

IN BRIEF

UN WOMEN'S PERFORMANCE AGAINST THE 2022–2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

BACKGROUND

UN Women's Strategic Plan 2022–2025 was developed to guide UN Women's work in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The plan outlined how UN Women intended to catalyse action to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. As UN Women approaches the end of the Strategic Plan period, there was an opportunity to examine UN Women's performance against the Strategic Plan's goals through a synthesis of available evaluative evidence. The results from this synthesis are intended to help support development of the next Strategic Plan and implementation of UN Women's programming more broadly.

Supporting change at the impact level of UN Women's Strategic Plan are seven medium-term systemic outcomes intended to serve as building blocks "to address the root causes that are at the heart of gender inequality."¹ The seven medium-term outcomes are designed as cross-cutting levers, with the intention that work within these outcomes is integrated with other systemic outcomes and across the organization's four impact areas.

The synthesis explored the performance of the systemic outcomes in relation to supporting and contributing to UN Women's mandate and impact areas. The specific objectives were to:

- **Map evaluative evidence** within UN Women against the systemic outcomes and impact areas.
- **Analyse the results and contributions of the systemic outcomes** to UN Women's thematic work, and the key factors that enable or hinder these outcomes.
- **Examine the coherence of the systemic outcomes** within the Strategic Plan, with an emphasis on exploring their integrated nature.
- **Understand how the systemic outcomes have supported implementation of UN Women's triple mandate of normative support**, UN system coordination and operational activities.
- **Identify considerations or implications to advance UN Women's work** and inform the next Strategic Plan.

FIGURE A

UN Women's systemic outcomes



¹ UN Women. Strategic Plan 2022 – 2025 (2021), 14.

To achieve this, the following synthesis questions were explored:

1. To what extent does available evaluative evidence cover the systemic outcomes?
 - a. Which systemic outcomes are linked to which impact areas?
 - b. Are there notable evidence gaps?
2. To what extent have systemic outcomes contributed to UN Women's thematic impact area results?
 - a. What are the key systemic outcome-level results achieved based on evaluative evidence?
 - b. What are the enabling and hindering factors that contributed to the achievement of the systemic outcomes?
 - c. To what extent have cross-thematic/integrated approaches been leveraged through the systemic outcomes?
3. To what extent has UN Women effectively implemented its triple mandate across the systemic outcomes?

METHODOLOGY

The exercise was a qualitative synthesis drawing on evaluation reports published by UN Women between 2020 and 2024. All evaluation report types were included: corporate, regional, country portfolio evaluations and project or programme evaluations. Reports must have received a GERAAS rating of good or very good. Overall, 175 evaluation reports met the criteria to be included in this synthesis.

With support from UN Women's Strategic Planning Unit, the synthesis team piloted use of the Evaluation

Synthesis Assistant chatbot, an artificial intelligence tool, as an innovative mechanism to verify synthesized findings from NVivo analyses, refining language and ensuring alignment with evidence cited across multiple evaluation sources.

EVALUATION MAPPING

Of the 175 evaluations, 65 per cent were programme or project evaluations, 19 per cent were country portfolio evaluations, 9 per cent were regional thematic/programme evaluations and 7 per cent were corporate evaluations.

