



EVALUATION REPORT

EVALUATION OF THE STRATEGIC NOTE: UN WOMEN REGIONAL OFFICE FOR EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA



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**UN Women Independent Evaluation,
Audit and Investigation Services**

Independent Evaluation Service

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Cover Photo: UN Women/Ognen Acevski | Teodora Mileska, 25, a project coordinator at Stella Network and the co-founder of PERIOD Skopje, is transforming how menstrual poverty and stigma are addressed through education, advocacy, and youth-led engagement.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CoP	Community of Practice
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
DCO	United Nations Development Coordination Office
ECARO	UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia
EU	European Union
EVAW	Ending Violence Against Women
GRB	Gender-Responsive Budgeting
IEAIS	Independent Evaluation, Audit and Investigation Services
IES	Independent Evaluation Service
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
RMS	Results Management System
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UN-SWAP	United Nations System-Wide Action Plan
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EVALUATION OF THE STRATEGIC NOTE: UN WOMEN REGIONAL OFFICE FOR EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

This report presents the key findings, conclusions and recommendations from the evaluation of the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia's Strategic Note. The evaluation provides a systematic assessment of UN Women's contribution to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in the region, covering the Entity's normative, coordination and operational mandates. The evaluation was carried out between April 2025 and September 2025

BACKGROUND

This evaluation of the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (ECARO) Strategic Note is primarily formative (forward-looking), designed to assist ECARO and its partners in strategic learning and decision-making as they prepare a new Strategic Note. The evaluation also takes on a summative (backward-looking) role, aimed at strengthening accountability, assessing development effectiveness and drawing lessons from past experience. The evaluation offers an independent, systematic review of UN Women's contribution to advancing its mandate at the regional level and in supporting country presences. Its findings will highlight which strategies have been effective, which areas require improvement and how these insights can inform future work. The assessment focuses on the current Strategic Note cycle (2022–2025) and will directly shape development of the upcoming Strategic Note (2026–2030).

UN WOMEN IN THE EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA REGION

ECARO provides support to **18 countries and territories** across the region.¹ The Strategic Note serves as the primary planning framework guiding UN Women's normative, coordination and operational work. Its aim is to ensure that women and girls in all their diversity are able to engage with and benefit from normative standards and gender-responsive laws, policies and institutions, gaining improved access to opportunities, resources and services and fully enjoying their fundamental rights and freedoms.

Within the diverse context of Europe and Central Asia, ECARO functions as a knowledge hub, delivering oversight, quality assurance, technical support and policy services. ECARO also manages regional and multi-country programmes designed to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. The ECARO Strategic Note (2022–2025) aligns with six systemic outcomes of the UN Women Strategic Plan to drive progress across thematic priorities: Inclusive Governance; Ending Violence Against Women and Girls; Women's Economic Empowerment; Women, Peace and Security; Climate Change; and Humanitarian Action and Disaster Risk Reduction.

¹ Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Türkiye, Ukraine, Uzbekistan

EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

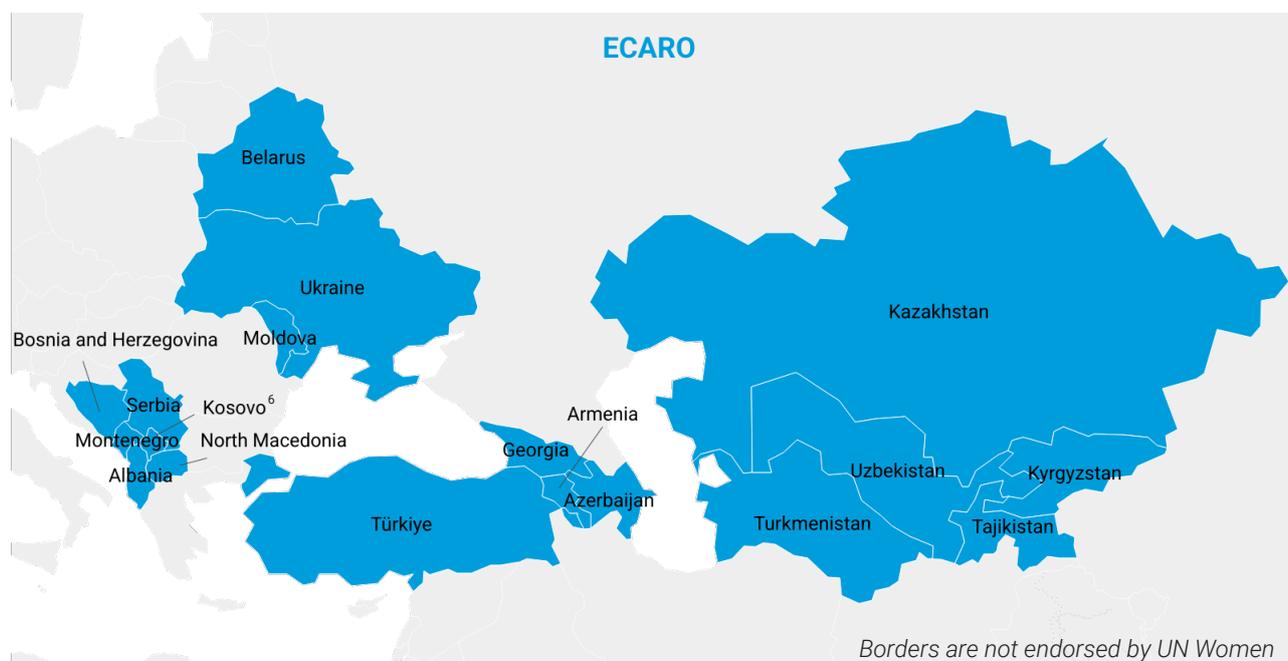
The evaluation used a theory-based approach and contribution analysis, considering ECARO's bridging role between headquarters and Country Offices; UN Women's integrated mandate; and its programmatic and operational scope. A revised theory of change guided the process, with evaluation questions assessed against the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, sustainability, gender equality/human rights and efficiency). Data collection engaged 138 people through interviews, focus group discussions, surveys and case studies. The evaluation team reviewed more than 100 documents as part of the secondary data review. Contribution analysis was strengthened by qualitative data coding in NVIVO and Excel, ensuring robust findings through triangulation.

The evaluation was guided by UN Women's principles for gender-responsive evaluation and by the United Nations Evaluation Group's standards. The process adhered to UN Women's established procedures to guarantee rigorous evaluation practices, ethical standards and high-quality outputs, as set out in the UN Women Evaluation Policy and Evaluation Handbook.

All deliverables underwent quality assurance by IES management, an external peer reviewer, as well as the Evaluation Reference Group and the Evaluation Management Group.

CONTEXT

Countries across the Europe and Central Asia region² have diverse and complex political, economic, social, environmental and legal landscapes, and are home to an estimated 253.6 million people.³ The Strategic Note 2022–2025 period has been marked by significant contextual changes across the region, including to peace and security, migration patterns, climate change, technological advancements, and political and economic priorities. Although advances towards the 2030 Agenda have been recorded, the pace of change remains insufficient, leaving the region off track to achieve gender equality by 2030.⁴ Of the 18 countries and areas in the Europe and Central Asia area where UN Women works, only three have met or are close to meeting the gender equality target in at least half of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 indicators and sub-indicators.⁵ Unless structural barriers to gender equality and discrimination are removed, women and girls will continue to be left behind.



² This section covers the 18 countries and territories where ECARO maintains a presence: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Türkiye, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.

³ UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, Regional Gender Snapshot: Europe and Central Asia, April 2025 ([Link](#))

⁴ UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, Regional Gender Snapshot: Europe and Central Asia, April 2025 ([Link](#))

⁵ UN Women calculations using United Nations Statistics Division. 2025. Global SDG Indicators Database. ([Link](#))

⁶ References to Kosovo should be understood to be in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

FINDINGS

The evaluation of the ECARO Strategic Note 2022–2025 found that its strategy effectively reflected UN Women’s integrated mandate and alignment with regional priorities, while highlighting opportunities for a clearer long-term vision and strategic differentiation. ECARO played a central development-focused role, providing valued thematic, technical and operational support to Country Offices, particularly in resource mobilization, compliance and knowledge generation. However, the evaluation noted that the Strategic Note’s relevance and timeliness varied across contexts and, without a clear accountability and results framework, its overall impact on performance was difficult to measure. ECARO’s adaptation to emerging risks –such as the gender backlash, shrinking civic space and funding volatility –was found to be reactive, with stronger engagement in the Women, Peace and Security and humanitarian domains emerging only after the invasion of Ukraine. Despite these challenges, ECARO enhanced internal coherence through planning support, knowledge management and promoting standardized approaches across thematic areas.

At the coordination and partnership level, ECARO contributed to regional UN coordination mechanisms, particularly through the Regional Collaborative Platform and in advancing gender mainstreaming within United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) and United Nations Country Team System-Wide Action Plan (UNCT-SWAP) Gender Equality Scorecards. Despite this, participation in regional joint programmes remained limited, constraining opportunities for system-wide impact. Engagement with civil society and the private sector produced promising but uneven results: private-sector initiatives, such as those promoting women’s entrepreneurship and gender-responsive business practices, offered strong potential for impact; while civil society engagement lacked a consistent framework following the discontinuation

of the regional Civil Society Advisory Group. The evaluation also noted progress in areas such as gender-responsive budgeting, elimination of violence against women and data-driven policy work; however, integration of marginalized groups in the programmatic portfolio was uneven.

While ECARO has made progress in strengthening its resource mobilization and donor engagement processes, the office’s overall financial sustainability remains under pressure. ECARO has professionalized its fundraising efforts through donor mapping, action plans and a structured community of practice, resulting in multi-year Strategic Note funding from Denmark and engagement with the European Union (EU). However, the funding base remains narrow, with Denmark and the EU contributing nearly three quarters of non-core resources, leaving ECARO vulnerable to shifts in donor priorities. This poses risks to institutional continuity, long-term knowledge retention and ECARO’s capacity to sustain a consistent strategic advisory role and guidance across the region.

The Strategic Note’s results framework remains activity-oriented and lacks outcome-level indicators linking to ECARO’s core functions of coordination, technical support, knowledge generation and resource mobilization. Challenges were identified in monitoring, evaluation and learning systems. Finally, the evaluation noted divergent views on ECARO’s strategic direction: some staff favour a broad thematic approach for flexibility and visibility; while others, along with most external partners, called for a sharper focus on UN Women’s comparative strengths –normative leadership, data and knowledge generation, and capacity development. Clarifying this strategic identity will be essential for the next Strategic Note, ensuring a sustainable, focused and coherent regional role within an evolving UN development landscape.

CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSION 1 :

ECARO is uniquely positioned to drive strategic influence, knowledge leadership and cross-country collaboration, but this potential can only be fully realized through clear articulation of its distinct value, stronger accountability for results and an adaptive model that supports the responsiveness of regional functions to country-driven demands. Catalytic work is essential for ECARO to maximize limited resources, generate multiplier effects and position gender equality at the centre of broader regional and national agendas.

CONCLUSION 2:

ECARO's experience during the 2022–2025 Strategic Note period highlights the need for greater agility, clarity and focus in navigating a complex and fast-evolving regional context. While its mandate and alignment with regional priorities are recognized, sustaining relevance requires moving beyond existing programmes and reactive responses towards proactive leadership, needs-based programming, sharper prioritization and stronger coherence across regional and country levels.

CONCLUSION 3:

ECARO's role in advancing UN Women's coordination mandate, along with ensuring internal and external coherence and synergies, is becoming increasingly critical in the context of UN reform and limited funding. There is a need to focus partnerships on programmatic work, beyond current convening and the provision of knowledge and data. To maximize impact and efficiency of resources, ECARO needs a theory of change for coordination with diverse regional stakeholders, along with a long-term vision that outlines how coordination and partnerships contribute to higher-level results.

CONCLUSION 4:

ECARO contributed to gender equality and the empowerment of women in the region by complementing country-level efforts with catalytic regional programming, knowledge generation and communications. Initiatives such as on gender-responsive budgeting demonstrate how subregional programmes can leverage expertise, scale results and initiate new projects across multiple contexts. However, the benefits of regional interventions remain uneven, with stronger engagement in countries with direct programme presence and limited benefits for non-presence countries, underscoring the need for tailored modalities of support.

CONCLUSION 5:

ECARO's financial sustainability remains a critical challenge. While one donor has provided some stability through Strategic Note funding, shifting donor priorities and declining development aid create significant uncertainty for the current model, which relies heavily on maintaining a full cadre of thematic advisers and support to Country Offices. Moving forward, ECARO will need to adapt its structure and explore more cost-effective modalities. This could include drawing on personnel in Country Offices who have strong subject-matter expertise to provide advisory support to the region. The current modality for non-physical representation countries also requires rethinking.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1

ECARO should **SHARPEN ITS STRATEGIC FOCUS AND CONSOLIDATE ITS EFFORTS**, ensuring that interventions are strongly driven by needs assessments, grounded in comparative advantage and deliver depth and quality without overstretching limited resources. Development of the next Strategic Note offers a timely opportunity to refine this direction and embed greater coherence and impact.

2

ECARO should **CONSOLIDATE EXISTING EFFORTS AND LESSONS LEARNED**, and adopt a proactive strategy to prevent and counter the growing backlash against gender equality and protect achieved rights. Aiming to position ECARO as a reference point, the strategy should include situation monitoring and analysis; risk assessments; strategic and tailored communications; and the building of alliances and advocacy coalitions, integrating backlash resilience into programming and strengthening advocacy coalitions.

3

ECARO should **CONTINUE TO BUILD AND CONSOLIDATE ITS ROLE AS A REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE HUB**, both internally (to support country-level offices) and externally (to inform and influence regional actors and institutions). This role should be pursued in a more strategic, needs-based and long-term manner, ensuring that knowledge generation, dissemination and uptake go beyond ad hoc events and workshops, and respond to the concrete needs of stakeholders.

4

ECARO should **FURTHER DEVELOP AND DEEPEN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS** with key regional actors to amplify impact, mobilize resources and strengthen advocacy for gender equality beyond short-term activities. This requires the development of a clear theory of change for each partner category, clear results and accountability frameworks.

5

ECARO should **ENHANCE AND DIVERSIFY ITS RESOURCE MOBILIZATION EFFORTS** by creating stronger synergies between thematic expertise and fundraising strategies. Resource mobilization should be systematically embedded in programmatic and technical work, ensuring that funding approaches are directly linked to priority areas of comparative advantage, while also broadening the donor base beyond traditional partners.

6

ECARO should **SYSTEMATICALLY EMBED INTERSECTIONALITY, DISABILITY INCLUSION AND THE LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND PRINCIPLE** across all regional interventions. All facets of UN Women's triple mandate should address overlapping forms of discrimination faced by marginalized women and girls, while also leveraging collective power with other actors to build intersectional approaches that link women's rights with the rights of diverse vulnerable groups, disability inclusion, climate and green solutions, and other cross-cutting agendas.

7

In the face of the global funding crisis, ECARO (in coordination with headquarters and other Regional and Country Offices) should consider the possibility of **STRATEGICALLY NARROWING ITS SCOPE TO FEWER THEMATIC PRIORITIES AND SHIFTING FOCUS TO GEOGRAPHIC AREAS WITH THE GREATEST NEED** and/or where it can achieve the greatest impact. ECARO should reassess its business model, considering decentralizing technical support to strong Country Offices with clear comparative advantages. Country Offices should also receive guidance on managing funding cuts, adapting programming and maintaining quality.



Photo: UN Women

Gender Data Bootcamp brings together participants to strengthen data literacy and use gender data for advancing equality and the SDGs.

1

BACKGROUND

1.1 PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

The primary purpose of the evaluation of the ECARO Strategic Note 2022–2025 is to consolidate findings and lessons learned about ECARO’s contribution to gender equality and the empowerment of women, affirm accountability and inform the ongoing development of the next Strategic Note. In conjunction with the Strategic Note evaluation, ECARO initiated development of the new Strategic Note process. The evaluation team worked closely with the Strategic Note development team, ensuring regular coordination, communication and the sharing of preliminary findings.

The primary intended users of the evaluation are ECARO and the programme offices that it oversees, UN Women senior management and other relevant personnel at headquarters, regional and country levels. The evaluation may also be useful for other actors collaborating with ECARO, such as UN organizations, regional organizations, intergovernmental organizations, civil society organizations (CSOs) and development partners.

The primary intended uses of this evaluation are to:

- Support decision-making regarding development of the next Strategic Note.
- Accountability for the development effectiveness of the existing Strategic Note in terms of UN Women’s contribution to gender equality and women’s empowerment, as well as organizational effectiveness, learning and knowledge management.
- Learning on effective, promising and innovative strategies and practices.
- Capacity development and mobilization of regional stakeholders to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The specific objectives of the Strategic Note 2022–2025 evaluation are to:

- Assess the relevance of Strategic Note design and implementation at regional and country levels, and its alignment with the corporate UN Women

Strategic Plan, international commitments and the needs of key partners.

- Assess the sustained relevance over the Strategic Note period and identify necessary changes with regard to the new Strategic Note development process.
- Assess internal and external coherence and identify areas for linkages, synergies and opportunities for better positioning of ECARO in the new strategic cycle.
- Assess effectiveness and identify areas and approaches to be continued and strengthened in the new strategic cycle.
- Assess organizational efficiency in a changing context and areas for improvement to ensure the Strategic Note is fit for purpose in the next strategic cycle.
- Assess the sustainability of key results and the regional functions supporting them.
- Identify and validate lessons learned and good practices that can be scaled up and replicated to support gender equality and human rights.
- Provide actionable recommendations with respect to development of the next Strategic Note.

The evaluation covers the entire Strategic Note period between 2022 and mid-2025. The entire programme of work included in the Strategic Note was considered, across UN Women’s integrated mandate –normative, coordination and operational –in all thematic areas. The scope of the evaluation covered joint regional programmes; global programme activities in the region; regional programmes being implemented across countries; and ECARO’s role and interventions (and respective Country Offices’) in programme presences and countries where UN Women is a Non-Resident Agency. The geographic scope included the Europe and Central Asia region. As some regional programmes had already been evaluated, their findings informed this evaluation, as did the relevant findings of corporate thematic evaluations.

1.2 EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The evaluation used a theory-based approach and contribution analysis. The analysis took into account the position of ECARO as a bridge between headquarters and country levels; UN Women’s integrated mandate (normative, coordination and operational); the scope of the programmatic and operational services ECARO provides; as well as ECARO’s programmatic portfolio and how it interacts with country-level dynamics. The evaluation was conducted in line with both internal and external standards and guidelines,⁷ with a clear focus on embedding gender equality and human rights principles throughout the process. UN Women evaluations are designed to be inclusive, participatory and transparent, promoting equitable power dynamics and examining the structural and sociocultural factors that hinder the advancement of women’s rights.

In collaboration with ECARO, a revised theory of change was created and applied as the foundation for contribution analysis. This theory of change guided formulation of the evaluation questions, which were assessed against the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Development Assistant Committee’s criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, sustainability, gender equality and human rights, and organizational efficiency. All evaluation outputs underwent a quality assurance process involving IES management, an independent peer reviewer, the Evaluation Reference Group and the Evaluation Management Group. Evaluation questions were fine-tuned and validated during inception phase consultations with UN Women personnel and the Evaluation Management and Reference Groups to ensure they reflected the priorities of key stakeholders.

