



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

STRATEGIC CLUSTER EVALUATION: UN WOMEN AFGHANISTAN COUNTRY OFFICE

Context

Since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, Afghan women and girls have faced unprecedented restrictions on their rights to mobility, education and participation in public life. The introduction of the restrictive Law on the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, enacted by the Taliban de facto authorities (DFA), has created a profound human rights crisis. In this environment, nearly 23 million Afghans required humanitarian assistance in 2025, with women and girls bearing the brunt of protection risks, psychosocial distress, exclusion from essential services and participation in decision-making at all levels, and constrained opportunities to enhance their livelihoods.

Photo: UN Women / Ali Omid Taqdisyan

UN Women supports this Multi-Purpose Women's Centre in eastern Afghanistan, providing business development skills, vocational training, and access to psychological counselling and medical services for women in the surrounding communities.

Purpose, scope and methodology

This strategic cluster evaluation, led by UN Women's Independent Evaluation Service (IES), assessed the Afghanistan Country Office's key programmes with time frames from June 2022 to December 2025. The evaluation covered Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW), Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE), Women, Peace and Security (WPS), capacity-building of Women-led Civil Society Organizations (WCSOs), and programmatic and coordination work related to Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA). The objectives of the evaluation were to assess the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and potential for sustainability of UN Women's interventions; analyse integration of human rights, gender equality and humanitarian principles; and identify lessons and actionable recommendations. The evaluation used a mixed-methods theory-based approach, triangulating qualitative and quantitative data from 1,622 respondents to surveys, interviewees and participants in focus group discussions; three case studies; and over 100 documents, with a strong focus on participatory, ethical and gender-responsive methods.

Key insights and conclusions

UN Women's work in Afghanistan has been a lifeline for women and girls in the world's most severe women's rights crisis. Despite immense challenges, the Country Office has sustained hope, agency and essential services for Afghan women. However, the future of these gains is precarious. A key lesson learned is that robust risk management and a commitment to protecting individuals, especially the most vulnerable, must remain at the heart of all interventions. The evaluation evidence demonstrates that there is a crucial ongoing role for the international community in support of Afghan women, to continue amplifying their voices, sustaining and building women's organizations and ensuring that women's rights and realities remain at the centre of global action.

CRITICAL RELEVANCE AND ADAPTATION:

UN Women's work has been essential in keeping women's rights on the agenda and sustaining WCSOs, Women-Focused (Civil Society) Organizations (WFOs) and gender equality activists under extreme restrictions. The Country Office's approach to engagement with the DFA and adaptive programming has enabled continued support for women and girls, although risks associated with operational and programmatic adjustments remain.

LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATION:

Over the evaluation period, UN Women's coordination role strengthened the UN system and other development partners to keep the rights of women and girls on the agenda. UN Women played a critical role in producing and disseminating gender data and leveraging the evidence for communications and advocacy within coordination spaces, which highlighted the impact of initiatives and provided a model for work in other restrictive and crisis contexts. The Country Office filled critical data gaps to inform programming and strengthen international advocacy, calling for more urgent action to protect women's rights in Afghanistan. While there are positive examples of cross-project collaboration, there are more opportunities to build on synergies across the Country Office's teams and initiatives.

EFFICIENCY AND RISK MANAGEMENT:

Flexible funding enabled greater programmatic and operational manoeuvrability – necessary in a dynamic crisis context. While tailored oversight mechanisms contributed to accountability in a high-risk environment, the evaluation identified opportunities to further develop UN Women's systems and procedures to increase their adaptability to crisis contexts.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY:

Interventions were shown to improve women's well-being and empowerment, especially through safe spaces, psychosocial support and economic empowerment. The evidence points to the importance of investing in the organizational resilience and capacity of WCSOs as a critical means of sustaining women's movements and service delivery in Afghanistan. However, overall sustainability is threatened by severe funding cuts, short project durations and systemic barriers, including the fragility of WFOs and limited access for marginalized groups.

INCLUSIVE OUTREACH:

Efforts to reach marginalized groups were meaningful but require more systematic strategies and tools. The absence of a clear strategy for engaging family and community members emerged as a gap.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Continue to **LEVERAGE UN WOMEN'S TRIPLE MANDATE** to champion Afghan women's rights through sustained advocacy, flexible support and context-driven programming.

2

Strengthen **STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS, COORDINATION AND INTERNAL INTEGRATION** to maximize collective impact.

3

Continue to deliver **HIGH-IMPACT, INCLUSIVE SERVICES** and **SCALE PROVEN APPROACHES** for women's empowerment.

4

Optimize **OPERATIONAL SYSTEMS, RISK MANAGEMENT AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION** for agile, accountable delivery appropriate for crisis contexts.

5

Continue strengthening and prioritizing the approach to building **INSTITUTIONAL RESILIENCE FOR WOMEN-LED ORGANIZATIONS**, supporting them to secure long-term, adaptable funding and share good practices.

6

Continue to **ADVANCE PRINCIPLED ENGAGEMENT, PROTECTION AND INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION** for all women and girls.