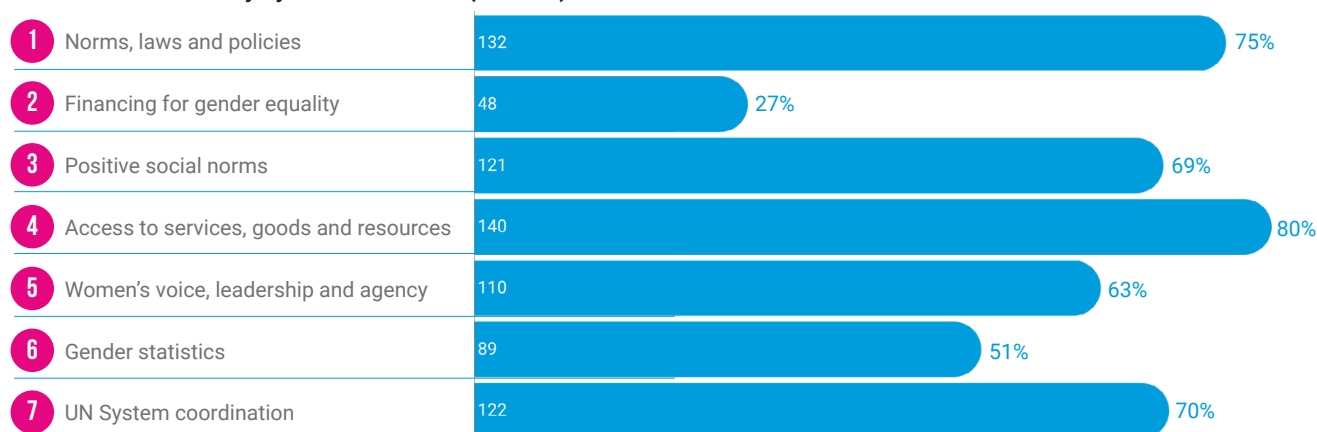
Women's Economic Empowerment and Ending Violence Against Women were the most frequently addressed impact areas, with 108 (62 per cent) and 109 (62 per cent) evaluations, respectively. Women, Peace and Security, Humanitarian Action and Disaster Risk Reduction were addressed in 86 evaluations (49 per cent) and Governance and Participation in Public Life in 81 evaluations (46 per cent).

The number and percentage of evaluations by systemic outcome is presented in Figure B below

To identify possible evidence gaps, trends in evaluation reports were compared with UN Women's expenditure by impact area and systemic outcome. When examining evaluation gaps across systemic outcomes, there was a lower number of Women, Peace and Security, Humanitarian Action and Disaster Risk Reduction-related evaluations compared to spending across several systemic outcomes. Lower coverage in Governance and Political Participation was seen particularly under systemic outcome 1, despite substantial spending in this area.

FIGURE B

Evaluation evidence by systemic outcome (N = 175)



FINDINGS

The report presents results for each systemic outcome, including a description of the evidence base; background to the systemic outcome; contributions to UN Women's impact areas; enabling and hindering factors; and key insights. Results related to UN Women's work on leaving no one behind are presented after the outcomes.

SYSTEMIC OUTCOME 1

Systemic outcome 1 envisions a comprehensive and dynamic set of global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls that are effectively translated into transformative legal and institutional reforms at national and local levels.

Key contributions included support to legal reforms to enhance gender-responsive electoral laws and gender quotas for political representation; strengthening frameworks to promote women's economic empowerment; improving legislation to end violence against women and girls; and supporting implementation of National Action Plans for Women, Peace and Security and integrating gender perspectives into humanitarian and disaster risk reduction policies.

Enabling factors included data-driven policy advocacy; adaptive strategies to seize reform opportunities; strategic partnerships to support an enabling environment for legislative and policy change; and alignment with global normative frameworks.

Hindering factors included resource constraints for policy advocacy; insufficient monitoring of policy implementation; inconsistent inclusion of marginalized groups; and lack of sustained national ownership and commitment to legislative and policy reforms.

Key insights: UN Women's work to strengthen global normative frameworks and gender-responsive laws, policies and institutions is a core strength. Global frameworks have served as a key entry point for UN Women into important thematic areas that are led by others. At the same time, the integration of global norms into national and local contexts and using country-level evidence to further refine and advance global norms requires stronger capacity-strengthening efforts. Limited evaluative evidence is available on the long-term impact of these laws and policies on the lives of women and girls.

SYSTEMIC OUTCOME 2

Systemic outcome 2 focuses on increasing financing for gender equality by mobilizing public and private financial resources through gender responsive financing policies, strategies and instruments.

Key contributions included strengthening the adoption and use of gender-responsive budgeting practices in public finance; enhancing financial inclusion for women entrepreneurs; expanding sustainable finance initiatives with private and public financial institutions; and fostering public-private partnerships.

Enabling factors included UN Women's technical credibility within gender-responsive budgeting and sustainable finance, and strong relationships with government stakeholders and strategic leadership in promoting innovative partnerships.

Hindering factors included a decline in traditional financing sources for gender equality; limited private sector engagement and follow-through on Women's Empowerment Principles commitments; and challenges in operationalizing and tracking gender-responsive budgeting commitments.