TABLE 1:
Evaluation criteria and questions

CRITERION	EVALUATION QUESTIONS
Relevance	How relevant has the regional Strategic Note been across the Entity’s integrated mandate in advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment and responding to the needs and changing contexts in the region (regional integrations, armed conflicts, natural disasters, backlash to gender equality and shrinking civic space, shrinking funding etc.)?
Coherence	<p>Internal: How have ECARO’s efforts supported internal coherence, catalysing efforts at all levels and bridging corporate and country-level efforts across UN Women offices in the region to ensure a coherent approach to achieving the Entity’s integrated mandate to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment?</p> <p>External: How effectively has ECARO leveraged UN Women’s coordination mandate to strategically position itself and contribute to a more coherent and gender-responsive approach by UN partners and other development actors in the region?</p>
Effectiveness	What were ECARO’s key results in pursuing gender equality and the empowerment of women through its integrated mandate and what were the most effective strategies?
Human rights and gender equality	How effective was the portfolio design and implementation in support of human rights, leave no one behind, including disability perspectives, and what were the most effective strategies?
Organizational efficiency and sustainability	<p>Is ECARO’s structure and capacity fit for purpose to deliver the Strategic Note and support offices in the region? What are the strengths and what are the challenges?</p> <p>To what extent are the mechanisms of support provided by ECARO (and the results achieved) sustainable?</p>

Source: Developed by the evaluation team

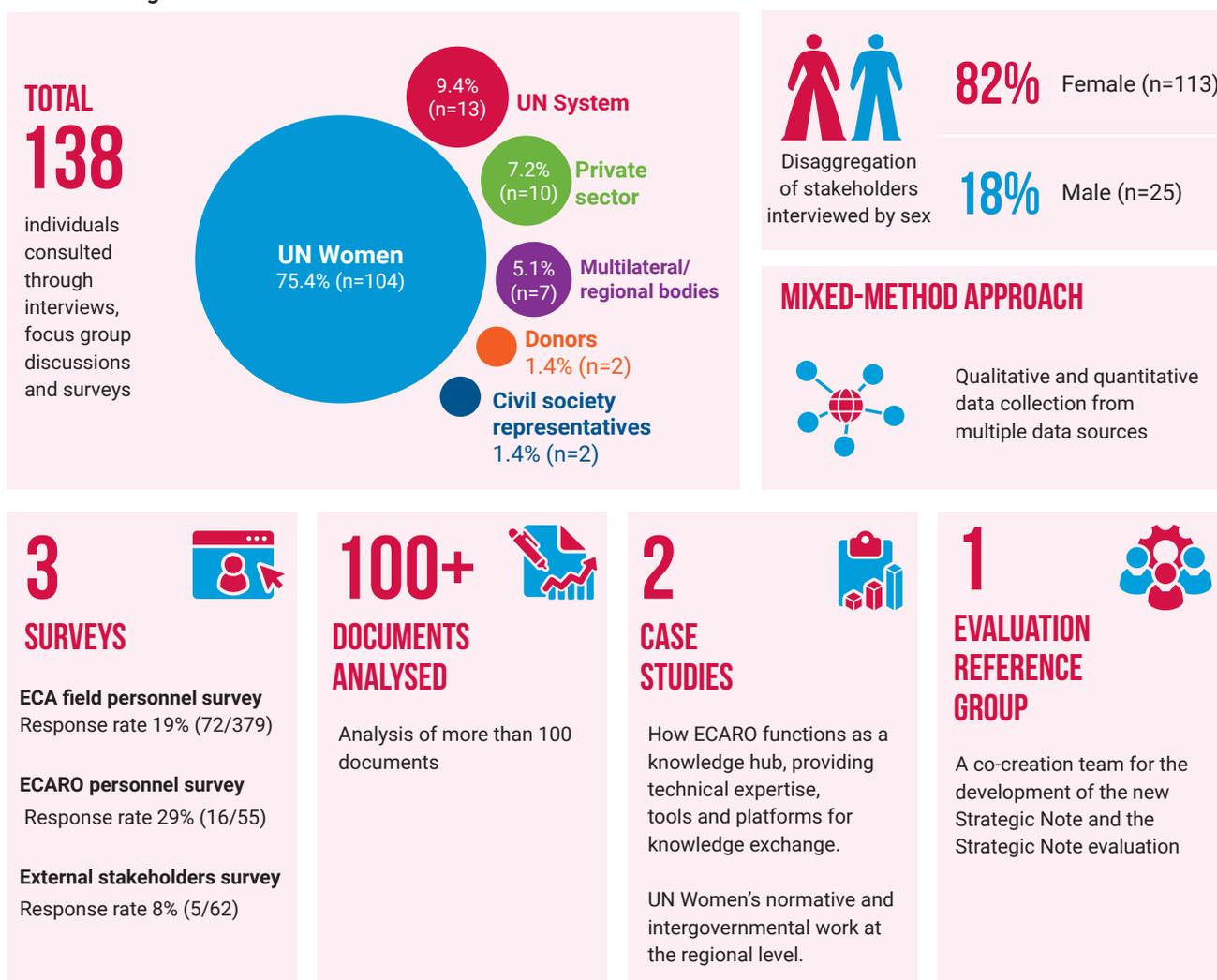
⁷ UN Women, UN Women Country Portfolio Evaluations: Revised Guidelines (2022). Available at [UN Women country portfolio evaluations: Revised guidelines | Publications | UN Women –Headquarters](https://www.unevaluation.org/unevaluation/publications/guidance-integrating-disability-inclusion-evaluations-and-reporting-undis-entity); UN Women, Guidance on Integrating Disability Inclusion in Evaluations and Reporting on the UNDIS Entity Accountability Framework Evaluation Indicator (March 2022). Available at <https://www.unevaluation.org/unevaluation/publications/guidance-integrating-disability-inclusion-evaluations-and-reporting-undis-entity>; United Nations Evaluation Group, Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations (August 2014). Available at <https://www.unevaluation.org/unevaluation/publications/integrating-human-rights-and-gender-equality-evaluations>

The evaluation employed qualitative and quantitative data collection from multiple data sources, including semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and two surveys (UN Women personnel survey and stakeholder survey); observation of meetings; and two case studies (for data collection tools see Annex 9 Data Collection Tools). More than 100 documents were reviewed, including annual reports, donor reports, publications, evaluations, reviews and audits.

The evaluation applied a mixed-methods approach, triangulating qualitative data from interviews, focus groups, case studies and document review with quantitative evidence from surveys, monitoring data, financial records and data analytics systems. Data

were systematically analysed using an evaluation grid –which organized evidence from multiple sources –against predefined evaluation questions, criteria and indicators to allow for consistency, comparability and triangulation. The reconstructed theory of change served as the primary analytical framework, guiding the differentiation of direct and indirect results and enabling contribution analysis to assess causal linkages, contextual factors and alternative explanations. Triangulation across multiple data sources and stakeholder groups enhanced validity, reduced bias and provided a nuanced understanding of ECARO’s role and contributions within the broader UN Women architecture.

FIGURE 1
ECARO Strategic Note evaluation overview of data collection



1.3 ETHICS, GENDER EQUALITY AND NO ONE LEFT BEHIND

The evaluation followed United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards as well as UN Women's Evaluation Policy, integrating gender-responsive and ethical principles into both its design and implementation. All participants were systematically asked for informed consent, with evaluators introducing themselves, explaining the purpose of the evaluation and obtaining agreement. When rights holders or sensitive issues were involved, interviews were carried out in private and secure environments to protect participants. The safety and comfort of respondents were prioritized, consistent with UN Women guidance. Anonymity was fully respected, with no personal identifiers included in the final report. Safeguards were implemented to prevent harm and promote inclusive, respectful participation among all groups consulted. Data was securely stored in UN Women's SharePoint, with access restricted to the evaluation team. Further details are provided in the dedicated Gender-Responsive and Ethical Procedures Data Management Plan in Annex 10.

1.4 EVALUATION CONSTRAINTS AND LIMITATIONS

One of the main limitations was the low response rate to the online survey, particularly among external stakeholders. The survey response rate was also low among ECARO and field personnel. This reduced the diversity of perspectives available for analysis and may have introduced response bias, as those who chose to participate might not fully reflect the views of the wider group. A particular emphasis was therefore put on triangulating findings from the survey with other data sources.

The timing of the evaluation also posed challenges. Conducting interviews during the summer period (June–August) affected the availability of both staff and external stakeholders, as many were on leave or had limited capacity to engage. While the evaluation team closely coordinated with ECARO to increase participation in the evaluation, the number of interview opportunities may have constrained the depth of qualitative insights gathered. The evaluation reached out to CSOs, but this resulted in only two interviews, which had to be compensated with evidence from secondary sources, such as multiple UN Women ECARO and Country Office independent evaluation reports.

The evaluation was conducted in a rapidly evolving context, which partially posed challenges for assessing relevance and sustainability. Rapidly shifting regional dynamics, combined with funding uncertainties and potential structural changes within the UN system, created a high degree of unpredictability. In this environment, the findings reflect conditions at the time of data collection but may not fully capture the implications of future developments for UN Women and stakeholders in the Europe and Central Asia region.



Photo: UN Women / Imrana Kapetanović

UN Women Deputy Executive Director Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda visited Bosnia and Herzegovina during her first official mission to the Western Balkans, meeting with rural women to underscore their vital role in community cohesion and economic stability.

2

EVALUATION CONTEXT

The context of gender equality and women’s empowerment in Europe and Central Asia has rapidly evolved during the Strategic Note period (2022–2025). While important progress has been made, it remains incremental and uneven, leaving the region off track to meet the 2030 gender equality targets.⁸

Countries across the Europe and Central Asia region⁹ have diverse and complex political, economic, social, environmental and legal landscapes. These countries are home to an estimated 253.6 million people, but demographic trends across the region vary.¹⁰ In Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans, the population is both declining and ageing, whereas populations in Central Asia, as well as Türkiye, have been growing and are notably younger. Central Asia’s population alone is expected to surpass 100 million by 2050.¹¹ Countries across the region have made **advances towards gender equality and women’s rights, although issues and inequalities persist**. Progress has remained modest and incremental, leaving the region off track to achieve gender equality by 2030.¹² Women in marginalized groups, including refugees, women with disabilities, Roma women, older women, rural women and LGBTIQ+ persons, are at the highest risk of being left behind.¹³

The Europe and Central Asia region has seen a rise of **authoritarianism, right-wing populism and “anti-gender” movements** affecting women and girls’ access to rights, spaces, resources and freedoms. Many countries in the region may continue to face instability due to fragile institutions, lack of rule of law, increasingly repressive leaders, ethnic tension and corruption.¹⁴ In recent years, rollbacks on the freedom of the media, freedom of assembly, freedom of speech and the rule of law have been witnessed across the region. Patriarchal social norms and conservative political ideology in the region often promote traditional

family values and pursue crackdowns on CSOs and independent media.¹⁵ Crackdowns on protestors across the region have been increasing; for example, recent pro-European protests in Georgia were met with arrests of both activists and the firing of around 700 civil servants.¹⁶ **Shrinking civic space**, alongside increased hostility towards gender equality, makes women’s rights organizations particularly vulnerable to targeted repressive measures.

The EU accession process presents a significant opportunity for advancing gender equality, given its requirements for harmonization with EU legal and policy frameworks on gender equality, human rights, democratization, rule of law and the protection of fundamental rights. These processes also include commitments to gender mainstreaming across sectors. However, recent divergences among EU Member States regarding gender equality have softened the transformative potential of EU alignment in this area. The process also creates an opportunity to support EU institutions and Member States themselves in strengthening the gender equality and women’s empowerment agenda within the EU and beyond, in collaboration with relevant partners. The rise of anti-gender narratives –often intertwined with anti-Western and anti-EU rhetoric –poses a growing challenge, particularly in countries such as Georgia, Moldova, Serbia and Ukraine, where geopolitical tensions further complicate democratic reform and gender equality efforts.

⁸ UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, Regional Gender Snapshot: Europe and Central Asia, April 2025 ([Link](#))

⁹ This section covers the 13 countries and territories where ECARO maintains a presence: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

¹⁰ UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, Regional Gender Snapshot: Europe and Central Asia, April 2025 ([Link](#))

¹¹ Kanat Makhanov, ‘UN Population Prospects: Case of Central Asia’, Eurasian Research Institute ([Link](#))

¹² UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, Regional Gender Snapshot: Europe and Central Asia, April 2025 ([Link](#))

¹³ UN Women Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS), Regional Evaluation of UN Women’s Support for Capacity Development to Respond to the Needs of Women and Girls in Europe and Central Asia, September 2023.

¹⁴ Freedom House, ‘Nations in Transit 2024: Region Reordered –Autocracy and Democracy’ (2024) ([Link](#))

¹⁵ Amnesty International, ‘EU/Central Asia: Authorities must safeguard civil society space for genuine progress’, Amnesty International, 26 March 2025 ([Link](#))

¹⁶ Associated Press, Georgia president says country is in grip of a Russian ‘special operation’ to derail EU path, 31 October 2024 ([Link](#)); Amnesty International, Georgia: Authorities using draconian new laws to crack down on dissent, 25 January 2025 ([Link](#)); Reuters, Georgia fired 700 civil servants for supporting pro-EU protests, watchdog says, 15 April 2025 ([Link](#))

Despite a challenging political environment, many countries in the region have witnessed a gradual increase in **women's political participation** in both national and local political offices, although this progress remains uneven and fragile. Important progress has been made in countries such as Moldova, with women serving as Head of Government and Head of State; and in Albania, with women comprising 70.6 per cent of cabinet members. In Kosovo's recent elections, the mandated 30 per cent gender quota was exceeded as women secured more seats in the 120-member Assembly.¹⁷ Quotas have increased women's role in decision-making positions, especially at the local level. In local deliberative bodies across the region, women hold 30.3 per cent of elected seats.¹⁸ Despite these gains, the region remains far from achieving gender parity targets as progress slows.

Cross-border tensions continue to pose major challenges to **peace and security** in the region. Amid the Russian Federation's full-scale war on Ukraine, civilians are enduring immense suffering, with women and girls bearing a disproportionate burden and making up the majority of **refugees and displaced people**. According to the 2025 Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, 6.7 million of the 12.6 million people in need of **humanitarian assistance** and protection are women and girls.¹⁹ Gendered impacts of the war are felt both within Ukraine and across the entire region, especially Moldova, where 127,785 Ukrainian refugees have fled since the start of the war.²⁰ Within Ukraine, many women face heightened vulnerability to exploitation, having lost income, livelihoods and stable

housing, while across the region, the war has widened gender gaps and increased rates of food insecurity, malnutrition and energy poverty.²¹

Other ongoing conflicts and tensions, including unresolved disputes in regions such as Abkhazia,²² Nagorno-Karabakh,²³ the borders with Afghanistan and the Ferghana Valley²⁴ continue to undermine regional stability. These **protracted crises** fuel political fragmentation, displacement and periodic violence, hindering prospects for lasting peace. Despite efforts to raise awareness about the **underrepresentation of women in peace processes**, these calls have not yielded significant results. Peace agreements and gender-sensitive policy frameworks offer entry points, but systemic barriers persist. For example, the Pristina–Belgrade dialogue on normalization of relations remains a gender-blind process.²⁵ In Ukraine, women continue to be largely excluded from peace negotiations and broader peace and security efforts led by the United Nations and other international and regional actors. Nevertheless, women play a vital role in conflict prevention and long-term peacebuilding initiatives.²⁶ Most countries in the region have developed Women, Peace and Security (WPS) National Action Plans, a primary tool for ensuring WPS implementation. As several National Action Plans have lapsed, there is a significant opportunity to integrate key provisions that would strengthen domestic protection and more comprehensively include grassroots actors in their formulation.²⁷ In response to regional instability, increased militarization in many countries in the region is diverting resources from social sectors

¹⁷ Vibhu Mishra, 'Kosovo's inclusive and peaceful election marks progress, but challenges remain', UN News, 8 April 2025 ([Link](#))

¹⁸ UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, Regional Gender Snapshot: Europe and Central Asia, April 2025 ([Link](#))

¹⁹ UN OCHA, Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025, 16 January 2025 ([Link](#))

²⁰ UNHCR, 'Ukraine Refugee Situation', UNHCR Operational Data Portal ([Link](#))

²¹ UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, Regional Gender Snapshot: Europe and Central Asia, April 2025 ([Link](#)); UN Women, Global Gendered Impacts of the Ukraine Crisis (September 2022) ([Link](#))

²² Olesya Vartanyan, 'Moscow Has Run Out of Patience in Abkhazia', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 13 February 2025 ([Link](#)); Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 'Kremlin-Favored Candidate Faces Runoff in Georgia's Abkhazia', 16 February 2025 ([Link](#)); The Kyiv Independent, 'Putin Signs Decree Easing Russian Citizenship Process for Residents of Abkhazia, South Ossetia', 17 May 2025 ([Link](#)).

²³ Council on Foreign Relations, 'Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict', Global Conflict Tracker, updated 20 March 2025 ([Link](#)).

²⁴ Temur Umarov and Alibek Mukambayev, 'Central Asian States Have Put Aside Their Territorial Disputes. Why Now?', Carnegie Politika, 9 April 2025 ([Link](#))

²⁵ Research Institute of Development and European Affairs (RIDEA) and Inclusive Peace, Shaping Peace: Women's Inclusion in the Kosovo-Serbia Peace Process (April 2024) ([Link](#))

²⁶ UN Women ECARO, 2024 Open Day for Regional Women, Peace and Security Dialogue: Full Outcome Document, February 2025 ([Link](#))

²⁷ Míla O'Sullivan and Kateřina Krulišová, 'Women, Peace and Security in Central Europe: In Between the Western Agenda and Russian Imperialism', International Affairs, 99.2 (2023), 625–643 ([Link](#)); UN Women, National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security: Europe and Central Asia (5 August 2024) ([Link](#))

and enabling patriarchal nationalism.²⁸ If unaddressed, militarization could further erode rights and protections, and marginalize women in peacebuilding, governance and security processes.²⁹

Violence against women and girls remains one of the most pervasive human rights violations in the region. Many countries have strengthened domestic violence and trafficking legislation, but no countries have legislation in place to comprehensively prevent and address violence against women. Despite scarce data, the scale of gender-based violence is clear: nearly one in four women in the Europe and Central Asia region aged 15–49 has been subjected to violence by a current or former intimate partner over their lifetimes.³⁰ These statistics may be understated due to underreporting: across the region, domestic violence is normalized by gender stereotypes and discriminatory social attitudes towards women and gender-diverse people under deep-rooted cultural and traditional norms.³¹ When survivors do seek support, robust social services may not be available with governments reducing investments in social services for survivors of violence and marginalized groups of people as development assistance decreases. Conflict and displacement have further exacerbated the risk of sexual and gender-based violence.³²

Increasingly complex patterns of **international migration and forced displacement** also complicate the region's demographic transformation. The region hosts a large number of refugees and people in refugee-like situations, with 3.2 million registered

Syrians under Temporary and International Protection as well as over 220,000 people displaced from other countries.³³ With Afghanistan bordering Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, outflows of Afghan refugees remain steady to these three countries, with Tajikistan hosting 9,902 Afghan refugees, Uzbekistan 8,505 and Turkmenistan 3,409 by the end of 2024.³⁴ However, a majority of these refugees have no status, as only Afghans with a valid passport and visa can travel to Central Asian countries.³⁵ In addition to forced displacement, regular and irregular labour migration also spurs human mobility across the region. Women comprised the majority of international migrants in the region³⁶ and the region also hosts the highest concentration of migrant women in the labour force (38.8 per cent).³⁷ Regardless of the motivation to migrate, irregular migration bears high risks for women and girls, making them more susceptible to exploitation, discrimination and abuse.³⁸

Gender gaps in **economic participation** are evident in women's lower engagement in the workforce and their markedly different work histories from men. While over 87 per cent of working-age men are actively engaged in the labour market, only 61.9 per cent of working-age women are employed, with the overall rate declining.³⁹ Over the past three decades, women's workforce participation has declined to a greater extent than men's; is concentrated in more vulnerable sectors; and tends to be part-time. Women's lower level of workforce engagement is directly related to their role in **unpaid domestic and care work**, with women undertaking on average 3.4 times as much unpaid care and domestic

²⁸ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 'Unprecedented rise in global military expenditure as European and Middle East spending surges', SIPRI, 28 April 2025 ([Link](#)); Voice of America, 'Central Asian Military Spending Surges Amid Border Tension, Regional Conflict Fears', VOA News, 25 July 2024 ([Link](#))

²⁹ UN Women, *Impact of Militarization on Gender Inequality*, August 2022 ([Link](#))

³⁰ UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, *Regional Gender Snapshot: Europe and Central Asia*, April 2025 ([Link](#))

³¹ Amnesty International, *Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Protect Women from Violence in Crises and Beyond*, 8 December 2022 ([Link](#))

³² UNHCR, 'UNHCR warns of devastating spike in risk of gender-based violence for women and girls forced to flee', UNHCR, 29 November 2024 ([Link](#))

³³ UNHCR, 'Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Türkiye', UNHCR Türkiye ([Link](#))

³⁴ UNHCR, *Afghanistan Situation, Operational Data Portal* ([Link](#))

³⁵ UNHCR, *Afghanistan: Border Monitoring Report* ([Link](#))

³⁶ UN DESA, Population Division, *International Migrant Stock 2024: Key Facts and Figures* (New York: UN DESA, 2025) ([Link](#))

³⁷ IOM, 'Women and Girls on the Move', Migration Data Portal ([Link](#))

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, *Regional Gender Snapshot: Europe and Central Asia*, April 2025 ([Link](#))

work as men.⁴⁰ Devoting so much time to domestic duties and the care economy hinders young women from entering, remaining and advancing in the formal job market. Only two of the 16 countries reviewed from the region had the legal frameworks necessary to address gender discrimination in employment and economic benefits.⁴¹ While the **gender pay gap** in the region has narrowed in recent years, women earn on average 20.4 per cent less than men; legal restrictions persist in relation to certain types of jobs that women can perform; and women's entrepreneurship remains low due to gender disparities in access to assets, financial services, capacity-building opportunities, information and markets.⁴²

Intersecting challenges for disability inclusion, diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) and other marginalized groups persist in the region, and have increased in recent years. **Persons with disabilities** represent one of the largest vulnerable segments of the population, with around 135 million people living with one or more disabilities.⁴³ Nationally, disability rates vary from around 6.5 per cent in Albania⁴⁴ and Bosnia and Herzegovina⁴⁵ to 8 per cent in Kosovo.⁴⁶ These rates are likely to rise given the region's **rapidly ageing**

population; the lack of standardized approaches to data collection hindering reliable decision-making;⁴⁷ and exclusion, which exacerbates vulnerability for people with disabilities of all ages.⁴⁸

Widespread discrimination, violence and a decline in legal protections and social acceptance for **people of diverse SOGIESC** continue to be reported across the region.⁴⁹ Restricted civic space targets marginalized communities, while Roma communities and other **marginalized ethnic groups** continue to face systemic exclusion from essential services and formal recognition of their rights.⁵⁰ Various regional **crises have exacerbated the barriers** already faced by those with one or more marginalized identity. For example, Ukraine is home to approximately 3 million people with disabilities, nearly 90 per cent of whom need humanitarian aid; while 20 per cent of internally displaced families report having at least one member with a disability.⁵¹ These **identities often intersect**, increasing vulnerability to discrimination, exclusion and violence, particularly affecting women with disabilities from ethnic minorities who face compounded marginalization.

