Programme Team, UN Women, UNFPA regional offices	Immediate
Restructure communications approvals process to align with modern communications tools and expectations.	Programme Team, UN Women, UNFPA regional offices, EU	First year

RECOMMENDATION 4:

The agencies and the EU should develop a clear, shared approach to understanding, articulating and valuing the Programme's contribution to long-term social norms change. This may mean accepting and valuing a certain amount of uncertainty.

This recommendation flows from Conclusion 3 and Findings 9, 10, 11, 12, 13. Understanding the present-day value proposition of interventions designed to have long-term transformational impact is challenging for agencies, donors, programme staff and stakeholders. This is especially true in the context of interventions that are intended as innovations, pilots or otherwise short-term trials. It is incumbent on the two agencies at the programme, regional and global levels to find frameworks and build plans that adopt less conventional measurement approaches and attach value to what may otherwise go unappreciated.

A particular challenge for the agencies will be in articulating the place for and approach to LNOB concepts in a Programme that seeks to impact broader societal dialogue.

Evaluation Team's Proposed Actions for Implementation	Responsibility	Timing
Develop a clear articulation of how LNOB principles are applied in the Programme that acknowledges the challenge of a conventional cross-cutting approach.	Programme Team	First year
Align the Programme more directly to ongoing work on longer-term social norms change at the global level in both agencies.	Programme Team, UN Women, UNFPA regional offices and HQ	Ongoing
Determine a theoretical approach to understanding long-term social norm change that aligns with the Programme's Theory of Change and measurement framework.	Programme Team, UN Women, UNFPA regional offices and HQ	First year
Require a sustainability commitment for each intervention that considers concepts including reusable or shareable products, partner capacity building, lessons learned.	Programme Team	Ongoing

TOGETHER AGAINST
GENDER STEREOTYPES AND
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