Key insights: UN Women's work on gender-responsive budgeting and public financial management is a major strength in promoting systemic change and was most effective when multiple strategies were used. Emerging sustainable finance initiatives demonstrated potential across both public and private sectors, but require a clearer global road map. UN Women's comparative advantage in engaging the private sector through the Women's Empowerment Principles was notable, though sustaining and deepening corporate action remains a challenge. Financing for gender equality work was found to be siloed within the organization, with opportunities to better integrate financing strategies across UN Women's programming. There are also opportunities to strengthen partnerships with women's rights and feminist organizations and other civil society organizations (CSOs), particularly in sustainable finance, to advance the leave no one behind principle.

SYSTEMIC OUTCOME 3

Systemic outcome 3 focuses on transforming discriminatory social norms, behaviours and practices to advance gender equality.

Key contributions included greater community understanding of women's right to participate in politics; reduced barriers to participation in economic activities and the workforce; changing norms around unpaid care work and distribution of domestic work; influencing norms and behaviours around ending violence against women (EVAW), such as through support to the development or implementation of national and local EVAW prevention strategies including through UN Women's Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Global Initiative; and influencing norms regarding the participation and leadership of women in peace processes, conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Enabling factors included inclusive stakeholder engagement including governments, CSOs, media, community leaders and community partnerships that promote awareness, capacity strengthening and local ownership.

Hindering factors included attempting to address longer-term norms change through short-term projects, often accompanied by a lack of comprehensive prevention interventions beyond one-off activities; limited engagement of men and boys as change agents; and insufficient standardized measurement frameworks to capture norms change. External barriers such as shifting political priorities and entrenched patriarchal beliefs also impeded progress.

Key insights: Addressing harmful social norms remains critical to sustaining progress across all impact areas. There is need for stronger organizational strategies that promote consistent social norms work across impact areas, improved measurement of social norms change and deeper integration of marginalized groups. There are opportunities for innovative approaches to community and institutional engagement.

SYSTEMIC OUTCOME 4

Systemic outcome 4 focuses on ensuring women's equitable access to services, goods and resources by strengthening service delivery systems, improving access to justice, securing land rights and enhancing the capacity of women's organizations.

Key contributions included increased income, land ownership and business sustainability through skills training, access to markets and climate-smart agriculture interventions. UN Women strengthened the capacity of government and civil society actors to deliver survivor-centred EVAW services, improve legal processes and establish holistic response mechanisms. UN Women also supported Member States in launching new multi-stakeholder initiatives to prevent and respond to sexual violence, including sexual harassment in public and/or private spaces. UN Women enhanced protection services for women in conflict and humanitarian settings, including through CSO partnerships.

Enabling factors included strategic partnerships with service providers that expand the quality and reach of services; UN Women's adaptability to changing contexts such as COVID-19 to maintain or adapt services; and community buy-in from political, traditional and faith leaders, especially in socially or politically sensitive sectors.

Hindering factors included limited programme reach; insufficient access to land, financial resources and care support which hindered participation in agricultural and market-based activities; entrenched social norms; and pandemic-related disruptions were additional barriers.

Key insights: Evaluations highlight the effectiveness of combining guidelines and capacity strengthening to improve service quality; the value of holistic and integrated service models; and linking women entrepreneurs to broader networks and markets. There was widespread adoption of the leave no one behind principle to reach marginalized groups. Evidence on work within the care economy, including social protection policies and provision of care services, was more limited and there was a need for better monitoring of results in relation to equitable access to services, goods and resources.

SYSTEMIC OUTCOME 5

Systemic outcome 5 aims to empower women and girls to exercise their voice, leadership and agency in public and private spaces.

Key contributions included increasing the number of women political leaders through capacity strengthening, legislative reforms and enhanced women's representation and bargaining power in workplaces and communities. UN Women contributed to reducing violence in political settings; providing safe spaces for women to exercise leadership; and strengthening women's roles in peacebuilding and disaster resilience efforts. UN Women strengthened the institutional, technical and financial capacity of civil society to engage in policy issues and intergovernmental forums and inform decision-making processes.

Enabling factors included partnerships with local civil society, feminist and women's organizations to enhance women's voice, leadership and agency; partnerships with political parties and institutions, including electoral commissions and parliamentary bodies; and community-level networks that supported women political aspirants were an important enabler in some contexts.