The effects of **climate change and environmental degradation** are increasingly visible across the region,

⁴⁰ *Ibid*

⁴¹ *Ibid*

⁴² UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, Regional Gender Snapshot: Europe and Central Asia, April 2025 ([Link](#))

⁴³ UNFPA (2023) Disability Tech Report: A4 V8, Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, 1 June, https://eeca.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/01-06-2023_disability_tech_report_a4_v8.pdf

⁴⁴ Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) (2024) Albanian Population and Housing Census 2023, <https://www.instat.gov.al/media/13626/cens-2023-census-botim.pdf>

⁴⁵ World Bank, 'Indicator: All persons with disabilities (adjusted, % of population group)' (Disability Data Dashboard, 2009-2022) https://disabilitydata.worldbank.org/en/indicator/adj_al_alot_dfc?countries=All_TJK_BIH

⁴⁶ Ifeta Smajic and Engji Susuri, 'Disability-inclusive development in Kosovo: Why it matters and what the World Bank is doing' (World Bank Blogs, 14 June 2023) <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/europeandcentralasia/disability-inclusive-development-kosovo-why-it-matters-and-what-world-bank>

⁴⁷ World Bank, 'Disability-inclusive social protection across Europe and Central Asia' (World Bank, 2025) <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/eca/brief/disability-inclusive-social-protection-across-europe-and-central-asia>

⁴⁸ European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education and UNESCO (2021) Global Education Monitoring Report 2021 – Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia: Inclusion and Education: All Means All, European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (Odense) and UNESCO (Paris), June, https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/210609_BLS20383_UNE_FurAsia_Report_EN_AV_v02_0.pdf; UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, Regional Gender Snapshot: Europe and Central Asia, April 2025, https://eeca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/web_regional_gender_snapshot_eng.pdf

⁴⁹ ECOM (2024) Regional Report 2024, <https://ecom.ngo/en/library/regional-report-2024/>; ILGA-Europe (2025) Annual Review 2025, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/files/uploads/2025/02/ILGA-Europe-Annual-Review-2025.pdf>

⁵⁰ Amnesty International (2025) 'EU/Central Asia: Authorities Must Safeguard Civil Society Space for Genuine Progress', Amnesty International, 27 March, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/03/eu-central-asia-authorities-must-safeguard-civil-society-space-for-genuine-progress/>

⁵¹ Protection Cluster Ukraine (July 2024), Protection Analysis Update The Critical Need for Protection amongst Armed Conflict and Violence, https://www.unhcr.org/ua/sites/ua/files/legacy-pdf/ukraine_protection_analysis_update_-_july_2024-compressed.pdf

particularly impacting women in agriculture, informal work and rural communities. Recent flooding in Bosnia and Herzegovina (resulting from rain intensified by climate change during one of the rainiest periods recorded in the region) killed 27 people, affected over 1,000 households and private businesses, and damaged public infrastructure.⁵² Across the region, prevailing gender norms exacerbate the negative impacts of climate change on women, yet women's participation in both disaster risk reduction and natural resource management is limited.⁵³

Shifts to green sectors offer new opportunities for inclusive growth, but also carry the risk of exacerbating existing gender inequalities if not proactively addressed.⁵⁴ Transformation spurred by EU alignment processes, climate financing frameworks and digital innovation strategies will reshape the region's public policy, labour markets and fiscal systems.

The lack of in-depth gender analysis and uneven progress in sex-disaggregated **statistics and gender data** among stakeholders in the region limit the ability to create and implement data-driven, responsive policies. Data is often inconsistent, outdated or missing for key indicators such as gender-based violence, unpaid care work and women's economic participation.⁵⁵ Most countries in the region have now reached at least 50 per cent of gender data availability to monitor the SDGs, but this is not adequate. Persistent critical data

gaps, compounded by weak policy space and chronic underfunding, limit gender-responsive policymaking in areas such as women's economic empowerment, violence against women and girls, and gender and climate. Only a limited number of countries collect and make data available disaggregated by sex, age and other dimensions simultaneously, which is crucial for producing evidence and knowledge on gender and intersecting forms of inequality.

As countries redirect resources to address immediate security, economic and humanitarian concerns, sustainable international support for gender equality may face further constraints. In the Europe and Central Asia region, women's rights organizations –often leaders in frontline implementation for both humanitarian and development work –have already called for increased access to more flexible, sustainable funding.⁵⁶ However, globally, amid the significant changes across the humanitarian and development sector, nearly half of the over 400 women's rights organizations interviewed by UN Women expect to shut down within six months.⁵⁷ UN funding cuts are expected, which are likely to be accompanied by a significant structural overhaul as part of the UN80 reform led by the UN Secretary-General.⁵⁸ These dynamics will have significant impacts on UN Women's work in the region.

⁵² Paul Kirby and Guy Delauney, 'Floods and landslides leave 18 dead in Bosnia', BBC News, 6 October 2024 ([Link](#)); IOM Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2024 Flood and Landslide Response Situation Report –26 December, 26 December 2024 ([Link](#))

⁵³ UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, Regional Gender Snapshot: Europe and Central Asia, April 2025 ([Link](#))

⁵⁴ *Ibid*

⁵⁵ Joint SDG Fund, Empowering Equality: Strengthening Gender Data Systems in Europe and Central Asia, 4 March 2025 ([Link](#))

⁵⁶ UN Women, ECARO Policy Brief for Expert Meeting, April 2025 ([Link](#)).

⁵⁷ UN Women, At a Breaking Point: The Impact of Foreign Aid Cuts on Women's Organisations in Humanitarian Crises Worldwide, May 2025 ([Link](#))

⁵⁸ UN80 INITIATIVE Shifting Paradigms: United to Deliver REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL, September 2025 ([Link](#))



Photo: UN Women

UN Women Deputy Executive Director Kirsi Madi visited Kyivpastrans to highlight the success of the #SheDrives project, which is empowering women to become municipal bus drivers in Kyiv. This initiative is breaking gender stereotypes and creating new opportunities for women in Ukraine.

3

PORTFOLIO ANALYSIS

3.1 STRATEGIC NOTE OVERVIEW

The ECARO Strategic Note 2022–2025 was originally designed with four results areas, as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2:

ECARO Strategic Note 2022–2025 original four results areas

OUTCOME 1:	OUTCOME 2:	OUTCOME 3:	OUTCOME 4:
Duty bearers implement and finance evidence-based gender-responsive normative frameworks and policies	Women and girls fully and equally participate in leadership and decision-making processes and benefit from gender-responsive governance	Women and girls live a life free from all forms of discrimination, violence and harmful social norms	We will ensure the UN system demonstrates greater accountability to advance progress on gender equality and women's empowerment
			

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian elements were introduced across the Strategic Note, as this thematic area and a large-scale war were not originally considered in the planning process.

Under **Outcome 1**, ECARO focused on gender-responsive governance; strengthening gender data, and knowledge and skills of governments to plan and monitor gender-responsive budgets; and strengthening capacities of development–peace–humanitarian partners to inclusively enforce, adopt, implement and finance gender equality normative frameworks. Thanks to a series of gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) programmes in the Western Balkans and Moldova, ECARO employed a GRB programme specialist serving as a programme manager and technical adviser for the entire region, which allowed for implementation of the regional programme in the Western Balkans and growth of the GRB portfolio across the region. Within this results area, ECARO integrated WPS and humanitarian initiatives; supported gender-responsive needs assessments following the war in Ukraine; and gender-mainstreamed responses by UN Women Country Offices and their partners during several crises.

Outcome 2 entailed women's participation in leadership and decision-making processes (both through civil society and governments) and pursuing benefits from

gender-responsive governance (including thematic areas of economic empowerment and climate change). Strategies included capacity development of women's organizations and female politicians for development of data-driven policies; leading, influencing and benefitting from decision-making and peacebuilding processes, gender-responsive laws and services; and access to financing and technology. Progress towards this outcome was supported by the women's political participation and governance specialist within the UN Women–Sida Strategic Partnership Framework and multiple women's economic empowerment initiatives.

Outcome 3 focused on the elimination of all forms of discrimination, violence and harmful social norms through capacity development of key stakeholders to influence the development, implementation and oversight of relevant legislation and policies; and ensuring access to quality essential services and socioeconomic measures. Large regional programmes such as EU 4 Gender Equality: Together against gender stereotypes and gender-based violence programme (first phase: 2020–2023, second phase started on 1 January 2024) and "Ending violence against women in the Western Balkans and Turkey: Implementing Norms, Changing Minds Programme" (2020–2023) and collaborations with the Council of Europe, EU, governments, regional and national CSOs supported progress towards this outcome.

Under its coordination mandate and in line with corporate Strategic Plan Outcome 7 on UN coordination and the regional Strategic Note **Outcome 4**, ECARO invested efforts in ensuring that the UN system demonstrates greater accountability in advancing progress on gender equality and women's empowerment. In the Strategic Note, ECARO aimed to position itself as a regional thought leader in the UN development system, leveraging convening power, leadership and

membership in regional coordination mechanisms. Another layer of work focused on supporting Country Offices in performing their UN coordination function for UNCTs, integrating gender equality and women's empowerment into UNSDCFs and crisis response plans; implementing the SWAP Gender Equality Scorecard; providing training on Gender Equality Markers; and conducting gender assessments.

BOX 1

Regional UN coordination

The regional coordination architecture on gender equality in the Europe and Central Asia operates through an integrated framework that combines the normative, coordination and programmatic strengths of several key UN entities with UN Women, UNFPA and the UN Development Coordination Office (DCO) leading. At the heart of this structure is the Issue-Based Coalition on Gender Equality, established under the Regional Collaborative Platform. Co-chaired by the UN Deputy Secretary-General and supported by the DCO Regional Office in Istanbul, the platform brings together all UN regional entities to ensure a coherent approach to implementing the 2030 Agenda. The Issue-Based Coalition on Gender Equality (co-chaired by UN Women and UNFPA, with participation from other UN entities) serves as the main coordination mechanism for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment across the region. It promotes system-wide policy alignment, joint programming and shared advocacy, ensuring that gender perspectives are integrated across regional priorities and that lessons are disseminated. UN Women takes part in other Issue-Based Coalitions as a member (environment and climate change; health and well-being; large movement of people, displacement and resilience; social protection; sustainable food systems; adolescents and youth; data and statistics; and digital transformation).

Within this architecture, each entity plays a complementary role. DCO provides the institutional and operational backbone for coordination, ensuring that gender equality is mainstreamed into UNSDCFs and measured through the UNCT-SWAP Gender Equality Scorecard. ECARO leads on the substantive and technical aspects of gender equality.

As the UN's regional economic commission, the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) also supports countries in developing legal and policy frameworks that promote gender equality in areas such as economic participation, social protection, statistics, transport and sustainable development. Through its Gender Equality Strategy and Gender Statistics Programme, UNECE ensures that gender considerations are embedded in regional economic policies and that data and standards inform both national action and UN system coordination. UN Women closely coordinates with UNECE, particularly on SDG reporting and statistics and capacity development of national statistics offices in Europe (regional workshops in [2023](#) and [2025](#)).

3.2 THEORY OF CHANGE

ECARO's Strategic Note integrates UN Women's threefold mandate (normative, coordination and operational/programming) and was designed along the theory of change detailed in Box 2.

ECARO's dual role –in undertaking its own programming and in supporting Country Offices –is outlined across the Strategic Note; however, it is not explicit in the theory of change. Instead, the theory of change was formulated as if ECARO would directly influence

changes at the country level, which in reality is more influenced by Country Offices, their partners and contextual dynamics, while ECARO contributes its specific services and expertise. Operational work at the country level in all regional programmes is implemented by Country Office personnel. Therefore, in consultation with ECARO personnel, the evaluation team reconstructed the theory of change where the distinction is more explicit (see Figure 2).

BOX 2

ECARO theory of change

IF

- duty bearers implement and finance evidence-based gender-responsive normative frameworks and policies;
- women and girls fully and equally participate in leadership and decision-making processes and benefit from gender-responsive governance;
- women and girls live a life free from all forms of discrimination, violence and harmful social norms; and
- the UN system demonstrates greater accountability to advance progress on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

THEN

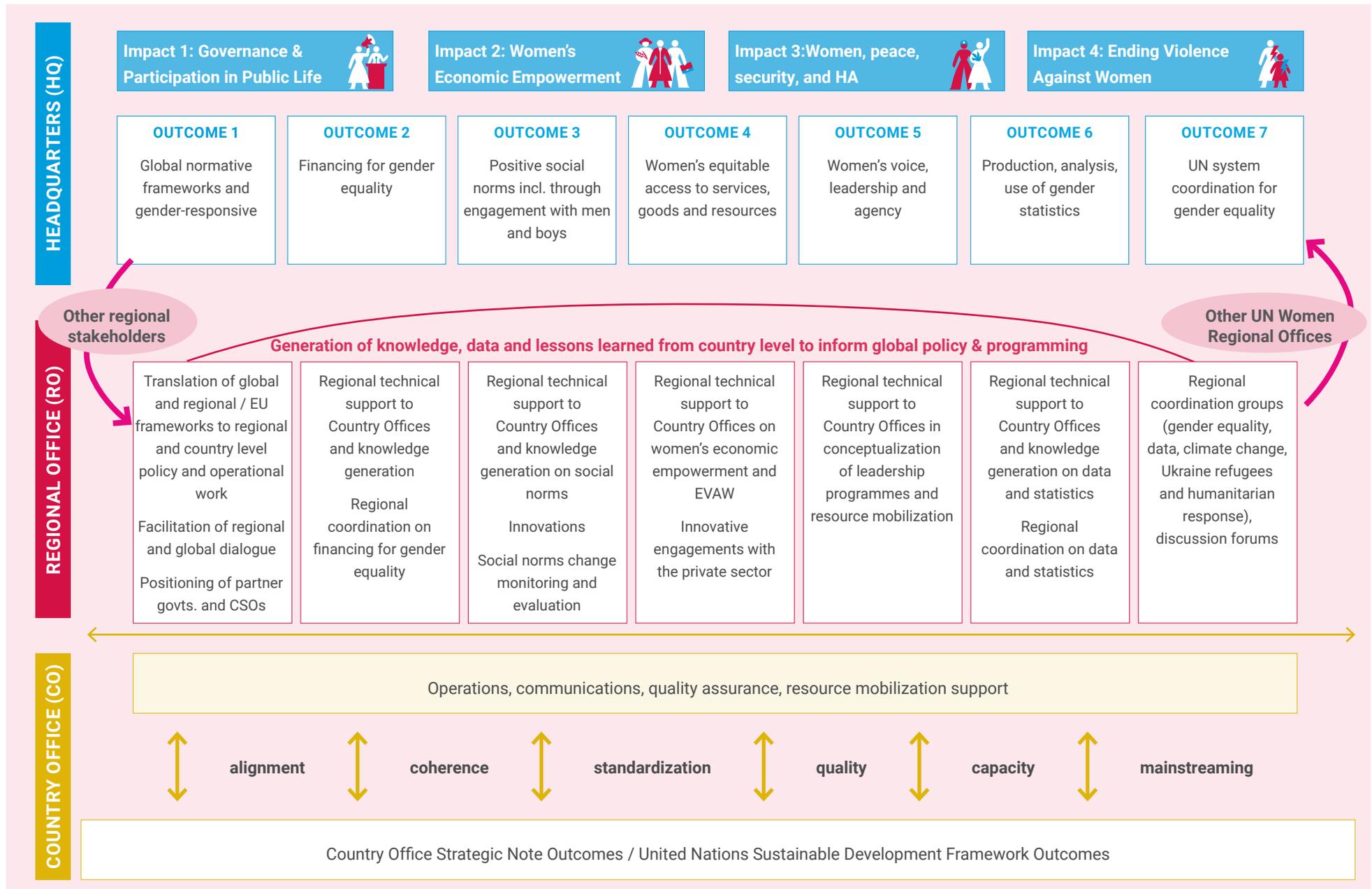
Countries/territories across the Europe and Central Asia region will achieve gender equality, the empowerment of all women and girls and the fulfilment of their human rights.

BECAUSE

- duty bearers across the region have strengthened political will and increased technical capacity at different levels to implement and finance global and national gender equality and the empowerment of women normative frameworks and policies;
- financing gender equality and the empowerment of women is prioritized by key stakeholders;
- systems and capacities are in place to identify and address gender data gaps and provide sufficient knowledge and evidence to generate political will to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women;
- shrinking space for women-led and women's rights organizations is addressed through increased engagement, financing and capacities to increase their influence and effectiveness;
- women have access to markets, financing, technology and networks and contribute to the green economy;
- drivers of violence against women and girls, women's low participation in politics, decision-making and the workforce are effectively tackled through a sustained and systematic focus on advancing social norms change;
- effective monitoring and measurement systems are in place to ensure accountability and assess progress and results by governments, women CSOs and the UN system on gender equality and the empowerment of women;
- government decision-making is gender-responsive;
- there is increased understanding about the importance of gender-targeted budget allocations and budget systems allow for tracking, monitoring and auditing of gender expenditure;
- fragmentation (of voice) within women's movements is decreased through greater solidarity and strategic cohesion among women CSOs; and
- there is greater leadership/cooperation and accelerated gender mainstreaming across the UN system to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women.

FIGURE 2:

Reconstructed theory of change



BOX 3

ECARO reconstructed theory of change

IF ECARO

- translates global and regional, including EU normative frameworks and gender equality strategies, into regionally and nationally relevant guidance;
- facilitates intergovernmental dialogue and links to global policy and gender equality and women's empowerment forums;
- delivers tailored technical support in programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation based on Country Office needs;
- provides catalytic and direct resource mobilization support, particularly to offices with limited capacity;
- coordinates regional UN and other stakeholders, and supports national-level coordination when required;
- pilots innovative interventions with both traditional and non-traditional partners;
- generates and synthesizes field data and knowledge to inform corporate strategic decisions; and
- showcases best practices and elevates national champions to the regional stage...

THEN

- Country Offices will deliver more coherent, high-impact, context-specific Strategic Notes aligned with global and regional priorities;
- regional collaboration will foster cross-country and cross-regional policy results, knowledge generation and dissemination;
- national partners will feel greater visibility, ownership and engagement in gender equality efforts;
- headquarters will benefit from regionally grounded insights to improve global strategies and policy coherence; and
- resources will be mobilized and used in a more efficient way.

BECAUSE

- ECARO acts as a strategic enabler and knowledge broker, ensuring alignment, capacity development, innovation and coordination between global mandates and local realities thereby supporting transformative change across country, regional and global levels.

The key assumptions that must hold for the theory of change to work are that gender equality and women's empowerment remain high on national and regional agendas; global and regional UN Women priorities remain relevant and demanded by regional and country-level partners; government actors, civil society and the private sector remain engaged in strategic dialogues and programmatic cooperation; Country Offices have the capacity and commitment to cooperate with ECARO and implement regional programmes; and donors and development partners recognize and respect ECARO's distinctive role and provide sufficient resources for key functions and services.

Key external risks that could hinder success include shifts in donor and development partner priorities; national backlash against gender equality; shrinking of civic space; degradation of achieved rights; dissolution of institutional frameworks; and marginalization of gender champions from positions. Key internal risks include disagreement over strategies and priorities in a context of reduced funding; insufficient resources and capacities at different levels; and challenges in vertical and horizontal communication and coordination.

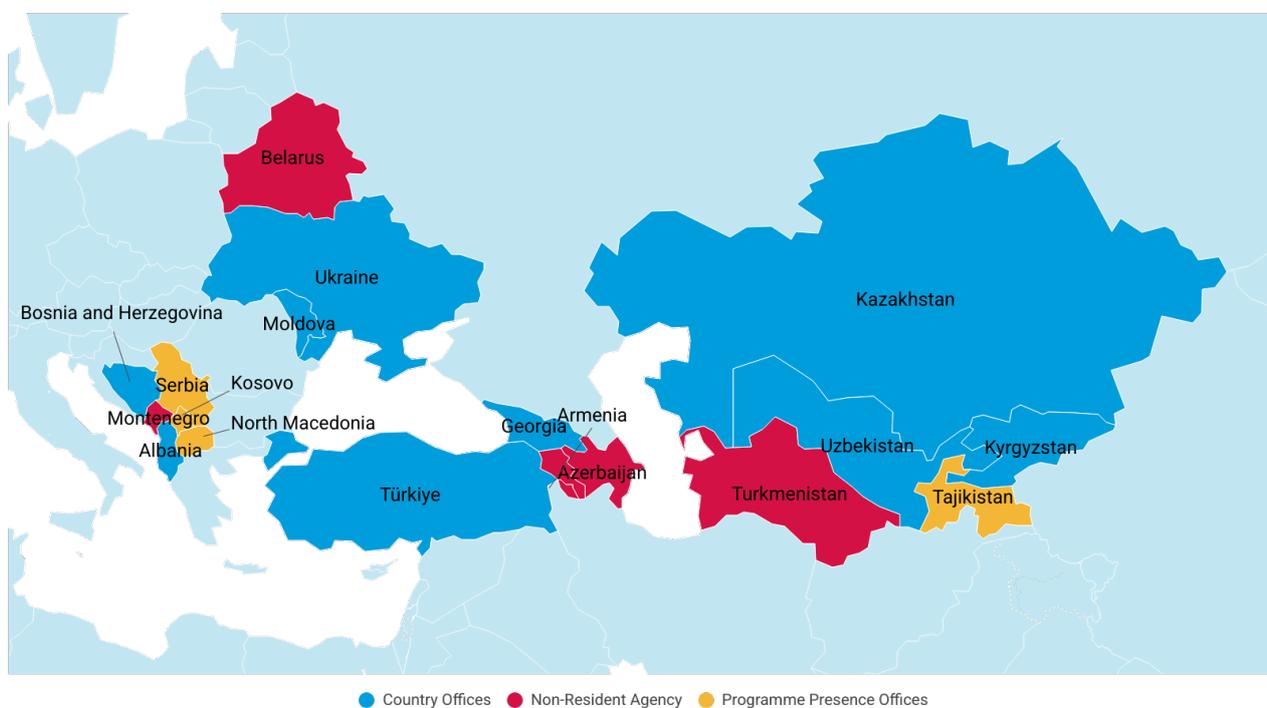
A summary of ECARO's contribution to the reconstructed theory of change can be found in Annex 3.

3.3 GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE

ECARO provides support to **18** countries/territories across the region:

- nine Country Offices in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kyrgyzstan (small Country Offices), Kazakhstan, Moldova, Türkiye (medium Country Offices), Ukraine and Georgia (large Country Offices) and Uzbekistan (since May 2025); and
- four **Programme Presence Offices**, including Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia and Tajikistan; and
- as a **Non-Resident Agency** in five countries covered by Country Offices, with different levels of thematic engagement provided by ECARO: Armenia and Azerbaijan (covered by UN Women Georgia), Belarus (covered by UN Women Moldova), Montenegro (covered by UN Women Albania) and Turkmenistan (covered by UN Women Kazakhstan).

FIGURE 3:
UN Women's presence in Europe and Central Asia



Source: Evaluation team, based on ECARO reports reviewed (borders are not endorsed by UN Women)

3.4 STAKEHOLDERS

The **internal primary stakeholders** of this evaluation include UN Women personnel within ECARO, headquarters, Country Offices and personnel in countries where UN Women has a programme presence. At ECARO, this includes the regional directors and staff from the strategic and normative cluster, the programme cluster and the operational and programme support cluster (see the ECARO organization chart in Annex 5). At the country level, it includes the leadership, programme and operational staff where UN Women has a Country Office, Programme Presence or representative.

At the regional level, ECARO engages with the following **external primary stakeholders** to deliver on its mandate, who are actively involved in co-creating, implementing or resourcing the office:

UN agencies that collaborate with UN Women at the regional level, including joint programming/partnerships, technical support/capacity-building and coordination. This includes UNDP, UNICEF, DCO, OHCHR, UNFPA, UNEP, UNECE, IOM, ILO, UNDRR and UNHCR.

Regional bodies, multilateral organizations and intergovernmental stakeholders that collaborate with UN Women at the regional level, including through memorandums of understanding, joint initiatives, technical support/capacity-building and coordination; for example, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the European Institute for Gender Equality, the Council of Europe, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

Civil society partners that collaborate with UN Women at the regional level, including through programme implementation (joint initiatives, advocacy, technical support/capacity-building and coordination); for example, the Beijing+30 Civil Society Steering Committee, CSO Task Force on WPS, Women Against Violence in Europe Network and European Women's Lobby and Gender Budget Watchdog Network.

Bilateral/multilateral donors of UN Women's work in the region that fund the Entity's work at the country level and/or regional level and collaborate with ECARO on gender equality initiatives and coordination. The primary donors of the ECARO Strategic Note

2022–2025 include UN Women National Committees, the European Commission, the Government of Denmark, the Government of Japan, the Government of Türkiye, the SDG 5 project under the Multi-Partner Trust Fund, the Government of Sweden and the Government of Canada.

Private-sector partners that collaborate with UN Women at the regional level, including through joint programmes/initiatives, funding, technical support/capacity-building and coordination. Private-sector funders for the ECARO Strategic Note 2022–2025 include Yildiz Holding and Mary Kay. Other key private-sector partners engaged at the regional level include Eurochambres, European Business Angels Network, Women in Tech, KAGIDER, TURKONFED, Sardis Expedition and Flying Broom.

Academia, researchers and the media that collaborate with UN Women at the regional level, including on specific research, thought-leadership, advocacy campaigns, joint initiatives, working groups and coordination. This includes the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders and the Gender Centre of the Geneva Institute.

ECARO's secondary stakeholders primarily include stakeholders who play an indirect role in ECARO's work. They are part of the broader ecosystems for gender equality at the regional level but are not directly engaged by ECARO. In most cases, these stakeholders are primarily engaged through Country Offices or UN Women headquarters. At the country level they include government partners (e.g. line ministries, national/local civil society actors), the private sector and the media.

Rights holders are the women and girls who benefit from UN Women's work across the region. Prioritized groups of women with intersecting identities include women entrepreneurs, women aspiring to be political leaders, refugees and internally displaced women, women with disabilities, rural women, women from ethnic minority groups, conflict-affected women, survivors of child and forced marriage, young women, women and girl survivors of violence and individuals of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression and sexual characteristics (SOGIESC).

3.5 FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

Over the full Strategic Note period (2022–2025), ECARO’s total budget amounted to nearly US\$ 20 million. In 2022, ECARO’s annual budget reached a high of US\$ 8.5 million, partially due to the regional response to the escalation of the war in Ukraine. In 2023 and 2024, the annual budget was less than half the previous year, at nearly US\$ 4 million. During the Strategic Note period, the core allocation was approximately 6 per cent and non-core sources 65 per cent. The ambition for resource mobilization increased from US\$ 9.16 million in 2022 to US\$ 11.92 million in 2025, but targets were not reached as planned. Top donors include the European Commission, the Government of Türkiye, the Government of Denmark and Sida.

3.6 HUMAN RESOURCES

As of May 2025, based on the OneApp Dashboard, ECARO employed 82 people in total, of which 27 were staff, 37 were employed on consultancy contracts, 7 on service contracts, 7 were United Nations Volunteer and 4 were interns.

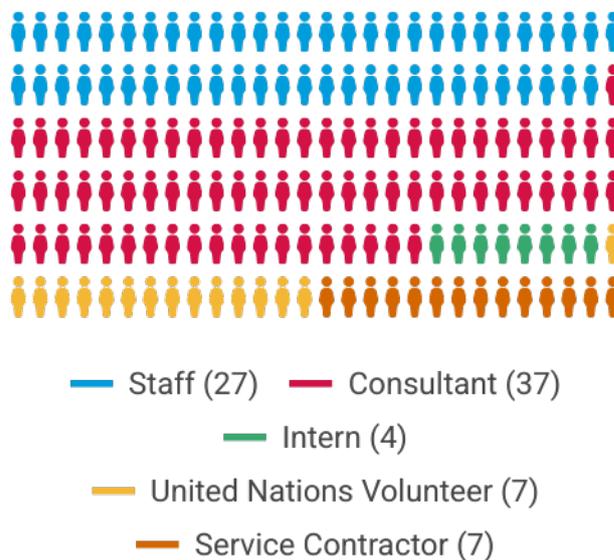
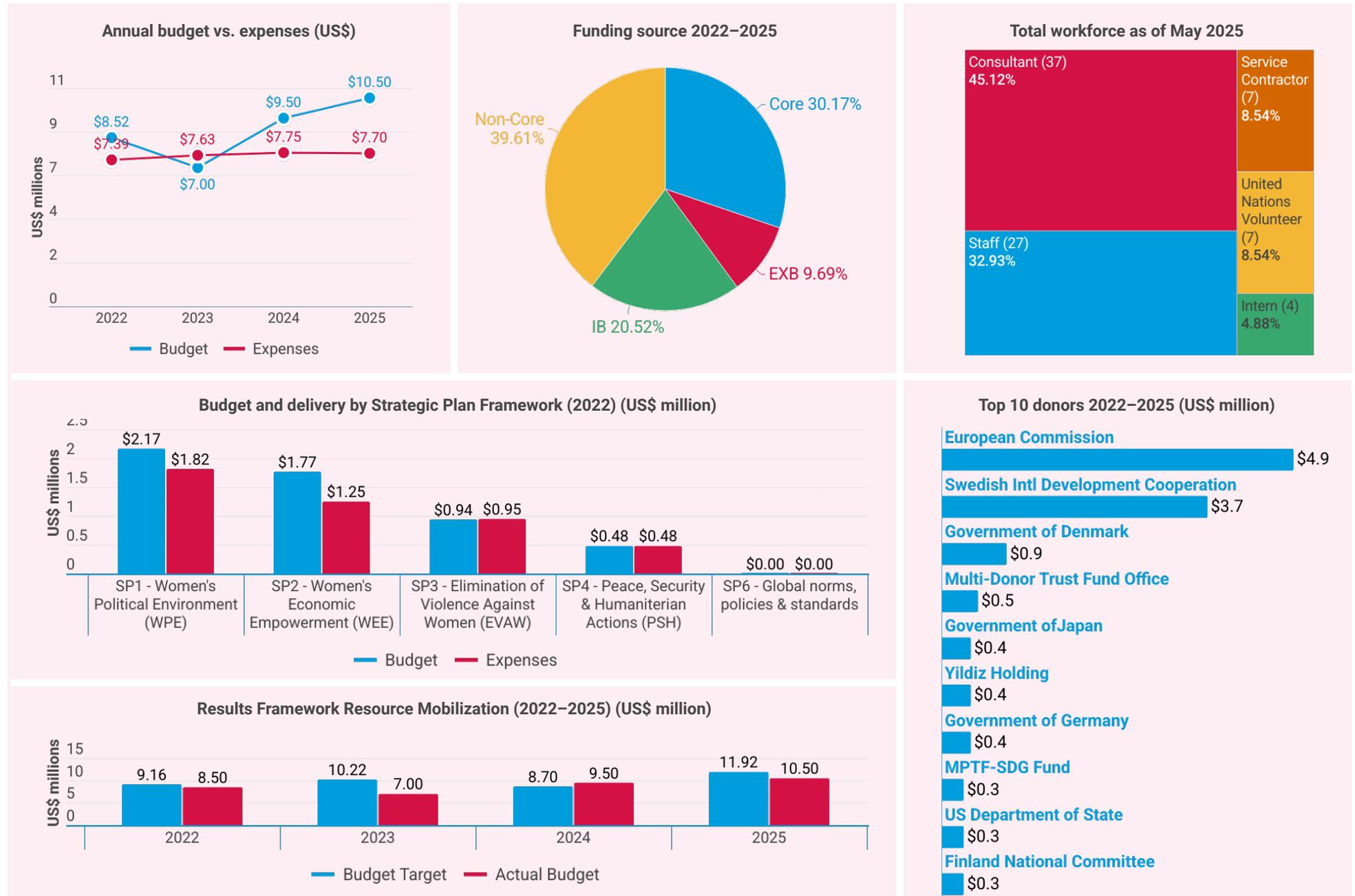


FIGURE 4:
Portfolio analysis



Source: Data from 2022 are from the corporate system Quantum (PDR), and data between 2023 and 2025 are from the corporate system Quantum (Delivery Report) 15 December 2025. Prepared by the evaluation team



Photo:UN Women/Bektur Zhanibekov

Decision-making: Women in Energy Sector

Women belong at every table where decisions are made. These photos illustrate gender data on leadership positions in government and local councils – showing why advancing women's leadership in decision-making matters for progress.

4

FINDINGS

The findings of this evaluation provide an evidence-based assessment of UN Women's work in Europe and Central Asia through the lens of its regional mandate, strategic positioning and operational effectiveness and efficiency. The findings draw on a systematic review of documents; consultations with UN Women personnel, partners and stakeholders across the region; and an analysis of both global and regional trends shaping the environment for gender equality.

The findings highlight not only areas of strength where ECARO has demonstrated clear comparative advantage and impact, but also the persistent gaps

and structural challenges that need to be addressed to ensure greater coherence, efficiency and sustainability.

In addition to their accountability function, the findings have a formative perspective, offering insights that are intended to guide future strategic planning and organizational development. This dual purpose ensures that the evaluation is not only a reflection on past performance, but also a forward-looking tool to support the recalibration of priorities, systems and approaches. Human rights and gender perspectives are integrated across the analysis.

4.1 –RELEVANCE

How relevant has the regional Strategic Note been across the Entity's integrated mandates in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment and responding to the needs and changing contexts in the region (regional integrations, armed conflicts, natural disasters, backlash against gender equality and shrinking civic space, shrinking funding etc.)

FINDING 1

The ECARO Strategic Note 2022–2025 reflected UN Women's integrated mandate and was well aligned with broader regional priorities. While it drew substantially on ongoing programmes, there was space to further articulate a longer-term vision and to more clearly define and develop ECARO's distinct role and value added.

The ECARO Strategic Note 2022–2025 was developed through an inclusive, participatory process (as reported in the evaluation interviews), including directly and indirectly more than 1,000 regional and country-level stakeholders, e.g. Country Offices, UN partners, CSOs, governments and intergovernmental bodies, and relied on thorough context analysis. The Strategic Note was anchored in global normative commitments and frameworks, including CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the Istanbul Convention and EU accession processes. It also engaged a broad spectrum of regional stakeholders, including UN entities, the EU, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Council of Europe and the business community, which all supported alignment with the regional priorities of intergovernmental work.

At its inception, the Strategic Note articulated four core outcomes: (i) advancing gender-responsive normative frameworks and financing; (ii) supporting women's political participation and leadership; (iii) eliminating violence against women and girls; and (iv) strengthening UN system coordination and accountability for gender equality. The Strategic Note was consistent with UN Women's corporate Strategic Plan and followed the impact areas; however, some interviewed personnel reported challenges in aligning with systemic outcomes and the siloed nature of practical implementation.

The initial design of the Strategic Note also revealed some shortcomings. The outcomes were largely built around already existing programmes and processes rather than articulating a forward-looking regional vision. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Strategic Note was revised to integrate Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian dimensions –neither of which had been sufficiently considered in the original planning. Similarly, Women’s Economic Empowerment was not clearly embedded as a strategic area at the outset. This was due to limited funding, despite its critical importance and ECARO’s regional initiatives, such as the Women’s Entrepreneurs EXPO and work on gender-sensitive procurement.

The Strategic Note outlined approaches but lacked clarity in defining the expected regional results and ECARO’s added value. While ECARO’s specific functions were considered highly relevant, several UN Women staff noted that its strategic role is not clearly understood beyond operational aspects, which are defined by corporate internal procedures. Regional objectives were far clearer in sectoral strategies developed at a later stage, e.g. the Regional UN Women Humanitarian Strategy for Europe and Central Asia (covering 2024–2025) and the Regional UN Women Intergovernmental Work (being drafted in 2025). With regard to the operational role of ECARO, relevance was stronger among smaller and medium-sized offices, which generally have fewer staff and rely more heavily on ECARO for operational support.

On UN coordination, priorities were only partly defined through standard interventions, e.g. gender-mainstreamed UNSDCFs and strengthened UN accountability through the UNCT-SWAP Scorecard. These were assessed as relevant, while the specific regional impact on UN, intergovernmental and NGO coordination remained vague and the strategic framework for these areas is in the development stage.

External stakeholders (UN agencies and intergovernmental organizations) highly appreciated UN Women’s contributions in areas such as normative frameworks, gender data and gender mainstreaming for strengthening the quality of joint planning documents and

providing inputs for their programmes. ECARO’s efforts on CEDAW, Beijing+ and the Istanbul Convention (particularly support for the inclusion of governments and civil society and the strengthening of reporting processes) were also highly appreciated.

Another comparative advantage is UN Women’s presence in the field and connection with governments and local-level civil society, which has provided regional-level partners with better insight into field operations and the needs of women and girls. However, both external stakeholders and UN Women recognize these collaborations rarely have a long-term vision and follow-up and remain limited to participation in events, joint events or publications and toolkits.

Previous evaluations and interviews confirmed the strategic relevance of regional programmes. UN Women’s work on GRB was singled out as one of the most contextually relevant and effective strategies, gaining recognition far beyond the initial Western Balkans focus and evolving into a flagship regional approach. In the area of Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW), the regional programme was praised for delivering demand-driven normative, technical and capacity-development assistance, with a strong focus on strengthening women’s specialized services. UN Women’s work on social norms, through the EU4Gender Equality programme, was recognized for its flexibility, adaptability and responsiveness to local contexts, as well as its ability to address backlash against gender equality. In all cases, UN Women effectively leveraged its past experience, evidence base and engagement with local stakeholders to ensure that its regional approaches were context-specific and responsive to local needs. However, the relevance of the programmes were stronger at the country level. The added regional value was primarily in standardized approaches; exposing partners to diverse practices and lessons learned; and facilitating cross-country learning. Spillover of best practices has been relatively limited (more under the Coherence and Effectiveness sections).

FINDING 2

ECARO was largely development-focused and reactive to a changing environment, with limited risk anticipation. Its WPS and humanitarian roles emerged only after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and other crises, supported by UN Women's membership of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Adaptation to the gender backlash, shrinking civic space and declining funding has been slow and insufficiently strategic

At the time of development of the Strategic Note, ECARO was development-focused and did not consider the risks of conflict and natural disasters that followed (Russia–Ukraine, Armenia–Azerbaijan, the earthquake in Türkiye and floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina).

The outbreak of the Russia–Ukraine war and UN Women's full membership of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in 2022 represented a turning point, exposing the lack of preparedness within both headquarters and ECARO to respond effectively in humanitarian contexts. Country Offices reported that, at the onset of the war, they operated largely autonomously, with limited immediate support from ECARO. Regional inputs, when they started, were channelled primarily through thematic advisers on GRB, women's political participation and women's economic empowerment, rather than through dedicated humanitarian systems or surge mechanisms. While agility improved over time, initial preparedness was lacking, particularly around evacuation, surge staffing and internal coordination within UN Women (as reported in evaluation interviews).

The onboarding of a regional humanitarian specialist in July 2022 was in direct response to the war in Ukraine and constituted an institutional milestone, bringing additional funding from headquarters to build regional humanitarian capacity. ECARO has since progressively expanded its humanitarian function. Humanitarian engagement was framed as technical advice, advocacy, gender analysis and coordination support for other UN actors, as UN Women's added value lies in evidence, data and strengthening women's voices. ECARO also played an expanded role in countries without a UN Women presence but which were affected by the refugee crisis, most notably in Slovakia and Poland, where it mobilized resources, led the delivery of services and provided gender

coordination across the Ukraine Situation Regional Refugee Coordination Forum. Within this framework, UN Women co-led the Ukraine Regional Refugee Response Gender Task Force alongside CARE and Oxfam. The task force was highly active between 2022 and 2024, convening monthly meetings, facilitating cross-agency learning, capacity development and consultations.

ECARO's humanitarian function was further tested in subsequent emergencies, including the Türkiye earthquake, the refugee influx from Armenia and floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These crises revealed both progress and persistent weaknesses. While the rapid deployment of surge staff to Türkiye illustrated greater agility, and the leadership training on Gender in Humanitarian Action was seen as immediately useful in the Bosnia response, some interviewed Country Offices and partners described responses as uneven and insufficiently coordinated internally. For example, the absence of clear standard operating procedures created uncertainty around the respective roles of headquarters, ECARO and Country Offices in crisis settings.

The draft ECARO humanitarian standard operating procedure and the Regional Humanitarian Strategy 2024–2025 were only developed towards the end of the Strategic Note period. However, following UN Women's membership approval into the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in 2022, they represent important institutional advances, articulating a "menu of services" in humanitarian settings and helping define a consistent approach to preparedness. The establishment of humanitarian focal points in each Country Office and a 10-week Gender in Humanitarian Action capacity-building programme in 2025 further illustrate the steps taken to strengthen organizational preparedness and resilience.

Parallel to its humanitarian engagement, ECARO increasingly addressed the phenomenon of a gender backlash, which emerged as an intensified trend in the aftermath of political and economic shifts globally. The evaluation notes the introduction of a Learning and Reflection series, with the first webinar in August 2024 focused on backlash drivers and narratives, and a subsequent session in September highlighting civil society responses. ECARO also initiated the development of a regional strategy on backlash, aligned with the corporate Global Push Forward strategy. Engagement with headquarters research teams, coupled with commitments from the 2025 Heads of Office Retreat to strengthen civil society support and resource mobilization, demonstrates recognition of the urgency of this issue. Nonetheless, adaptation was delayed and responses remained fragmented.

The evaluation interviews highlighted the strong demand for coordination with other UN organizations and development partners on this issue.

In summary, the evaluation finds that ECARO significantly expanded its role in humanitarian and WPS domains after 2022, demonstrating the capacity to adapt under pressure. However, the absence of early preparedness; reliance on ad hoc surge support; inconsistent reporting; and limited integration of crisis risk into the Strategic Note undermined the timeliness and strategic coherence of responses. ECARO's ability to institutionalize humanitarian expertise, integrate thematic areas and provide consistent and visible support to Country Offices will remain critical to sustaining its credibility and advancing gender equality objectives in increasingly volatile regional contexts.

FINDING 3

ECARO generated knowledge across the region and supported Country Offices through thematic, technical and operational assistance, resource mobilization, communications, planning and evaluation, and compliance with corporate UN Women policies. This support was generally valued as contributing to Country Office performance. However, its relevance and timeliness varied across contexts, and in the absence of a clear accountability and results framework, it remains difficult to systematically assess its overall effect on performance.

According to its Strategic Note 2022–2025, ECARO set out to position itself as an innovative knowledge hub and thought leader in gender equality and women's empowerment. The Strategic Note aimed to institutionalize knowledge management as a driver of impact by generating evidence-based insights; linking knowledge to programming and normative work; expanding digital platforms; and building networks of professionals and partners. Strategies included embedding a results-based culture, promoting cross-border cooperation, expanding advisory services, enhancing gender data systems and improving access to knowledge products.

Two organizational reviews in 2023 highlighted the importance of this strategy but also pointed to shortcomings. A Regional Evaluation of UN Women's Capacity Development Support to Partners, conducted by the Independent Evaluation and Audit

Service in 2023 recommended developing a clear regional capacity development strategy, standardizing approaches, enhancing communities of practice (CoPs) and ensuring a stronger focus on crisis and conflict contexts. Similarly, a functional review identified knowledge management as highly needed but underperforming, citing a lack of dedicated staff, the absence of a strategy and weak structures for documentation and lesson sharing. Both reviews recommended increased resourcing, formalizing CoPs and creating repositories to improve knowledge flows. Formal management responses to these processes were prepared, but not systematically implemented. However, visible progress was achieved on strengthening ECARO's knowledge management function in the region. This was primarily reflected in capacity needs assessments; standardization of curricula at the regional level; evaluating the immediate results of training; and management of CoPs.