Hindering factors included challenging national contexts that limit participation of feminist and women's rights organizations; backlash and violence against women in politics; high barriers to women's participation, including limited access to resources to apply for office; and discriminatory gender and social norms on women's leadership and participation further impede women's participation in public and private spheres.

Key insights: UN Women fosters enabling environments for women's leadership and the importance of institutionalized capacity strengthening and training programmes for officials and women political aspirants. Findings highlight the need for context-specific strategies and the challenge of reaching marginalized women, particularly in political spaces, without compromising scale.

SYSTEMIC OUTCOME 6

Systemic outcome 6 aims to institutionalize the production, analysis and use of gender data to inform policymaking and accountability for delivering gender equality and women's empowerment results.

Key contributions included leveraging gender data to promote gender-responsive political systems and providing data-driven insights that shape financial policies, labour market reforms and gender-responsive budgeting. UN Women contributed to strengthening data systems and institutional capacity to collect, analyse and use EVAW data and support gender-responsive monitoring systems to track women's participation in peace processes.

Enabling factors included partnerships with national statistical offices and researchers and increased government ownership and institutional commitment to gender data.

Hindering factors included weak coordination among national statistical offices, line ministries and CSOs which hindered the production, dissemination and use of gender statistics. Limited political will and lack of national ownership further hampered long-term sustainability and effective data utilization.

Key insights: UN Women successfully advances gender data through its triple mandate, although limited institutional capacity, fragmented coordination mechanisms and insufficient domestic investment in gender data systems remain challenges. Innovative data methodologies and knowledge-sharing, such as time-use surveys and global data platforms, have facilitated evidence-based decision-making and cross-regional learning.

SYSTEMIC OUTCOME 7

Systemic outcome 7 focuses on strengthening UN system coordination for gender equality by enhancing accountability for the UN system to deliver on gender equality commitments, advocating for adequate resourcing and driving coordination for thematic results.

This includes leading the management and implementation of accountability frameworks such as the UN-SWAP and Gender Equality Marker, as well as leading and participating in inter-agency collaboration, integrated policy support and capacity-building for gender mainstreaming. While UN Women aims to accelerate and implement its coordination mandate through stand-alone Systemic Outcome 7, it is important to note that coordination mandates are also fully leveraged across all systemic outcomes and thematic areas.

Key contributions included strengthening the implementation of gender accountability frameworks within the UN system, such as UN-SWAP, and supporting the integration of gender equality into UN plans and programmes, including the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) and Common Country Analyses. Thematic-level contributions include integrating gender equality into UN system-wide policy and guidelines that promote women's political participation; collaborating with other UN entities and a broad range of government stakeholders to strengthen linkages between gender and economic policies; developing and implementing a multisectoral, coordinated UN approach to the prevention and response to violence against women and girls; and integration of gender into national plans related to Women, Peace and Security, and UN Humanitarian Country Team response plans and strategies.

Enabling factors include UN Women's clear coordination mandate and institutional partnerships with clear areas for collaboration, roles and responsibilities. Inter-agency mechanisms and frameworks such as the UN-SWAP were key entry points or drivers of inter-agency coordination.

Hindering factors include unclear roles in joint programming; limited human and financial resources for coordination; and competition for funding among UN agencies.

Key insights: While UN Women has made significant strides in integrating gender into UN system policies, challenges remain in measuring the direct impact of the Entity's coordination efforts on women's lives, with limited systematic indicators for tracking results. UN Women has advanced gender mainstreaming within UN Country Teams (UNCTs) by strengthening accountability frameworks and mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment into strategic frameworks. Joint programmes enabled UN Women to leverage resources and influence, while also promoting the use of standardized approaches drawn from global norms and standards. By fostering collaborative, inter-agency knowledge generation, UN Women enhanced the coherence, dissemination and utilization of gender-related knowledge and data.

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

The leave no one behind principle was integrated across all systemic outcomes, demonstrating a concerted effort to promote the inclusion of marginalized groups.