BOX 4.

UN Women internal communities of practice

Thematic CoPs:

- Gender-responsive budgeting CoP: 50 personnel across the region, six meetings annually.
- Women's Economic Empowerment CoP: thematic meetings on Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy, exchanges with global teams on care, finance, migration, procurement and the Women's Empowerment Principles.
- Women's Political Participation CoP: webinars on advancing women's leadership, violence in politics and responding to global evaluations, peer learning, research dissemination.
- Women, Peace and Security CoP: monthly calls, events planning, UN SDG reporting, advocacy.
- Gender in Humanitarian Action CoP: initiated in the Regional Gender in Humanitarian Action Workshop and provided insights on responses to the October 2024 floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- Climate Change CoP: support in mobilizing resources and accessing updates on global and regional funding opportunities.
- The Regional LGBTIQ+: established in February 2024 and had three meetings under the guidance of the UN Women Global LGBTIQ+ Policy Specialist. Focused on awareness-raising and capacity development of UN Women personnel.
- Gender data CoP, jointly established with UNFPA in 2025, facilitating regional peer exchange and knowledge sharing on gender data collection, analysis, and communication.

Operational CoPs:

- Performance Management CoP: online capacity-building events on results-based management principles and lessons learned from performance management. A Teams channel was used for sharing resources and enabling peer exchanges.
- Coordination CoP: mapping of coordination capacities and support needs, integrating gender in Common Country Analysis and UNSDCF, sharing of lessons learned.
- Resource Mobilization CoP: monthly meetings to share donor intelligence and build donor engagement and reporting capacities, further support to resource mobilization and donor follow-up.
- Communications and Advocacy CoP: meetings on major campaigns (Beijing+30, 16 Days of Activism etc.).
- Human Resources CoP: monthly meetings to discuss issues in the region, share knowledge and facilitate capacity-building among human resources focal points, discuss/communicate new policies, procedures and practices and staff well-being.
- Finance COP: Meets monthly to review and address common issues.
- Procurement COP: Meets on a needs basis around emerging procurement issues, sharing good practices and knowledge.

Knowledge management within ECARO does not rest in a central unit but is integrated across programme specialists. Staff working on thematic areas such as GRB; gender data and statistics; Women's Economic Empowerment; Women, Peace and Security; and Humanitarian Action are expected to generate evidence, commission or draft learning products and

facilitate CoPs. They also oversee editorial quality and contribute to knowledge dissemination. This decentralized approach has enabled integration of knowledge functions into daily workflows but has also led to fragmentation and uneven quality and depth.

Internally, knowledge management has been highly relevant for Country Offices. With small offices and programme presences often lacking capacity, regional knowledge support provides tested methodologies, thematic expertise and opportunities for peer learning. Country Office staff particularly valued support on gender data, standardized tools and advisory inputs. The evaluation survey confirmed widespread participation in webinars, training and CoPs, although some respondents felt that regional support was inconsistent and insufficiently tailored to national realities. Staff highlighted the need for more responsive communication, in-person support and co-designed capacity development initiatives.

As part of knowledge management efforts, UN Women organized internal CoPs, increasing from nine CoPs active in 2022 to 14 in 2024 (as reported by UN Women). See Box 4 for more details. Interviewed staff reported that the CoPs were relevant and useful for strengthening their country-level work and responding to day-to-day questions and challenges.

Externally, ECARO's role as a knowledge broker has supported policy influence and normative engagement. Regional partners and governments frequently use UN Women's gender data, policy briefs and thematic studies. Knowledge products such as rapid gender assessments, GRB toolkits and crisis analyses are widely cited in policy processes. Partners emphasized the value of gender data on violence against women, the care economy and in humanitarian contexts. ECARO also disseminates knowledge through regional policy forums (e.g. the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, CSW consultations) and dialogue

platforms such as AsiaFem or the Ukraine Situation Regional Gender Task Force.

Interviewed UN Women personnel rated ECARO's services and support in almost all areas as highly relevant. At the same time, when asked about areas of UN Women's work which were and will be most relevant for future collaborations, external partners expressed greater interest in normative work and gender mainstreaming in general, GRB, EAW, WPS and Humanitarian Action, social norms and gender backlash, engaging men and boys, data and statistics and knowledge management. Regional non-governmental organizations (NGOs) did not respond to the evaluation enquiries (an overview of responses is presented in Table 3 below)

Country Offices expressed strong appreciation for ECARO's resource mobilization support, regional programmes and access to technical expertise through thematic advisers – particularly GRB, political participation and leadership, and to some extent Humanitarian Action. The relevance of ECARO's role has also changed over time as, in most cases, regional advisers are linked to programme funding (for example, the EAW thematic adviser function ceased with the end of the regional EAW programme in 2023).

According to UN Women personnel, some systemic issues remain to be resolved, such as limited human resources to dedicate to knowledge management; inconsistent follow-up to evidence of the application of knowledge; and, in some cases, insufficient alignment with the specific needs of individual Country Offices.

TABLE 3:

Relevance of regional support and approach for different stakeholders

THEMES / FUNCTIONS	UN WOMEN COUNTRY OFFICE	UN PARTNERS	OTHER INTERNATIONAL NGO PARTNERS	NGOS	DONORS	REMARKS
Women's Economic Empowerment	✓					
GRB/financing for gender equality	✓	✓	✓			More specifically, relevant for regional and UN partners at the country level and international financial institutions
Governance/ Women's Political Participation	✓					
EVAW		✓	✓			Country Offices claimed to have sufficient capacity on EVAW
WPS/Humanitarian	✓		✓		✓	Overall framework and operating procedures are needed, while some Country Offices mentioned they have capacity in this area
Disaster risk reduction/Climate change	✓					
Social norms and gender backlash	✓	✓	✓			
Engaging men and boys	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Policy/normative	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Gender mainstreaming	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Data/statistics	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Knowledge management	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Partnerships– Resource mobilization	✓	✓	✓		✓	
HR	✓					Relevant for smaller offices
Finance and budget	✓					Relevant for smaller offices
Procurement	✓					Relevant for smaller offices
Administration	✓					Relevant for smaller offices
Communication	✓	✓	✓			

Source: Identified by the evaluation team based on the evaluation interviews and survey responses.

4.2 INTERNAL COHERENCE

How have ECARO's efforts supported internal coherence, catalysing efforts at all levels and bridging corporate and country-level efforts across UN Women offices in the region to ensure a coherent approach to achieving the Entity's integrated mandate to advance gender equality and women's empowerment?

FINDING 4

ECARO has enhanced internal coherence by supporting strategic planning and programming, advancing regional knowledge management and promoting standardized approaches in selected thematic areas. While regional programmes were effectively linked to Country Office interventions through joint ECARO–Country Office efforts, this generally did not translate into spill-over effects across borders. Coordination and synergies across thematic areas at the regional level remained limited, constraining the potential for more integrated and transformative results.

At the strategic level, ECARO supported the development of Country Office Strategic Notes, ensuring alignment with the global Strategic Plan 2022–2025, while tailoring approaches to national contexts. This strengthened coherence in priority settings and allowed country programmes to anchor their interventions in national contexts, while using regionally proven best practices, tools and methodologies. Country Offices highlighted the added value of this support, particularly in linking their national strategies to the Strategic Plan's systemic outcomes and adhering to corporate requirements.

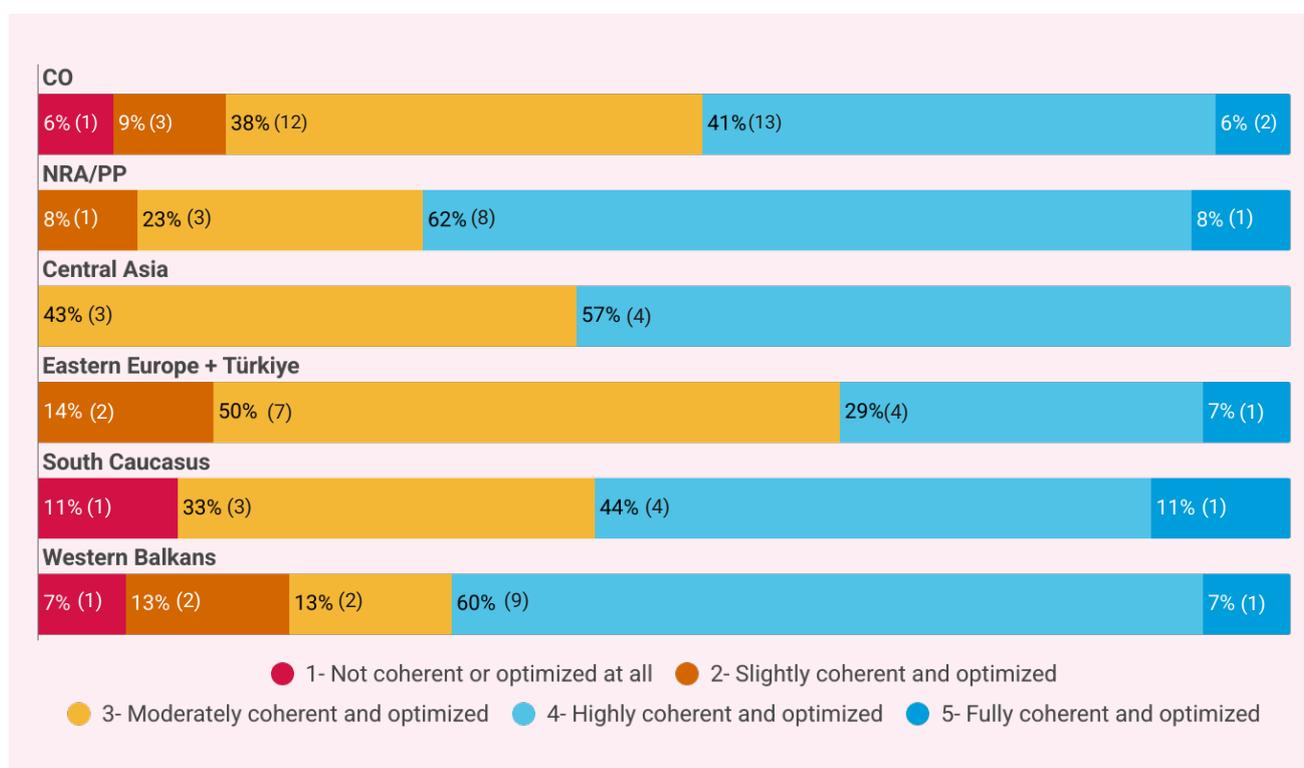
Management of regional programmes also strengthened coherence, with ECARO deploying standardized yet context-sensitive approaches (confirmed by interviews and review of evaluation reports). For example, the regional GRB programme introduced common training packages and monitoring tools, while still allowing adaptation to diverse governance systems in the Western Balkans, Central Asia and the Caucasus. ECARO's oversight role was particularly valued in helping Country Office teams move from fragmented and projectized efforts to more integrated and systemic reforms.

The GRB Programme Specialist was consistently recognized for ensuring quality control, promoting cross-country learning and disseminating lessons and good practices. Working on financing for gender equality, the programme easily connected with other areas of Country Office portfolios, such as Women's Economic Empowerment (budgetary support to rural women and women's owned businesses); Women's Political Participation (by empowering women to advocate for their needs to be budgeted and local councillors and parliamentarians to oversee the budget adoption and implementation); and Ending Violence Against Women (by ensuring budgetary support to women's specialized services at the local level), etc. The regional ERAW programme closely collaborated with country programmes on ERAW, bringing the most up-to-date knowledge and leveraging normative results and effectiveness of specialized services with additional funding. Lessons from regional work on social norms through the EU4GE programme also highlighted good practices relevant to the entire region.

While synergies were ensured at the country level, there was space to improve coordination among regional programmes. The perception of most interviewed personnel was that regional programmes often operated in parallel rather than in synergy, with limited mechanisms to systematically link initiatives across programmes. This was mostly due to the workload of programme management and administration, as programme specialists had to focus primarily on delivering within their respective areas rather than building structured, cross-cutting synergies and facilitating cross-fertilization.

As seen in the survey responses (see Figure 5), less than half of Country Office personnel view the regional structure as “highly” or “fully” coherent and optimized. There is space for stronger management direction, joint planning and investment in integrative approaches to leverage organizational comparative advantages across programmes and further support transformative changes across the region.

FIGURE 5:
Perception of UN Women personnel on effectiveness and coherence in supporting implementation



Source: Evaluation UN Women personnel survey

4.3 EXTERNAL COHERENCE

How effectively has ECARO leveraged UN Women's coordination mandate to strategically position itself and contribute to a more coherent and gender-responsive approach by UN partners and other development actors in the region?

FINDING 5

Coordination with the UN system in the European and Central Asia region shows uneven performance across different modalities. While ECARO has played an intensive and valued role in regional coordination groups and in advancing gender mainstreaming through its contributions to UNSDCFs and implementation of the UN-SWAP Gender Equality Scorecard, the potential of engaging in regional joint programmes was not fully realized.

ECARO has consolidated its role as a key driver of UN system-wide accountability for gender equality in the region. Through its coordination mandate, ECARO has demonstrated leadership in embedding gender equality across regional and country-level processes, while also contributing to global normative frameworks and humanitarian responses. Its work within inter-agency structures has enabled greater coherence in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment across the UN system.

Under its coordination mandate, and in line with corporate Strategic Plan Outcome 7 on UN coordination and regional Strategic Note Outcome 4, ECARO has invested in efforts to ensure that the UN system demonstrates greater accountability to advance progress on gender equality and women's empowerment. In the Strategic Note, ECARO aimed to position itself as a regional thought leader in the UN development system, leveraging convening power, leadership and membership of regional coordination mechanisms.

BOX 5.

ECARO's engagement with UN coordination groups

- Regional Collaborative Platform for Europe and Central Asia, which brings together the regional heads of UN entities.
- Issue-based coalition on Gender Equality (co-lead with UNFPA).
- Issue-Based Coalition on Climate and Environment (member).
- Montenegro, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan's Gender Theme Groups (member, from the last quarter of 2022. Montenegro has been covered by the Albania Country Office and in May 2025 UN Women opened a Country Office in Uzbekistan).
- Ukraine Situation Regional Gender Task Force under the Regional Refugee Coordination Forum co-led by Care and later by Oxfam, established in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and involved various UN agencies and international NGOs (discontinued in December 2024).
- Peer Support Group of Europe and Central Asia region engaging with UNCTs in quality assuring the products of the UNSDCF cycle (such as road map, Common Country Analysis) based on which the UNSDCF is designed and gender mainstreamed.
- Regional UN Working Group on Data and Statistics.

Another highly valued area of work, both internally and externally, was ECARO's support to Country Offices in their UN coordination role with UNCTs. This included integrating gender equality and women's empowerment into UNSDCF and crisis response plans; implementing the SWAP Gender Equality Scorecard; providing training on Gender Equality Markers; and conducting gender assessments. ECARO's co-leadership of the Issue-Based Coalition on Gender Equality with UNFPA became a recognized mechanism for advancing system-wide commitments on gender equality. According to UN Women reports, during the period under evaluation, dedicated online training convened by the Issue-Based Coalition on Gender Equality reached nearly 230 UN staff, including 59 per cent of Gender Theme Group members. The coalition also supported demand-driven engagement through webinars, guidance notes and tailored advisory services, with strong uptake by UNCTs navigating new UNSDCF cycles. In 2024 alone, all UNCTs in the region benefitted from at least one service from the Issue-Based Coalition on Gender Equality, including technical support for integrating gender equality into UNSDCF and Common Country Analyses. The Issue-Based Coalition on Gender Equality also played a visible role in shaping policy dialogues, for example co-organizing regional workshops on systems thinking in UNSDCF and contributing gender analyses to the regional Beijing+30 review.

ECARO has had an important role in advancing gender data within UN coordination structures. As confirmed by both UN Women and UN partners, UN Women's active participation in the Regional UN Coordination Group on Data and Statistics contributed to UNECE SDG reviews, joint gender data initiatives and the development of guidance notes to strengthen national statistical systems. The launch of the SDG 5 Joint Programme in 2025, co-implemented with UNFPA and coordinated with the Development Coordination Office, represents an important milestone in institutionalizing gender data capacities at the regional level. This programme builds on UN Women's established reputation as a trusted source of data and evidence, particularly on femicide, violence against women, the care economy and the impacts of crises. In 2025, as a member of the UNECE Group of Experts on Gender Statistics, ECARO led regional data collection on

best practices for measuring technology-facilitated gender-based violence in the region. The initial results were discussed at the Group of Experts meeting in Geneva in 2025, and the data collection tool developed by ECARO was reported to be replicated by other UN regional commissions, strengthening regional gender data practices. The information collected aims to contribute to the global development of a conceptual definition and statistical framework to measure technology-facilitated violence in line with recommendations from the UN Statistical Commission's work on gender statistics.

In humanitarian contexts, ECARO demonstrated agility and leadership through its co-leadership of the Regional Gender Task Force under the Ukraine Refugee Coordination Forum. By producing and disseminating gender analyses across seven countries, ECARO ensured that gender perspectives were integrated into inter-agency reports on economic inclusion, health, education and protection. These inputs directly informed the 2023, 2024 and 2025 Regional Refugee Response Plan and were reflected in several Common Country Analyses and UNSDCF, illustrating ECARO's ability to bridge humanitarian, development and peacebuilding agendas. Partners interviewed consistently recognized UN Women's role in ensuring that the voices, needs and priorities of refugee women and girls were visible in system-wide planning and response.

ECARO also partnered with the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy and UNDP to strengthen gender-responsive peace and security work in Eastern Partnership and Central Asian countries. Building on the UN Secretary-General's New Peace Agenda and the Pact for the Future, ECARO laid the groundwork for collaborative actions planned for 2025, reinforcing regional commitments emerging from the Women, Peace and Security Dialogue for Eastern Partnership countries and the Central Asian Women's Dialogue Forum.

At the same time, coordination efforts faced some limitations. First, participation in joint programming has remained limited, with only a small number of initiatives implemented (e.g. EU4GE, Making Every Woman and Girl Count, the SDG 5 Joint Programme).

This reduced opportunities for leveraging collective resources, strengthening visibility and reinforcing UN Women's position as the regional lead agency on gender equality. Some tension was reported in the evaluation interviews and UN Women reports between demand-driven collaboration and responsiveness to immediate UN family requests and the need to prioritize joint higher-level advocacy and policy influence.

Through the Peer Support Group, ECARO conducted gender reviews and provided recommendations to all UNCTs developing new UNSDCF. While gender mainstreaming within UNSDCF has improved significantly, stakeholders highlighted the need for sustained

engagement during the later stages of implementation, monitoring and accountability to ensure that commitments translate into results. Capacity-building activities –such as regional training and peer support to UNCTs –are highly valued, but UN partners would also appreciate further systematic follow-up; and, in some cases, contextual adaptation with more targeted and tailored in-country engagement.

As per annual reports, UN coordination efforts have positioned UN Women as an important driver of accountability for gender equality within system-wide planning and monitoring processes.

FINDING 6

Regional intergovernmental and international finance institutions value ECARO's role in generating knowledge; providing gender analysis and data; and fostering connections with national and grassroots partners. Work on women's economic empowerment and gender-responsive public finance management has translated into tangible activities and results, whereas other initiatives have remained largely limited to exchanges and joint publications, leaving room for a stronger long-term vision and follow-up.

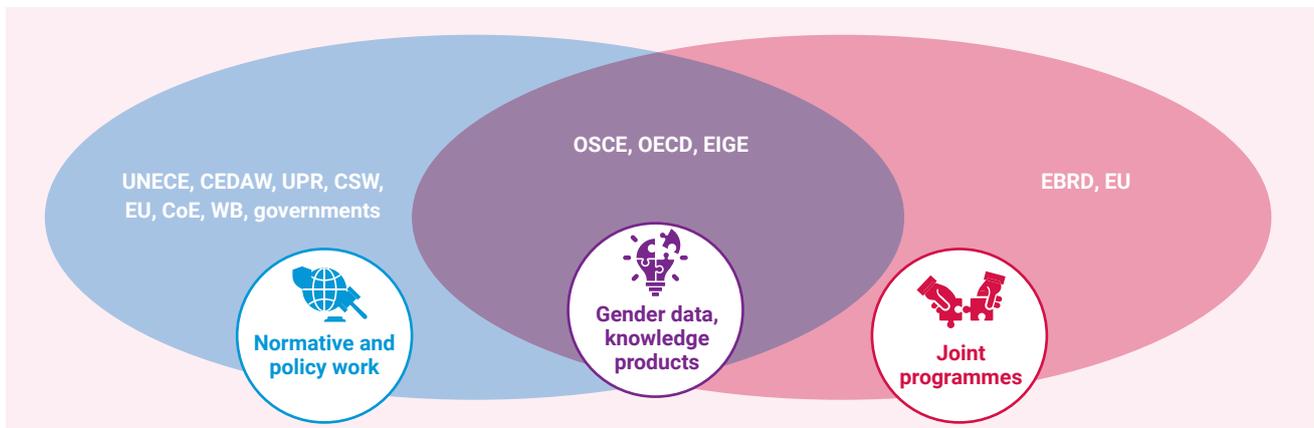
ECARO has established a diverse set of external partnerships with international financial institutions, regional intergovernmental organizations and private-sector actors, which have strengthened the office's visibility and convening role in the region. A flagship example is the Women's Entrepreneurship EXPO, launched in 2021 in partnership with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and private company, Yıldız Holding. This initiative has engaged thousands of women entrepreneurs across the region, providing networking opportunities, business development support and visibility to women-led enterprises. The EXPO has grown over successive years into a flagship platform uniting women entrepreneurs, investors, mentors and business networks. Its features include co-creation hubs, pitches, digital booths, peer learning sessions and regional dialogue around finance, digitalization and value chains.

ECARO has also collaborated with global partners such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and the EU, at both regional and country levels, ensuring that efforts are aligned with international standards and practices, and the field interventions of these development stakeholders. For instance, UN Women

engaged with the World Bank in conducting gender analysis within Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability in Georgia, Kosovo and Moldova, which provided useful information for future developments in public finance management. ECARO joined with the World Bank in providing training for officials of 11 Ministries of Finance and UN Women personnel across the region in public finance management and gender-responsive Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability. UN Women Kazakhstan's partnerships with the Asian Development Bank and World Bank on GRB-related initiatives have been crucial for its promotion; while in Kyrgyzstan, UN Women has worked with EU-supported budget programmes and government agencies to integrate GRB tools effectively. In Uzbekistan, ECARO established a partnership with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to conduct a gender-responsive analysis of the energy sector in 2025. The contribution of intergovernmental work to outcomes (GRB, Women's EXPO), in synergy with regional programmes are explained under the Effectiveness section, Finding 9.

FIGURE 6:

Stakeholders and areas of UN Women's intergovernmental work in Europe and Central Asia



Source: Developed by the evaluation team

Beyond the financial sector, ECARO collaborated with key regional organizations such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Council of Europe and the EU, including memorandums of understanding, joint research, development of tools and co-organization of events in global and regional forums, e.g. side events at CSW. According to the UN Women personnel and partners interviewed, such engagements have raised the visibility of gender equality issues in intergovernmental spaces and contributed to the production of relevant policy guidance. However, these engagements remain fragmented and largely exchange-driven, without a clear overarching framework to sustain cooperation.

Longer-term strategic collaboration is challenged due to limited human and financial resources and opportunities for direct resource mobilization from international financial institutions and regional bodies. However, there is potential for resources to be mobilized by national government partners for economic development programmes. For instance, while regional collaboration with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe or EU structures has helped Country Offices leverage funding streams domestically, at the regional level, partnerships are rarely used as vehicles for mobilizing or pooling resources for joint programming. Similarly, while UN Women has promoted the inclusion of gender perspectives in processes such as Public Expenditure and Financial

Accountability assessments, its engagement has been more ad hoc than systemic, and these efforts have yet to be translated into a coherent regional strategy for collaboration with financial governance actors.

The stakeholders interviewed for this evaluation acknowledged the value of UN Women's convening power and credibility in facilitating dialogue with international financial institutions and regional bodies. However, they also pointed to the lack of a clearly articulated vision guiding these partnerships. Without a stronger strategic framework, partnerships risk remaining transactional, focused on one-off events or knowledge products, rather than advancing long-term transformative agendas such as integrating gender equality into financial governance, regional trade frameworks or resilience strategies.

Looking ahead, ECARO has an opportunity to leverage its normative mandate and technical expertise to move beyond knowledge exchange and towards structured partnerships that embed gender equality into regional financing and policy mechanisms. This would also position UN Women as a more strategic actor in shaping regional development priorities in alignment with its corporate Strategic Plan.

FINDING 7

Engagement with the private sector has opened promising entry points through initiatives promoting women’s entrepreneurship, gender-responsive business practices and inclusive procurement. These efforts have increased visibility, created collaboration opportunities and demonstrated strong potential to directly benefit women entrepreneurs and employees, but require further strategic consolidation.

The results of the EXPO initiative affirm that private-sector engagement is a relevant and promising area of work for ECARO. The EXPO model provides tangible opportunities for women entrepreneurs to gain visibility, develop business ideas, connect to investors and engage in cross-border networks. For UN Women, it offers a mechanism to amplify its credibility, expand its partner base and position gender equality within private sector and market development discourse. However, this type of engagement also reveals structural and operational constraints that limit its scalability and sustainability. Many stakeholders noted that while the demands for private-sector partnerships are

high, they require significant time, coordination and relationship management, and the financial returns or resource mobilization from such partnerships often fall short of UN Women’s needs.

The EXPO model is developing strong ownership across Country Offices in the region and has been successful in outreach and networking. However, it still requires further efforts to grow into a systemic and long-lasting joint intergovernmental and private investment approach to women’s economic empowerment, tied to UN Women’s long-term programming.

FINDING 8

Engagement with civil society at the regional level has been inconsistent and shifted in approach from a regional Civil Society Advisory Group to programme-related interactions and generic long-term memorandums of understanding. There are discussions within ECARO about the most appropriate modality, but a decision is yet to be made. During the Strategic Note period, ECARO engaged with CSOs on processes such as Beijing +30 and WPS.

One of ECARO’s distinctive strengths, recognized by all regional partners, is its relatively deep-rooted engagement with CSOs and women’s rights groups, which sets it apart from some other UN agencies, which focus more on governmental or intergovernmental stakeholders. In the Europe and Central Asia region, UN Women is often viewed by CSOs as a convenor, interlocutor and source of normative, technical and funding support –playing a bridging role between grassroots movements and national and regional policymaking.

For instance, UN Women’s coordination with CSOs in designing the regional Strategic Note 2022–2025 reflected an intent to align with the needs of, and co-create with, civil society voices. Despite this, most

collaboration with CSOs happens through regional programmes at the country level and regional normative work (CEDAW normative consultations, CSW, reporting on international commitments). Formal structures, such as the regional Civil Society Advisory Group, once part of UN Women’s regional architecture, have been discontinued. Similar trends were seen with country-level Civil Society Advisory Groups (e.g. in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Georgia), which either lost relevance or ceased functioning due to fatigue, lack of effectiveness or the preference of CSOs to engage as UN Women partners. This reduces institutionalized channels for civil society to engage with UN Women’s strategic and operational planning.

More intensive cooperation with CSOs happens through regional programmes and specific initiatives, such as community advocacy for GRB in the Western Balkans; strengthening intersectoral collaboration against gender-based violence; and implementing programmes for transforming social norms. UN Women organized targeted dialogues with CSOs from Türkiye and Armenia on WPS; with Central Asian women CSOs on economic empowerment, WPS and climate change; and between women's organizations and activists from conflict-affected and fragile countries. These initiatives are recent and are yet to show their effects.

Engagements were also reported through facilitated consultative mechanisms for high-level events and normative processes. For example, a CSO Steering Group of 12 members was established in relation to Beijing +30 processes (involving over 120 CSOs in consultations) and CSO inputs were gathered around CEDAW general recommendation no. 40. These processes indicate a willingness to engage civil society formally, but their reach and continuity beyond flagship events remain limited.

ECARO lacks a coherent vision and a regional CSO engagement strategy; therefore, engagement remains highly fragmented and varies by subregion and country, with no consistent thread or clear regional framework. There are weak structural links with larger regional NGOs or movements (for example Women Against Violence in Europe or the European Women's Lobby): communication and coordination are often episodic, not sustained or integrated into joint programming or advocacy. A similar pattern occurred with the Gender

Budgeting Watchdog Network where, despite the regional project, engagement was largely limited to information exchange rather than deeper synergies or joint initiatives. The findings of the regional Review of Partnerships with Women's Civil Society Organizations and Women's Human Rights Defenders in Europe and Central Asia (2023) also underscore UN Women's important role for women's CSOs in the region and a need for clearer, more consistent and more inclusive engagement. CSOs view UN Women as their ally but face uneven access to information and opportunities due to resource constraints, language barriers and irregular engagement practices. To address this, the recommendations in this report emphasize clearly defining and operationalizing consultation, engagement and partnership; improving transparent, multilingual communication; rebuilding trust with core feminist constituencies; and establishing predictable regional and country-level consultation mechanisms. Pluralism and intersectionality within women's movements should also be emphasized and strengthened, enabling two-way communication and knowledge-sharing; facilitating regional CSO exchanges; supporting long-term capacity-building; and simplifying funding procedures so that smaller and newer organizations can participate more equitably in advancing substantive gender equality.

In summary, ECARO's engagement with CSOs demonstrates strong potential and a degree of credibility among civil society stakeholders, but is constrained by under-institutionalized modalities, uneven regional coverage, and resource and capacity constraints.

4.4 EFFECTIVENESS

What were ECARO's key results in pursuing gender equality and the empowerment of women through its integrated mandated and what were the most effective strategies?

FINDING 9

Tangible results have been achieved through UN Women's regional programming in areas such as GRB, normative progress on eliminating violence against women and initiatives challenging harmful social norms. Strategies such as research and gender data generation, policy work and capacity development efforts, and work with non-traditional partners, all realized in synergy with Country Offices, have generated concrete outcomes for women and girls at the country level.

While ECARO reported results under all Strategic Note outcomes, the most tangible evidence on results was gathered from regional programmes and flagship initiatives such as EXPO. Other results mostly involved general advancements made across the region (for example in political participation), where ECARO's contribution is largely indirect.

Under Outcome 1, UN Women's GRB work across Europe and Central Asia has achieved significant progress in mainstreaming gender into public financial management systems at both national and local levels. According to the GRB evaluation report, GRB works well because it provides a systemic and institutionalized mechanism for advancing gender equality through public finance processes rather than isolated projects. The evaluation showed that GRB is most effective where it is embedded in legal frameworks, public financial management reforms and national gender equality strategies, and aligned with international commitments such as CEDAW, the SDGs and, in some contexts, EU accession and World Bank led reform processes. Its effectiveness is further strengthened by a combination of standardized technical tools, extensive capacity development and sustained engagement with ministries of finance, line ministries, local governments and oversight institutions, which enables practical application through gender analysis, indicators, tagging and accountability mechanisms. At the same time, GRB links budgeting with participatory governance by enabling civil society and women's

groups to influence budget priorities. Even in contexts of political backlash against gender equality, GRB has been a "door opener" in Central Asia or proven resilient to backlash across the region by embedding gender considerations into fiscal systems, demonstrating its value as both a technical and transformative approach.

GRB results can be grouped into several areas: integrating GRB into policy and legal frameworks; developing tools for implementation (budget circulars, tagging systems, audits); strengthening institutional capacity through training and technical support; enabling participatory approaches with women's groups and CSOs; advancing gender-disaggregated data systems; and facilitating regional cooperation through exchanges, study visits and conferences. Based on UN Women Results Management System (RMS) reporting, following GRB interventions, national and local governments in 16 of 18 countries in Europe and Central Asia engaged in GRB, with Albania and Serbia being among 19 per cent of nations that track and publicly disclose allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment (SDG target 5.c.1). UN Women contributed to the development of comprehensive policy and legal frameworks for GRB in the region and built institutional capacity through extensive training and technical support for ministries, civil servants, local governments, oversight mechanisms and civil society (thousands of public officials from central and local levels across the region, e.g. more than 1,000 in Albania, Moldova and Türkiye; close to

800 in Serbia and Ukraine; more than 600 in Georgia; close to 500 in Bosnia and Herzegovina; close to 400 in Kosovo; and slightly less in other countries).

UN Women also built the capacities of oversight institutions, such as supreme audit, parliaments and municipal councils (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia, Kyrgyzstan, Türkiye and Ukraine) and ombuds institutions, resulting in line ministries preparing responses or action plans based on enquiries and recommendations they provide. These efforts resulted in increased budget allocations for gender equality across government sectors in several countries. For example, as reported by the Evaluation of UN Women's Work on Gender Responsive Budgeting in Europe and Central Asia, in Albania in 2015, only 1 per cent of budget allocations were assessed as gender-responsive, which increased to 9 per cent in 2025. Further efforts are needed in all countries to identify the effects of GRB on real expenditure and its impact on women and girls' lives.

ECARO played a significant role in localizing the global UN Women flagship programme "Women Count" on gender data, by supporting countries to strengthen gender statistics and close critical data gaps for SDG 5 through normative, technical and capacity-building interventions. As reported by UN Women, through direct or joint work with Country Offices, ECARO supported normative interventions to mainstream gender into national statistical strategies and action plans in countries including Georgia, Albania and Kyrgyzstan and strengthened institutional frameworks for gender-responsive data systems. ECARO supported time-use surveys for SDG 5.4 reporting in Georgia, Armenia and Belarus; and violence against women prevalence surveys for SDG 5.2 reporting in Georgia, Belarus, Moldova and Kyrgyzstan.

ECARO reported progress on women's leadership and political participation under Outcome 2, with female representation increasing by 2–9 per cent in five countries in 2024. The evaluation team confirmed the significant contribution made by the regional thematic adviser on political participation (through the corporate Strategic Partnership Framework with Sida) in development of country programmes, which provided capacity development to female politicians and initiated other actions on women's participation in policy development.

Outcome 3 results during the evaluation period also show progress made by countries and UN Women Country Offices, while additional contribution was evident through regional programmes ("Implementing Norms, Changing Minds" and "EU4Gender Equality"). The evaluation of the EU4Gender Equality Regional UN Women –UNFPA Joint Programme implemented in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine identified numerous effective and innovative interventions, which resulted in shifting harmful social norms and promoting gender equality. According to the report, some of the most impactful initiatives were the Papa School models where fathers were provided with culturally relevant spaces to explore positive parenting, family relationships and non-violent masculinities; while adaptations during the war in Ukraine expanded to psychosocial support and community activities for internally displaced persons. Engagement with religious leaders made priests, imams and faith-based organizations influential partners in addressing gender-based violence and promoting gender equality, with some leaders actively challenging harmful practices and promoting safety within families. Youth engagement benefitted from creative approaches such as interactive theatre, hackathons and festivals harnessing the openness of young people to challenge stereotypes and embrace more equitable norms. According to UN Women reporting, programme communication campaigns reached an estimated 35.6 million people across different channels.

Evaluation of the regional EVAW programme "Implementing norms, changing minds" found it contributed to a stronger legislative and policy environment by supporting countries revise their laws and policies to align with international conventions such as the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW. For example, Albania revised its Law on Measures Against Violence in Family Relations and adopted a Strategy for Gender Equality; Bosnia and Herzegovina revised the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence; Kosovo adopted amendments to the Constitution and a new Strategy for Protection from Domestic Violence; Montenegro adopted a new National Strategy for Gender Equality; and Serbia enacted multiple changes, including a Strategy for the Prevention and Combating of Gender-Based Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence. CSOs have actively monitored and reported on implementation of these legal and policy changes.

The programme also contributed to social norms shifts, through innovative communication campaigns and targeted actions in communities.

Within Women's Economic Empowerment (later added to the portfolio), based on UN Women RMS reporting, the Women's Entrepreneurship EXPO initiative resulted in significant capacity development for women entrepreneurs and enhanced their connection with markets and individual gender-responsive procurement initiatives, which resulted in the purchase of products and income generation.

All programmes developed a range of knowledge products and resources (for details see Appendix 2 on knowledge management).

The evaluation identified key, effective implementation strategies drawn from extensive interviews and documentation review. Key impactful approaches included the multi-level model of interventions, focusing simultaneously on personal, interpersonal, institutional and societal levels. This comprehensive framework recognized that transforming norms requires coordinated efforts across these layers.

Overall, a key foundational element is UN Women's policy work, which advances legal and institutional frameworks in countries to support human rights and gender equality. Such policy engagement provides the structural backbone for all other interventions. Through close collaboration with governments, parliaments and national gender machineries, UN Women has helped align national laws and policies with international standards. This work has created an enabling environment where community initiatives and behavioural change efforts can take root.

By combining evidence-based policy advice with technical assistance and capacity development, UN Women has built the institutional commitment necessary to sustain progress on gender equality long after individual programmes conclude. Capacity development was most effective when designed comprehensively, i.e. based on proper needs assessment; designed and tailored to the context; extended beyond one-off training to include mentoring, peer exchanges and CoPs; and when it included longer-term

follow-up to support application of the knowledge and skills gained. Although in many cases sustainability has not yet been fully achieved, these approaches contributed to stronger ownership and strengthened institutional networks.

In the social norms-focused "EU 4 Gender Equality "Together against gender stereotypes and gender-based violence" regional programme, at the personal and interpersonal levels interventions targeted community men and fathers and engaged non-traditional partners such as religious leaders and influential community persons. The programme continuously challenged stereotypes around care roles. At the institutional level, integrating gender equality into professional and educational curricula ensured that gender-transformative perspectives became embedded in systems that shape social values. At the societal level, mass communication campaigns amplified visibility and reinforced consistent messages on gender equality, reaching millions and sparking public dialogue. This was complemented by interactive community activities, digital storytelling and youth-led initiatives to promote reflection and attitude change. However, it is worth stressing that work on social norms requires long-term interventions to achieve wider societal change.

Within the WPS area, UN Women supported the Ukraine refugee response in neighbouring countries, including Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Moldova and Georgia by strengthening gender-responsive humanitarian action. UN Women increased access to gender analysis and expertise through Gender in Humanitarian Action training in Poland and Slovakia provided to humanitarian partners; and amplified the voices of women-led organizations through national consultations, whose recommendations informed inter-agency refugee response planning. ECARO provided technical guidance, gender analysis and advocacy to improve the gender responsiveness of Refugee Response Plans and funding for women-led organizations. Additional capacity-building included regional training on humanitarian negotiations for civil society actors and gender-based violence case management training.

TABLE 4:

Key results of the Women's Entrepreneurship EXPO initiative –reported by management

2022	2023	2024
<p>Capacity development:</p> <p>232 women entrepreneurs gained knowledge in branding, pricing and marketing through PwC-led bootcamps.</p> <p>57 women entrepreneurs in Kyrgyzstan strengthened business skills through nine Acceleration Programme seminars.</p> <p>Promotion:</p> <p>Six countries hosted satellite Expos and summits, where 243 women entrepreneurs showcased products, 163 women networked and promoted services and 3,000 participants engaged overall.</p> <p>763 private companies participated, creating strong links with UN Women Country Offices.</p> <p>800+ visitors joined 16 learning sessions.</p> <p>650+ connections were established among participants.</p> <p>210 entrepreneurs launched virtual booths.</p> <p>Resource mobilization:</p> <p>US\$ 620,000+ leveraged in private-sector contributions (multi-year commitments).</p> <p>Partnerships expanded.</p>	<p>Capacity development:</p> <p>1,381 women entrepreneurs trained through 50+ multilingual virtual bootcamps.</p> <p>Promotion:</p> <p>400 entrepreneurs showcased services/products across 13 sectors at EXPO marketplace booths.</p> <p>10 satellite events in 6 countries drew over 15,000 participants and 75 investors, with more than 1,047 women entrepreneurs engaged.</p> <p>400+ virtual booths attracted 2,550+ visitors.</p> <p>Social media reached 55,000+ users.</p> <p>Gender-responsive procurement:</p> <p>Gender-responsive procurement and investment programme was launched with Yildiz Holding: US\$ 1 million spent on procurement from women agricultural entrepreneurs.</p> <p>US\$ 4.3 million invested in 53 new women-owned businesses.</p> <p>The programme won Deloitte's Best Global Corporate Social Responsibility Programme.</p>	<p>Capacity development:</p> <p>1,336 women entrepreneurs trained through 45+ virtual bootcamps conducted in 10 languages.</p> <p>93.4 per cent of participants reported significant knowledge gains (avg. rating 5.45/6).</p> <p>Promotion:</p> <p>8 in-person events in 7 countries reached 10,000+ participants, with 587 women entrepreneurs actively involved.</p> <p>37 panels/seminars delivered with 38 local partners (chambers of commerce, banks, state agencies).</p> <p>Virtual EXPO drew 1,950 registrations, 7,736 visits.</p> <p>Social media reach 6.2 million.</p> <p>Financing and resources:</p> <p>US\$ 147,472 core budget leveraged to mobilize US\$ 91,100 in cash/in-kind and an additional US\$ 620,000 through EU proposals.</p> <p>Gender-responsive procurement</p> <p>The Women Stars of Agriculture Programme (with Yildiz Holding) facilitated the purchase of 7,022 tons of fresh produce from 70 women farmers, valued at US\$ 1.7 million.</p> <p>The Ben de Varım initiative placed women entrepreneurs' products in 243 ŞOK retail stores, increasing national visibility and access to consumers.</p>

Source: UN Women management RMS reporting

FINDING 10

ECARO is moving from fragmented, project-driven communications towards a more integrated and strategic model. Consolidating the core team, strengthening media partnerships and improving cross-portfolio coordination are key ongoing changes. Completing this transition will be critical to sustaining recent gains and achieving consistent, region-wide impact.

During the current Strategic Note period, after the period when the communication specialist position was vacant, ECARO's communications function focused on organizational transition. Tangible achievements include strengthened digital communications capacity, with innovative formats and non-traditional storytelling approaches that expanded reach and engagement. The Ukraine communications response emerged as a flagship example of successful coordination across headquarters, ECARO and the Country Office, ensuring consistent, timely and compelling messaging for one of the region's most critical priorities. ECARO also completed a comprehensive media mapping exercise, providing a solid foundation for targeted media engagement. For the first time, ECARO secured and managed a core budget for communications, enabling delivery of high-profile events such as the Beijing+30 anniversary. Alignment with headquarters-led global campaigns (e.g. International Women's

Day, 16 Days of Activism) increased coherence and visibility across platforms.

The Communications function is in transition from a fragmented, project-driven set-up towards a more structured and strategic model. Previously, scattered reporting and siloed practices limited synergistic and strategic communications. Moving forward, key priorities include translating the media mapping exercise into a focused set of strategic media partnerships; strengthening cross-portfolio coordination within ECARO to reduce siloed practices; and embedding communications more systematically into programme design and implementation.