However, evaluative evidence suggests that while engagement with marginalized populations is often present – especially through participatory data collection and design, and the use of disaggregated data and targeted interventions – the causal link between inclusion and improved access to services, or adapted services to meet needs and expanded policies is not always systematically established. Some evaluations found that leave no one behind approaches fostered more inclusive programme delivery and visibility of underserved groups, but the degree to which this translated into measurable policy or service expansion varied depending on the context. Successful cases tended to involve robust institutional partnerships, data-informed planning and cross-sectoral collaboration. Challenges remain in ensuring sustainability, particularly where initiatives rely on short-term funding or lack institutional ownership. Embedding intersectionality and ensuring marginalized groups are consistently prioritized throughout implementation and monitoring and evaluation frameworks are critical for achieving systemic impact.

OVERALL INSIGHTS

Bringing together the analysis of each systemic outcome, integration across the systemic outcomes and application of the leave no one behind principle, the synthesis presents the following overall insights:

Evaluative evidence and evidence gaps

- The synthesis found limited evidence on UN Women's contribution to longer-term, outcome-level results across the systemic outcomes.
- The synthesis observed cases where evidence exists but where there are no, or limited, corresponding Strategic Plan indicators.

Systemic outcomes

- The conceptualization of the systemic outcomes is coherent; however, greater clarity is required on their implementation. Evidence for some systemic outcomes indicated the need for clearer organizational plans to support their implementation. The relationship between the systemic outcomes, gender equality accelerators, including those based on longstanding UN Women initiatives, and impact areas remains insufficiently defined, limiting strategic coherence and reporting clarity.
- Governance systems within UN Women do not always reflect the integrated intent of the systemic outcomes. At times, organizational governance structures were at odds with the integrated nature of the systemic outcomes, with related functions structurally and practically siloed.
- Harmful social norms, including institutional and political resistance, were frequently cited as a major impediment to gender equality and women's empowerment across systemic outcomes.
- Capacity strengthening is a core intervention approach of UN Women. Although embedded across the systemic outcomes, there is opportunity for capacity strengthening work to be more meaningfully integrated following a common organization-wide framework that bridges the array of capacity strengthening approaches employed by UN Women.

Triple mandate

- Evaluations identify normative work as a clear strength of UN Women across thematic areas. UN Women is viewed as a bridge builder across sectors/stakeholders with valued technical expertise to strengthen normative, legislative and policy frameworks.
- Evaluations found that UN Women has been effective in driving gender equality through its coordination role across the UN system, but to maximize its impact, clearer articulation of its mandate, stronger system-wide collaboration and more robust measurement of results are needed.
- Operationally, short-term projects are limiting efforts to realize and measure longer-term change and obtain sufficient reach to achieve impact at scale.



Photo: UN Women/Rashid Hamis Kindamba

EMERGING CONSIDERATIONS

The synthesis presents 10 considerations, which aim to support development of the next Strategic Plan and UN Women's programming more broadly. The first three address the systemic outcomes and Strategic Plan while the remainder focus on UN Women's triple mandate.

Considerations related to the systemic outcomes and Strategic Plan:

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| 1 | Clarify the relationship between the systemic outcomes, gender equality accelerators and impact areas. |  |
| 2 | Move towards a governance structure that supports the interconnected relationship between the systemic outcomes, gender equality accelerators and impact areas. |  |
| 3 | Strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems to effectively track and measure longer-term outcomes across the systemic outcomes. |  |

Considerations related to UN Women's triple mandate:

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| 4 | Strengthen implementation, accountability and capacity related to gender-responsive normative frameworks and leverage UN Women's strength in normative work to respond to new challenges. |  |
| 5 | Strengthen UN Women's UN system coordination mandate by developing a clear theory of change with an operational plan. |  |
| 6 | Strengthen intersectionality and integration of the leave no one behind approach by designing programmes that systematically address the needs of women with different vulnerabilities. |  |
| 7 | Strengthen capacity-building efforts by developing tailored approaches that respond to specific national contexts and institutional needs. |  |
| 8 | Leverage, measure and refine UN Women's work on social norms. |  |
| 9 | Promote the sustainability of interventions by deepening engagement of duty bearers and service providers, including government institutions, CSOs and other service providers. |  |
| 10 | Strengthen strategic partnerships and funding mechanisms to ensure sustainable and impactful gender equality programming. |  |