At the country level, capacities remain uneven, with some Country Offices lacking dedicated communications staff or budgets, and relying heavily on ECARO for their basic web and social media presence.

TABLE 5:**ECARO's social networks statistics - reported by management**

2022	2023	2024
<p>In 2022, the total number of followers for all ECARO accounts (English and Russian) stood at 110,068 - marking a 8.2% increase compared to 2021.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECARO English Facebook: 22,615 • ECARO Russian Facebook: 10,419 • ECARO English Twitter: 24,074 • ECARO Russian Twitter: 2,387 • ECARO English Instagram: 3,553 • ECARO Russian Instagram: 3,468 • ECARO Odnoklassniki: 25,880 • ECARO VKontakte: 15,179 • ECARO YouTube: 2,493 	<p>The number of total followers increased to 118,373 –a 7.5% increase as compared to 2022.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECARO English Facebook: 26,005 (15% increase) • ECARO Russian Facebook: 12,200 (6.5% increase) • ECARO English Twitter: 24,467 (1.6% increase) • ECARO Russian Twitter: 2,464 (3.2% increase) • ECARO English Instagram: 4,216 (18.6% increase) • ECARO Russian Instagram: 3,971 (14.5% increase) • ECARO Odnoklassniki: 27,057 (4.5% increase) • ECARO VKontakte: 15,300 (0.7% increase) • ECARO YouTube: 2,493 (15.2% increase) <p>Additionally, in 2023, ECARO launched its LinkedIn account with 3,660 followers, bringing the total number of social network followers to 122,033.</p>	<p>The number of total followers from increased from 118,373 to 133,378 –a 12.6% increase as compared to the previous reporting year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECARO English Facebook: 27,253 (4.7% increase) • ECARO Russian Facebook: 13,276 (8.8% increase) • ECARO English Twitter: 24,448 (0.1% decrease) • ECARO Russian Twitter: 2,529 (2.6% increase) • ECARO English Instagram: 5,331 (26.4% increase) • ECARO Russian Instagram: 4,769 (20% increase) • ECARO Odnoklassniki: 27,876 (3% increase) • ECARO VKontakte: 15,365 (0.4% increase) • ECARO YouTube: 3,119 (25% increase) • ECARO LinkedIn: 9,412 (157% increase)

Source: UN Women management RMS reporting

4.5 HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

How effective was the portfolio design and implementation in support of human rights, leave no one behind, including disability perspectives, and what were the most effective strategies?

FINDING 11

While inclusion and the leave no one behind principle are referenced in the Strategic Note, their integration across regional interventions has been uneven, limiting the extent to which programming fully reflects the needs of the most marginalized groups. Stronger examples emerge in regional programmes implemented at the field level, where participatory approaches and targeted interventions have more directly addressed the needs of vulnerable women.

Regional evaluations found examples of integration of human rights and leave no one behind principles into programming, but it was inconsistent.

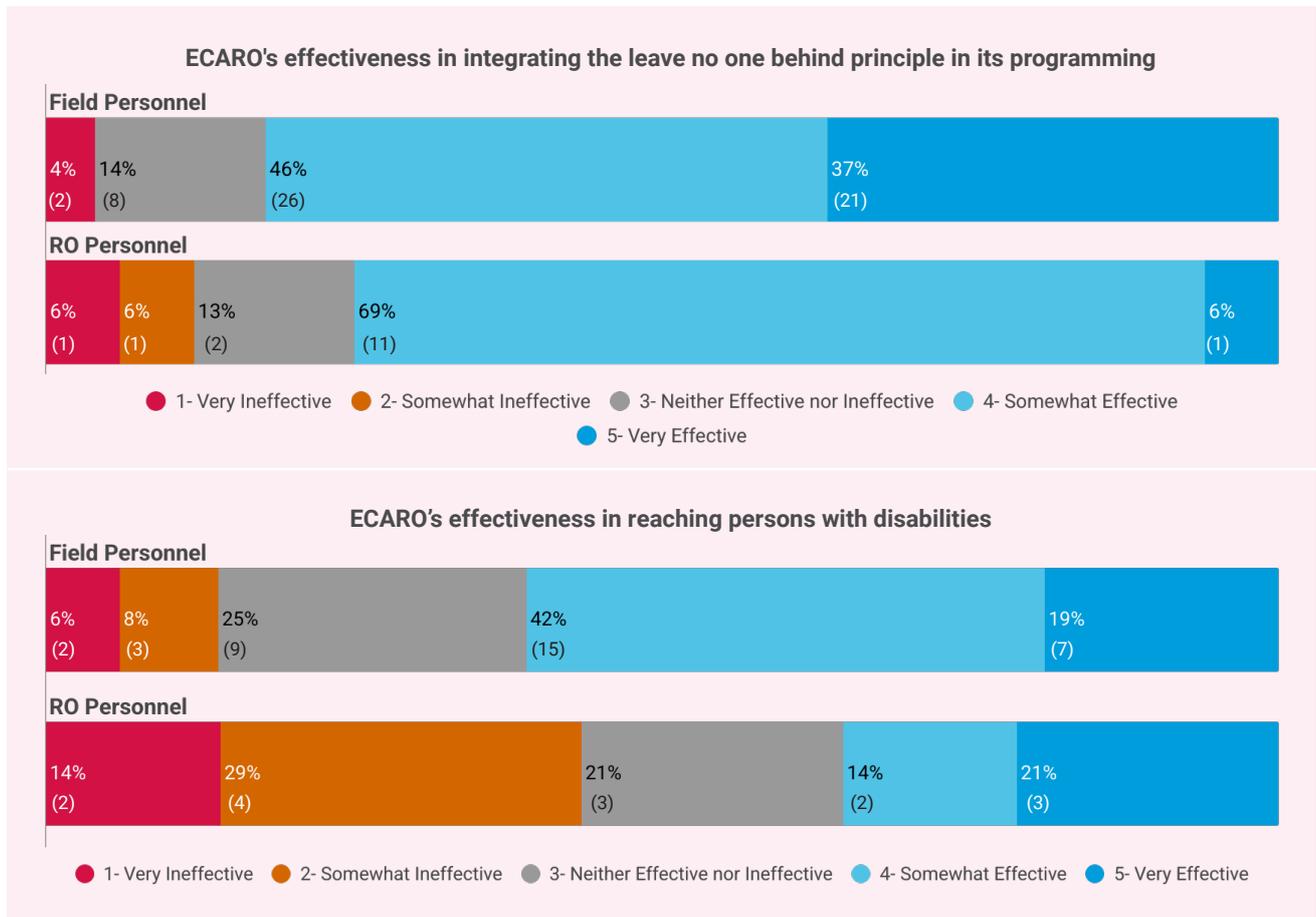
Examples include the GRB initiative, which highlights the potential of leave no one behind approaches, especially at the local level, where participatory budgeting has supported rural women, survivors of violence and marginalized groups to articulate priorities and influence resource allocation. However, broader and more systematic application across sectors and countries is limited. Similarly, in the EU4Gender Equality and EVAW programmes, leave no one behind was not treated as a cross-cutting principle, although subgrants effectively targeted women with disabilities, survivors of gender-based violence, Roma women, internally displaced women and other vulnerable groups. Adaptations in war-affected Ukraine further demonstrated the capacity to pivot towards meeting the needs of displaced families and women affected by the war.

Beyond regional programmes, organizations of vulnerable groups and those supporting vulnerable groups were involved in consultative processes. Disability inclusion remains an underdeveloped area and requires further dedicated expertise, systematic mainstreaming and investment in programming and institutional capacity, alongside stronger partnerships with organizations of persons with disabilities and grassroots actors.

Overall, while success stories exist, both UN Women and external stakeholders acknowledged there is space for further systemic integration of leave no one behind principles in programme design (see Figure 7 on UN Women personnel's perception of the effectiveness and inclusion of the leave no one behind principle in programming). Greater intentionality is needed to ensure that regional programming not only promotes gender equality but also addresses the intersecting forms of discrimination faced by those most at risk of being left behind. Intergovernmental stakeholders are particularly interested in intersectional analyses and disaggregated data on vulnerable groups.

FIGURE 7:

UN Women personnel's perception on the effectiveness and inclusion of the leave no one behind principle in programming



Source: Evaluation personnel survey

4.6 EFFICIENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Is ECARO's structure and capacity fit for purpose to deliver the Strategic Note and support offices in the region? What are the strengths and what are the challenges? To what extent are the mechanisms of support provided by ECARO (and the results achieved) sustainable?

FINDING 12

Although ECARO undertakes intensive resource mobilization efforts, the financial sustainability of the office's operational modality is under strain. While one donor's flexible support to the Strategic Note has provided stability, overall funding remains heavily dependent on a narrow donor base, with two donors contributing nearly three quarters of non-core resources.

Over the Strategic Note period, ECARO has taken notable steps to professionalize and structure its Resource Mobilization function. Several mapping exercises have been conducted, including donor priority analysis, foundation mapping and stakeholder analysis to inform the new Strategic Note. More recently, dedicated donor briefs and action plans are being finalized, complemented by a pipeline tracking system that monitors both regional and country-level fundraising opportunities. This has been accompanied by internal capacity-building through a Resource Mobilization CoP, with monthly meetings, a dedicated resource page and weekly updates to programme teams on donor intelligence.

In 2025, ECARO strengthened donor relations through targeted engagement, such as missions to Nordic capitals, and increasingly prioritizing structured visibility and political dialogue. Efforts have also been made to map opportunities for joint UN programming.

The region received recognition for securing multi-year Strategic Note funding for three countries and ECARO itself, with funding from the Government of Denmark. Although this approach is known to UN Women through earlier Sida funding of Country Office Strategic Notes, it is new at the regional level (and to the Government of Denmark) and is of high importance to realize and demonstrate the comparative advantages and benefits of such a funding mechanism.

Several personnel reported that coordination between the Resource Mobilization team and thematic advisers was insufficient, but has improved over time. The Resource Mobilization function was praised by some

Country Office personnel for being responsive, field-oriented and effective in unlocking donor contributions.

Despite these advances, challenges remain. Most current programmes are due to expire at the end of 2025: the only two major programmes remaining are the Strategic Note funding by Denmark (until 2027) and EU4 Gender Equality: Women's Economic Empowerment and Ending Violence Against Women in the Western Balkans (until early 2028). Overall funding remains heavily dependent on a narrow donor base, with the EU and Denmark contributing nearly three quarters of non-core resources in the previous period. ECARO has low allocation of core resources considering the size and complexity of the region, including an ongoing war, multiple crises, fragile regions and shrinking donor interest.

These considerations pose challenges for ECARO to overcome issues identified even two years ago by the 2023 Functional Review. The review highlighted significant staffing and capacity constraints that limit ECARO's ability to meet growing and complex demands from Country Offices. Personnel capacity has not kept pace with workload increases, operational changes (such as the roll-out of Quantum) and expanded humanitarian programming. In many cases, multiple functions were overlapping in a single post, which led to role overload, blurred accountability and reliance on a small number of individuals, creating bottlenecks and operational risks. The context has become even more complex, with the sustainability of ECARO's thematic technical advisers –one of its key functions and widely valued

by Country Offices and partners in strengthening portfolios –increasingly in question. The lack of predictable, dedicated funding for advisory posts poses risks to institutional memory, continuity and long-term knowledge development. Given these positions' heavy reliance on project-based contributions, other modalities should be considered. The positions' dual role as project managers and technical advisers for the whole region also limits their ability to provide consistent, forward-looking guidance and undermines their potential to drive cross-country synergies.

FINDING 13

With the exception of regional programmes, monitoring and reporting on ECARO results remains activity-oriented and does not provide clarity on the scope of work or achievements. Learning and follow-up on strategic evaluations require further attention.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning within ECARO remains insufficiently robust to capture the effectiveness of the office's functions and its added value to Country Offices. While regional programmes benefit from stronger monitoring frameworks, ECARO's Strategic Note results framework is largely activity-based. It lacks outcome-oriented indicators and provides limited clarity on ECARO's contribution to regional coherence, knowledge leadership and capacity development as these aspects are not set out in either the Development Resources Framework or the Organizational Efficiency and Effectiveness Framework. This constrains ECARO's ability to demonstrate achievements, ensure accountability and generate learning that informs strategic decision-making across the region.

A further challenge lies in reporting structures: activities for countries where UN Women does not have a physical presence are often reported through the ECARO framework, even though they are implemented by neighbouring Country Offices; and regional programme results are reported by ECARO even if they contribute to specific country-level changes by supporting Country Offices. This blurs accountability and makes it difficult to assess ECARO's direct contribution versus the contribution made by Country Offices. Regional programmes, while generally stronger in monitoring, evaluation and learning, also tend to limit reporting to output-level results in some aspects (such as capacity development) without systematically capturing longer-term institutional or behavioural change.

Evaluations of three regional programmes highlighted that sustained resources and continued efforts are required to strengthen national ownership and sustain results, where either ECARO's continued engagement is needed or follow-up by Country Offices is required. While the GRB regional programme contributed to the policy framework across the region, regional oversight and advisory support is needed to pursue implementation and further support programming in Country Offices with less capacity.

In terms of learning, according to interview respondents, CoPs facilitate the process to some extent and allow for adjustment of practices. Regional programme evaluations are followed by management responses, which are implemented within a reasonable time frame. However, while key committed actions for programmatic-level evaluations are implemented in a timely manner, challenges are faced in implementing management responses for strategic thematic evaluations which are linked to headquarters action. Unlike programmatic evaluations, the implementation of management responses for more strategic evaluations (e.g. the evaluation of capacity development or the functional review) were not tracked and deadlines were overdue; and interviewed personnel were not able to provide consolidated information on progress.

Looking ahead, ECARO would benefit from developing a more outcome-oriented results framework for its Strategic Note, with clear indicators linked to its core functions: technical support, coordination, knowledge generation and resource mobilization. Strengthening monitoring, evaluation and learning capacities across teams; systematizing follow-up to evaluation recommendations; and aligning regional reporting with corporate results frameworks will be critical for improving accountability and enabling a stronger culture of learning and adaptation. It would also be helpful in demonstrating the value added of the regional layer of work for resource mobilization purposes.

FINDING 14

The management of Non-Residence-Agency countries remains unresolved. The current modality, where neighbouring UN Women Country Offices support UNCTs, does not allow for strategic and sustainable programming and development.

UN Women's current arrangement for covering Non-Resident Agency countries from neighbouring Country Offices (such as Belarus from Moldova, Montenegro from Albania, and Armenia and Azerbaijan from Georgia) was widely assessed as unsustainable, and in some cases politically sensitive. The model also imposes a disproportionate burden on Country Representatives. Under their supervision in Belarus and in Armenia and Azerbaijan, five personnel support gender mainstreaming and coordination in the UN Resident Coordinator's Office as well as implementing programmes on the ground.

While the modality shows results and is appreciated by UN partners, the set-up places operational and political demands on neighbouring Country Offices, stretching their resources and diverting attention from national priorities. The arrangement is not financially supported by core funds and Country Offices are therefore responsible for financing these activities. Country Offices face increasing expectations to deliver results in countries where UN Women is a Non-Resident Agency with limited or no dedicated funding, while UNCTs in countries where UN Women

is a Non-Resident Agency have increasing demands for support and even joint programming.

The model is further complicated in some cases due to political sensitivities, such as UN Women personnel coming from a neighbouring country. While UN staff are bound to uphold neutrality and set aside national affiliations, such circumstances may nonetheless affect local perceptions of neutrality. This may weaken trust, risk credibility and constrain UN Women's ability to engage meaningfully in politically complex environments.

Compounding these challenges, the arrangement lacks a clear strategic vision and operational guidance from ECARO. Stakeholders involved in managing Non-Resident Agency responsibilities consistently called for stronger ECARO leadership to define the long-term vision and, in line with expansion plans, either provide operational and financial support or redefine the model altogether, transforming Country Offices into Multi-Country Offices for example.

FINDING 15

Views on ECARO's future strategic orientation diverge across regional and country-level personnel and external counterparts, which may affect programming, weaken strategic coherence and lead to mixed messaging and expectations in partners. Many inside UN Women value a broader thematic approach for flexibility and fundraising opportunities; others aim for a tighter focus on areas of clear comparative advantage, with strong vision and guiding features. External partners caution that an overly broad agenda dilutes the limited capacity of UN Women and urge ECARO to concentrate on normative work and capacity development.

The evaluation found persistent differences of opinion among UN Women personnel and external partners regarding ECARO's future strategic orientation. These diverging perspectives shape both ongoing implementation of the current Strategic Note and the discussions under way for the next framework (2026–2029).

Within UN Women, some personnel advocate for a broad thematic approach, arguing it offers flexibility to adapt to shifting contexts, align with donor priorities and open diverse fundraising opportunities. This group views the Strategic Note as a high-level umbrella framework that should encompass multiple thematic areas, leaving room for context-specific tailoring at the country level. According to these personnel, such an approach enhances visibility across a wide spectrum of gender equality issues and ensures agility in responding to emerging challenges.

However, others within the organization would prefer to see a tighter, more focused approach with the Strategic Note as a guiding document. They argue that, given ECARO's limited resources and the fragmented funding landscape, UN Women should prioritize areas of clear comparative advantage and ensure depth rather than breadth of engagement. According to this view, the Strategic Note should provide a sharper vision of outcomes; outline guiding principles for regional engagement; and clearly define how ECARO adds value to country-level operations. This approach seeks to avoid the risk of work being spread too widely/thinly across the portfolio, compromising programme quality, especially when resources are limited.

External partners echoed this second perspective more strongly, cautioning that an overly broad

agenda risks diluting ECARO's limited technical and financial capacity. They consistently emphasized the importance of UN Women concentrating on its core comparative advantages: normative leadership, knowledge generation and use of gender data, and targeted capacity development. Several partners also suggested that UN Women should refrain from positioning itself as a large-scale operational actor, and instead reinforce its credibility as a thought leader and knowledge broker on gender equality.

Another issue raised during interviews was the uncertainty surrounding the future of UN development system reform. Some personnel argued that this unpredictability should have prompted UN Women to extend the previous corporate Strategic Plan and regional Strategic Notes rather than launch new ones, to allow space for scenario planning and adaptation to different institutional futures. In their view, this would have provided continuity and minimized risk at a time of volatility in funding, political contexts and global agendas.

The debate underscores a strategic identity dilemma for ECARO, particularly important in terms of shifting donor priorities, shrinking funds and UN reforms, which needs to be resolved within the next Strategic Note document. The evaluation team provided its view on the way forward across the conclusions and recommendations in this report, including the dedicated Recommendation no. 7.



Photo: UN Women

United to advance the 2030 Agenda: Central Asia countries pledge to act for gender equality in the region

On February 6, 2025, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan collectively affirmed their commitment to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, as outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), during a high-level meeting in Astana, Kazakhstan. The pledge was formalized through a joint statement.

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LESSONS LEARNED

The lessons learned were generated by synthesizing what worked well and where gaps were identified across evaluation findings. They capture the perspectives and experiences of UN personnel, partners and other external stakeholders that should be used to inform development of the next Strategic Note. Integration of these lessons into planning will help to shape a more resilient and responsive ECARO for the future.

FACTORS OF SUCCESS	LESSONS LEARNED
 <p>Agility and preparedness</p>	<p>The rapidly evolving context –marked by conflicts, climate shocks, backlash against gender equality, shrinking funding and UN reform –requires proactive anticipation, continuous risk assessments and strategic use of lessons and assets from past crises. Leveraging existing assets and stronger internal synergies will be key to addressing these challenges effectively.</p>
 <p>Capitalizing on value added</p>	<p>Clarity of roles and value added strengthens efficiency, credibility and accountability. Clearer articulation and communication of ECARO’s distinct functions and added value is essential to maximize efficiency; strengthen the office’s relevance and credibility; and foster internal synergies within UN Women’s architecture. This requires an accountability framework that defines expected deliverables, mechanisms for measuring results and standards for collaboration across levels.</p>
 <p>Strong leadership and vision</p>	<p>There is a visibility and attribution challenge in how ECARO’s role and results are communicated and reported. Strong leadership and a clearly articulated vision would strengthen regional results. Leadership sets the tone for organizational results-oriented culture and fosters accountability, while a shared vision provides clarity of purpose; supports intervention logic and continuity; and facilitates prioritization of regional work.</p>
 <p>Vertical synergy of programming and regional knowledge brokering</p>	<p>Country-led and needs-based programming, combined with regional knowledge brokering and networking, strengthens regional impact and relevance. When programming is shaped by country-level priorities and grounded in local realities, it ensures stronger ownership and alignment with national agendas. ECARO also plays a critical role in connecting country-led initiatives through knowledge brokering, peer learning and regional networking.</p>
 <p>Horizontal synergies for efficiency</p>	<p>Deliberately designed horizontal synergies across functions translate into stronger, more integrated results. When thematic and resource mobilization teams and operations work in a coordinated and mutually reinforcing way, greater coherence, effectiveness and the maximization of limited resources can be expected.</p>
 <p>Inclusive design and integration of the most vulnerable</p>	<p>Inclusive design and systematic integration of marginalized groups are critical for impact and sustainability for the most vulnerable. Systematic integration of intersectionality and leave no one behind principles across all programming ensures that the needs of the most marginalized are consistently addressed. The meaningful participation of marginalized groups enhances accountability and equity and strengthens the long-term relevance and legitimacy of UN Women’s work.</p>



Photo: UN Women/Yuri Vyblou

Tirek: The Thread of Her Life" Data-Art Exhibition:
Almaty, Kazakhstan

On December 5th 2025, the Almaty Gallery opened its doors to a groundbreaking Central Asian data-art exhibition, "Tirek: The Thread of Her Life." This unique initiative brought together artists, influencers, activists, researchers, government representatives, civil society, international organizations, and youth in a powerful visual dialogue on women's rights.

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CONCLUSIONS

In a context of global and regional polarization, shifting donor priorities, shrinking development aid and growing backlash against gender equality, ECARO is at a critical juncture. It is also uniquely positioned to provide strategic influence, knowledge leadership and cross-country collaboration in a region where the evolving context requires recalibration of strategic approaches to maximize comparative advantages, strengthen accountability and secure sustainable delivery modalities. A clearer vision, sharper focus and catalytic approach would allow ECARO not only to respond to immediate needs but proactively lead on pressing gender equality challenges. At the time of concluding the report, the trajectory and effects of UN80 reforms and discussions on leadership for gender equality and the empowerment of women within the UN system were still not clear. This will further influence interpretation of these conclusions and implementation of the recommendations.

The conclusions and recommendations that follow build on the evaluation findings and were discussed in detail with ECARO personnel during a dedicated workshop in September 2025. This dialogue provided an opportunity not only to validate the evaluation evidence but also to jointly reflect on ECARO's future direction in a rapidly changing context. The evaluation findings and early recommendations have already informed some phases of the new Strategic Note development process.

CONCLUSION 1:

ECARO is uniquely positioned to drive strategic influence, knowledge leadership and cross-country collaboration, but this potential can only be fully realized through clear articulation of its distinct value, stronger accountability for results and an adaptive model that supports the responsiveness of regional functions to country-driven demands. Catalytic work is essential for ECARO to maximize limited resources, generate multiplier effects and position gender equality at the centre of broader regional and national agendas. (Based on Findings 1–8)

ECARO is uniquely positioned to drive strategic influence, knowledge leadership and cross-country collaboration in the Europe and Central Asia region. ECARO's comparative advantage lies in its ability to translate global priorities into regionally relevant action, convene diverse stakeholders and generate knowledge that informs policy at national and regional levels. Through catalytic programmes, ECARO has demonstrated that relatively small, well-placed interventions can generate multiplier effects across countries and themes. To maximize limited resources and achieve multiplier effects, ECARO must sharpen its strategic focus, strengthen accountability for results and embed a catalytic logic into its programming and coordination functions.

CONCLUSION 2:

ECARO's experience during the 2022–2025 Strategic Note period highlights the need for greater agility, clarity and focus in navigating a complex and fast-evolving regional context. While its mandate and alignment with regional priorities are recognized, sustaining relevance requires moving beyond existing programmes and reactive responses towards proactive leadership, needs-based programming, sharper prioritization and stronger coherence across regional and country levels. (Based on Findings 1–8)

ECARO's experience during the 2022–2025 Strategic Note period highlights the need for greater agility, clarity and focus in navigating a complex and fast-evolving regional context. Stakeholders across the region emphasized that relevance now requires more than alignment with regional priorities: it requires anticipatory leadership and the ability to recalibrate programming in light of emerging threats and opportunities. The current model, which often relies on projectized interventions, constrains ECARO's ability to shift from reactive programming towards proactive, needs-based approaches. Greater prioritization and sharper thematic focus, continuous risk assessments and programmatic flexibility are needed to sustain relevance in an environment marked by backlash against gender equality and fragility on one side and modernization, development and digital transformation on the other.

CONCLUSION 3:

ECARO's role in advancing UN Women's coordination mandate, along with ensuring internal and external coherence and synergies, is becoming increasingly critical in the context of UN reform and limited funding. There is a need to focus partnerships on programmatic work, beyond current convening and the provision of knowledge and data. To maximize impact and efficiency of resources, ECARO needs a theory of change for its coordination work with diverse regional stakeholders and a long-term vision that outlines how coordination and partnerships contribute to higher-level results. (Based on Findings 4–8)

ECARO's coordination mandate is increasingly central in the context of UN reform and constrained funding. ECARO has made notable progress in UN and wider stakeholder coordination, and these efforts have strengthened its position as a driver of accountability for gender equality within the UN system and beyond. However, an overarching long-term strategy and institutionalization is required for long-term impact. ECARO needs a theory of change for coordination and partnerships which clarifies its value proposition, sets priorities and defines how collaboration contributes to higher-level results.

CONCLUSION 4:

ECARO contributed to gender equality and the empowerment of women in the region by complementing country-level efforts with catalytic regional programming, knowledge generation and communications. Initiatives such as GRB demonstrate how subregional programmes can leverage expertise, scale results and initiate new projects across multiple contexts. However, the benefits of regional interventions remain uneven, with stronger engagement in countries with direct programme presence and limited benefits for non-presence countries, underscoring the need for tailored modalities of support. (Based on Findings 9–11)

ECARO has contributed meaningfully to gender equality and women's empowerment in the region by complementing country-level efforts with catalytic programming, knowledge generation and communications. Regional programmes demonstrate how expertise can be scaled across multiple contexts, generating cross-country learning and influencing national reforms. Stakeholders consistently highlighted the benefits of having a regional layer that can provide oversight, standardize methodologies and share lessons across borders. However, the benefits of regional interventions remain uneven between those countries with direct support and those that do not receive regional funding. Tailored modalities of support should be developed to ensure different Country Office types and their host countries tangibly benefit from regional expertise.

CONCLUSION 5:

ECARO's financial sustainability remains a critical challenge. While one donor has provided some stability through Strategic Note funding, shifting donor priorities and declining development aid create significant uncertainty for the current model, which relies heavily on maintaining a full cadre of thematic advisers and support to Country Offices. Moving forward, ECARO will need to adapt its structure and explore more cost-effective modalities. This could include drawing on personnel in Country Offices who have strong subject-matter expertise to provide advisory support to the region. The current modality for non-physical representation countries also requires rethinking. (Based on findings 12-15)

ECARO's financial sustainability remains a critical challenge. Support from core donors, such as the Government of Denmark, has provided stability but shifts in donor priorities and the overall decline in development aid has created significant uncertainty. The current model, which relies on maintaining a full cadre of thematic advisers and broad support to Country Offices, is unlikely to be sustainable in the long term. Without new funding models or more efficient modalities, ECARO risks being unable to sustain its scope of operations. This challenge is particularly acute given the shrinking aid environment and the rise of issue-based, short-term funding streams that offer less flexibility for institutional functions. Along with resource mobilization efforts, ECARO should consider adapting its structure; strengthening catalytic resource mobilization; attracting host government and private funding; and exploring cost-effective alternatives such as deploying technical expertise through Country Offices or subregional hubs



Photo: UN Women / Lariemeli Matias Kuusisto

Beijing+30 Anniversary Event “30 Years, 1 Journey: For All Women and Girls in Europe and Central Asia” brings together over 200 activists, government officials, ambassadors, and influencers from Europe, the Western Balkans, Türkiye, and Central Asia in Helsinki, Finland to commemorate the 1995 Beijing Conference’s landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, celebrate three decades of progress, and discuss urgent next steps to accelerate gender equality across the region.

7

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are designed to be forward-looking and actionable, recognizing both the opportunities and constraints facing ECARO. They reflect the urgent need to recalibrate priorities in a complex context. At the same time, the recommendations highlight the need for strategic visioning, building on ECARO's comparative advantages – its mandate, convening power and technical expertise –and propose ways to maximize its influence and impact. Each recommendation is framed around concrete steps for initiation, deepening and scaling, and is accompanied by an assessment of priority, potential impact and level of difficulty. The recommendations are based on evidence, but also were consulted on with ECARO and articulated through a participatory process.

The recommendations are not intended as prescriptive directives but as a framework for strategic reflection, prioritization and adaptation. Many of the recommendations require further strategic thinking to complete initiated processes of developing key operational strategies and to ensure that ECARO's evolution is deliberate, coherent and has a clear guiding vision.

RECOMMENDATION 1

ECARO should sharpen its strategic focus and consolidate its efforts, ensuring that interventions are strongly driven by needs assessments, grounded in comparative advantage and deliver depth and quality without overstretching limited resources. Development of the next Strategic Note offers a timely opportunity to refine this direction and embed greater coherence and impact.

Priority: HIGH

Suggested steps to be taken:

Initiative:

- Develop and analyse potential global and regional scenarios and their implications for UN Women's work.
- Define a clear set of regional priorities aligned with ECARO's comparative advantage and partner demand, and prioritize them in line with the scenarios developed.
- Develop a results framework for the next Strategic Note, embedding ECARO's results (covering regional efforts –knowledge generation, bringing country-level recommendations to regional and global normative forums –and contribution to country-level work, e.g. policy development, programme development, resource mobilization) and accountability.
- Establish a process for systematically assessing risks, demand from Country Offices and non-presence countries to guide regional interventions.

Deepen:

- Build a common understanding of ECARO's objectives, approaches and how they synergize with other UN Women levels, particularly Country Offices.
- Strengthen the regional dimension of thematic areas where UN Women has demonstrated credibility (e.g. normative support, gender data, GRB, Women's Economic Empowerment).
- Consolidate regional cross-portfolio synergies by improving internal collaboration across thematic areas.
- Deepen engagement with partners (UN system, international financial institutions, intergovernmental organizations, the private sector, NGOs) through more strategic and longer-term collaboration frameworks.

Scale:

- Expand successful catalytic models (e.g. Women's Entrepreneurship Expo, GRB, subregional programming, gender-responsive procurement) across more countries.
- Leverage regional knowledge brokering and peer learning to replicate good practices across the region.
- Position ECARO more strongly as a convener and influencer at the regional level, ensuring visibility and uptake of results in intergovernmental and regional policy processes.

Impact: HIGH

Difficulty: MEDIUM

Result: Strengthened strategic coherence, efficiency and regional influence by aligning interventions with evidence-based priorities, deepening thematic focus and scaling proven initiatives for greater impact.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Consolidate existing efforts and lessons learned, and adopt a proactive strategy to prevent and counter the growing backlash against gender equality and protect achieved rights. Aiming to position ECARO as a reference point, the strategy should include situation monitoring and analysis; risk assessments; strategic and tailored communications; and the building of alliances and advocacy coalitions, integrating backlash resilience into programming and strengthening advocacy coalitions.

Priority:HIGH

Suggested steps to be taken:

Initiative:

- Map and consolidate existing knowledge, efforts and lessons learned.
- Develop a proactive strategy for prevention and countering backlash against gender equality and for the protection of achieved rights.
- Design a backlash response communication framework.

Deepen:

- Institutionalize analysis and advice mechanisms in ECARO, providing timely guidance.
- Build advocacy coalitions through existing coordination groups and platforms.

Scale:

- Lead strategic evidence-based engagement in intergovernmental forums.
- Expand regional coalitions and peer-support platforms.
- Position ECARO as a reference point for evidence, resilience and advocacy.

Impact:MEDIUM

Difficulty:MEDIUM

Result: Strengthened ECARO regional leadership and resilience through robust advocacy coalitions with key regional stakeholders would enable more effective responses to gender equality backlash and safeguard achieved rights.

RECOMMENDATION 3

ECARO should continue to build and consolidate its role as a regional knowledge hub, both internally (to support country-level offices) and externally (to inform and influence regional actors and institutions). This role should be pursued in a more strategic, needs-based and long-term manner, ensuring that knowledge generation, dissemination and uptake go beyond ad hoc events and workshops, and respond to the concrete needs of stakeholders.

Priority: MEDIUM

Suggested steps to be taken:

Initiate:

- Identify a lead in knowledge management.
- Conduct a structured needs assessment with Country Offices, non-presence countries and country/regional stakeholders to define priority knowledge gaps.
- Develop a regional knowledge hub strategy (including capacity development) with a long-term vision, roles and accountability for knowledge generation, dissemination and uptake.

Deepen:

- Institutionalize processes for integrating lessons learned and good practices from regional and country programmes into guidance and tools.
- Strengthen internal knowledge-sharing mechanisms (e.g. thematic CoPs, peer-to-peer learning).
- Build partnerships with think tanks, academia and regional institutions to co-create and validate evidence-based knowledge products.

Scale:

- Expand the centralized repository for knowledge products, ensuring accessibility and consistent quality.
- Position ECARO as a go-to regional thought leader on gender equality by actively engaging in policy dialogues and regional forums.
- Expand reach through digital platforms, virtual learning hubs and strategic media partnerships to ensure broader dissemination and visibility.
- Ensure systematic monitoring of knowledge uptake, e.g. tracking how Country Offices and regional actors apply knowledge products in policies, UNSDCFs and programmes.

Impact: MEDIUM

Difficulty: MEDIUM

Result: ECARO's enhanced position as a regional thought leader would improve evidence-based policymaking, strengthen partner and Country Office capacities and ensure sustained regional influence through strategic, needs-driven knowledge generation and dissemination.

RECOMMENDATION 4

ECARO should further develop and deepen strategic partnerships with key regional actors to amplify impact, mobilize resources and strengthen advocacy for gender equality beyond short-term activities. This requires the development of a clear theory of change for each partner category, clear results and accountability frameworks. Considering the contextual changes, the strategy for intergovernmental work is of key importance.

Priority: HIGH

Suggested steps to be taken:

Initiate:

- Review the map of existing and potential regional partners (UN system, international financial institutions, intergovernmental organizations, the private sector, NGOs, intergovernmental bodies) by category and value added.
- Develop a partnership theory of change outlining pathways for influence, expected results and resource mobilization opportunities and modalities.
- Establish clear accountability frameworks and results indicators for each partner category.
- Initiate development of a civil society engagement strategy for regional and country levels, based on lessons from regional and country programming. Rethink inefficiencies of institutional mechanisms, such as Civil Society Advisory Groups and propose innovative solutions.

Deepen:

- Finalize the Strategy on Intergovernmental and Normative Work in collaboration with partners, clarifying underdeveloped areas such as the overall theory of change, common goals and results of cooperation with each of the partners.
- Move beyond ad hoc collaboration and generic memorandums of understanding to multi-year partnerships with shared objectives, results and co-created initiatives.
- Initiate dialogue with civil society to remove barriers to cooperation (such as perception that UN Women and CSOs are competing for the same funding sources, programming overlaps etc.). Continue policy consultations with national CSOs and strengthen sustained partnerships with larger regional CSO networks and movements to move beyond episodic consultations.
- Take leadership in countering anti-gender narratives by promoting evidence-based advocacy, broadening civil society participation and safeguarding civic space.
- Strengthen joint advocacy platforms and policy dialogues to amplify gender equality commitments at the regional level.
- Invest in human capacity and resources to maintain agility in emerging intergovernmental spaces (e.g. climate, digital, crisis response) while ensuring consistency in follow-up.
- Improve internal systems for partnership management, including monitoring of results (not activities) and lessons learned.

Scale:

- Expand effective partnerships (e.g. with international financial institutions, the private sector) to mobilize resources and create systemic change.
- Expand cooperation with international financial institutions in increasing financial flows for gender equality, e.g. financing for gender equality, GRB and gender-responsive investments.
- Follow memorandums of understanding and partnership agreements with results and accountability frameworks.
- Invest in the generation of in-demand gender data, particularly on vulnerable groups and intersectionality.
- Strengthen monitoring and reporting on UN accountability for gender equality (including support to Country Offices) and intergovernmental work to report beyond activities implemented.
- Position ECARO as a convener of diverse actors, building multi-stakeholder coalitions to drive regional impact.
- Leverage partnerships to broaden outreach and visibility, ensuring sustained advocacy and influence beyond project cycles.

Impact: HIGH

Difficulty: HIGH

Result: Strengthened ECARO strategic partnerships and intergovernmental engagement would enhance regional influence, advocacy power and more coherent, long-term and systemic progress towards gender equality across diverse stakeholder groups.

RECOMMENDATION 5

ECARO should enhance and diversify its resource mobilization efforts by creating stronger synergies between thematic expertise and fundraising strategies. Resource mobilization should be systematically embedded in programmatic and technical work, ensuring that funding approaches are directly linked to priority areas of comparative advantage, while also broadening the donor base beyond traditional partners.

Priority: HIGH

Suggested steps to be taken:

Initiate:

- Enhance internal capacity by training staff on integrating fundraising into programmatic design and technical work.
- Develop a regional resource mobilization strategy expanding from bilateral and multilateral government funding to the business sector, local partners/governments.

Deepen:

- Map the donor landscape (traditional and non-traditional) in the region and donors' recent strategies for the region (if applicable) to identify opportunities aligned with UN Women's priorities and comparative advantages.
- Strengthen relationships with existing donors through regular communication, political dialogue, joint visibility and sharing the credit for impact.
- Foster deliberate and structured coordination between resource mobilization and thematic teams within ECARO and coordinate with Country Offices.
- Develop joint fundraising initiatives with Country Offices to avoid parallel approaches to the same donors and funding streamlines. Develop joint fundraising initiatives with UN organizations and other partners, ensuring coherence and reducing competition for resources.

Scale:

- Position ECARO as a regional investment partner through catalytic initiatives (e.g. women's entrepreneurship, gender-responsive procurement, financing for gender equality/GRB).
- Promote multi-year, flexible funding of the Strategic Note.

Impact: HIGH/MEDIUM/LOW

Difficulty: HIGH/MEDIUM/LOW

Result: Sustained UN Women engagement and effectiveness in strategic priority areas and areas of its comparative advantage.

RECOMMENDATION 6

ECARO should systematically embed intersectionality, disability inclusion and the leave no one behind principle across all regional interventions. All facets of UN Women's triple mandate should address overlapping forms of discrimination faced by marginalized women and girls, while also leveraging collective power with other actors to build intersectional approaches that link women's rights with the rights of diverse vulnerable groups, disability inclusion, climate and green solutions, and other cross-cutting agendas.

Priority :MEDIUM

Suggested steps to be taken:

Initiate:

- Develop regional guidance on systematically applying intersectionality, disability inclusion and leave no one behind principles across partnerships and interventions.
- Train staff and partners on integrating these principles into programme design, monitoring and evaluation.
- Pilot intersectional approaches in selected programmes, focusing on marginalized groups of women and girls.

Deepen:

- Embed intersectionality, disability inclusion and leave no one behind into all phases of the programme cycle – design, implementation, monitoring and reporting.
- Strengthen data systems to collect and use disaggregated data (e.g. by gender, age, disability, ethnicity) for evidence-based programming.
- Foster partnerships with human rights organizations and organizations of marginalized groups, particularly persons with disabilities, to align agendas and share leadership.

Scale:

- Institutionalize intersectionality and leave no one behind as core accountability markers within the Strategic Note and regional results frameworks.
- Establish ECARO as a reference organization for gender and intersectionality data, ensuring collection, analysis and dissemination of disaggregated data to guide evidence-based policymaking and strengthen accountability across the region.
- Position ECARO as a regional leader in intersectional and inclusive approaches, influencing UN system practices and intergovernmental processes.

Impact: HIGH

Difficulty: MEDIUM

Result: Intersectionality, disability inclusion and leave no one behind systematically integrated across all interventions and mainstreamed in partnerships, resulting in more equitable, evidence-based and rights-driven regional impact for marginalized women and girls.

RECOMMENDATION 7

In the face of the global funding crisis, ECARO (in coordination with headquarters and other Regional and Country Offices) should consider the possibility of strategically narrowing its scope to fewer thematic priorities and shifting focus to geographic areas with the greatest need and/or where it can achieve the greatest impact. ECARO should reassess its business model, considering decentralizing technical support to strong Country Offices with clear comparative advantages. Country Offices should also receive guidance on managing funding cuts, adapting programming and maintaining quality.

Priority: HIGH/

Suggested steps to be taken:

Initiate:

- Conduct a comprehensive prioritization exercise to identify thematic areas and subregions where ECARO has the greatest comparative advantage and potential for impact.
- Develop clear scenario-based planning tools to guide decision-making under different funding levels.
- Resolve the status of Non-Resident Agency countries (either taking over the interventions at the regional level, transforming some Country Offices into Multi-Country Offices with the provision of adequate funding, or deprioritizing/closing some presences).
- Ensure a coherent region-wide understanding of the approach to prioritization and adaptation, and provide immediate guidance to Country Offices on adapting programming and operations.

Deepen:

- Reassess ECARO's business model, shifting from direct implementation towards a stronger support and brokering role for Country Offices.
- Pilot decentralized technical and operational support models where strong Country Offices and national personnel take the lead in specific thematic areas of their comparative advantage, or around subregions, reducing duplication and strengthening ownership.
- Within the overall knowledge management strategy, establish a cross-country peer support mechanism to share lessons on resource mobilization, cost-efficiency and maintaining programme quality under funding constraints.

Scale:

- Institutionalize a region-wide prioritization and adaptation framework, embedded in the next Strategic Note, to ensure coherent focus across all portfolios.
- Consolidate thematic expertise around a smaller number of flagship priorities, positioning ECARO as the go-to actor for donors and partners in those areas.

Impact: HIGH

Difficulty: MEDIUM

Result: Strengthened resilience, and sustained relevance and effectiveness in a transforming development environment.

UN WOMEN EXISTS TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S RIGHTS, GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS.

As the lead UN entity on gender equality and secretariat of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, we shift laws, institutions, social behaviours and services to close the gender gap and build an equal world for all women and girls. Our partnerships with governments, women's movements and the private sector coupled with our coordination of the broader United Nations translate progress into lasting changes. We make strides forward for women and girls in four areas: leadership, economic empowerment, freedom from violence, and women, peace and security as well as humanitarian action.

UN Women keeps the rights of women and girls at the centre of global progress – always, everywhere. Because gender equality is not just what we do. It is who we are.



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