



IN BRIEF

UN WOMEN TUNISIA COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION

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Background

UN Women has been active in Tunisia since 2009 (previously as UNIFEM) and formally joined the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in 2019. Prior to this, UN Women's engagement in Tunisia was managed under the Morocco MultiCountry Office. In 2019, UN Women reconfigured its presence, establishing a Cluster Office covering both Tunisia and Libya, with offices in Tunis and Tripoli.

Although UN Women operates through a Tunisia–Libya Cluster Office, the two countries have maintained separate Strategic Notes to ensure that programming remains responsive to the distinct political, institutional and operational contexts. The Strategic Notes serve as the primary planning instrument guiding UN Women's normative, coordination and operational engagement in each country.

This Country Portfolio Evaluation (CPE) exclusively assesses the UN Women Tunisia portfolio against its Strategic Note for the period 2022–2025. For the purposes of this report, the entity under evaluation is hereafter referred to as the Tunisia Country Office.

Purpose

The CPE was conducted by the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service (IES) as a primarily formative (forward-looking) evaluation to support the Tunisia Country Office and national stakeholders' strategic learning and decision-making for the next Strategic Note. The evaluation also had a secondary summative (retrospective) perspective to support enhanced accountability for development effectiveness and learning from experience.

Objectives

The evaluation aimed to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and gender-transformative nature of the Country Office's work. It also sought to identify lessons learned; highlight good practices that can be scaled; and provide actionable recommendations to inform development of the new Strategic Note.

Scope

The CPE included all activities undertaken by the Country Office under its current Strategic Note 2022–2025, including operational work, support to normative policy and UN system coordination. However, as UN Women operates through a Tunisia–Libya Cluster Office with shared management, operations and communications functions, the evaluation also assessed how this cluster arrangement has influenced functionality and the Tunisia Country Office's delivery of results during the current Strategic Note period. The geographical scope of the evaluation was Tunisia. Most of the interviews were conducted either in-person or virtually with stakeholders in Tunis, the capital, where normative, coordination and programmatic activities were implemented.

Intended users

The primary intended users of this evaluation are UN Women management and Country Office personnel; the UN Women Executive Board, UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States, UN Women Global Office/s and other Regional and Country Offices outside the Arab States region; target groups, their households and community members, programme and project partners; national and local governments in Tunisia; civil society representatives; the donor community and other development partners; and the UNCT.

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation followed gender-responsive principles and had a utilization-focused lens. It used a theory-based design to assess Strategic Note performance based on its stated assumptions about how change happens. The evaluation was conducted using a mixed-data collection approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods.

A desk review, interviews and focus group discussions were organized involving a total of 82 consultations with civil society organizations (CSOs), government partners, donors, target groups, UNCT, external consultants, the Country and Regional Office and headquarters (69 females, 13 males). This included two focus group discussions with a total of 21 target women. One survey was conducted with Country Office personnel, which had an 84.2 per cent response rate (16 of 19).

The Gender at Work Analytical Framework¹ was used to assess the extent to which Country Office programmes had been gender transformative.

Key findings

RELEVANCE

Finding 1. The Country Office's 2022–2025 Strategic Note was responsive to national, international and UN priorities for gender equality and women's empowerment. In the context of pushback against women's rights and shrinking civic space, UN Women's mandate – encapsulated in the Country Office's Strategic Note – is regarded as essential, and its thematic focus remains relevant. However, the Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW) portfolio is currently fragmented across multiple initiatives, highlighting the need for a more coherent and integrated prevention-to-response strategy. Scaling up the Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) portfolio and revisiting the scope and focus of the Country Office's work under the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) pillar also remains key to maintaining relevance in the changing context.

COORDINATION

Finding 2. The Country Office has effectively and consistently leveraged its UN system coordination mandate. It has chaired/co-chaired the UN Gender Theme Group and convened the multi-partner Gender Coordination Group, using these platforms to bring together UNCT stakeholders and development partners around shared gender equality and empowerment of women priorities, even in a context that has become less conducive to overt gender advocacy. At the same time, some coordination overlaps and funding competition across UN agencies remains a challenge.

EFFECTIVENESS

Finding 3. UN Women has made credible contributions towards its normative mandate, namely in advancing and sustaining the operationalization of Organic Law 58/2017 on eliminating violence against women, paternity leave reform, the National Strategy for the Economic and Social Empowerment of Women and Girls in Rural Areas and gender-responsive budgeting (GRB). Its strengths lie in providing credible technical input, strategically aligning the policy environment, convening key stakeholders and keeping gender equality central in parliamentary debates. Stakeholders emphasized the need for UN Women in Tunisia to revitalize its engagement on compliance with international normative commitments, particularly relating to gender parity concerns within the Personal Status Code.

Finding 4. The Country Office's WEE portfolio integrates rural livelihoods programming; pathways for educated young women to enter growth sectors; and market-enabling partnerships with government, the private sector and international financial institutions. These efforts are complemented by early work on the care economy and social norms to expand women's access to decent work and essential services. A more clearly defined road map is required to translate partnerships into sustained employment opportunities and enterprise growth in the context of the forthcoming "Surge in Women's Employment" Initiative.

¹ <https://genderatwork.org/resources/gender-at-work-framework/>

Finding 5. The Country Office's Women's Political Participation and Leadership portfolio demonstrated adaptability in a highly constrained environment by shifting from conventional electoral assistance to supporting women in leadership roles and influencing public policy, including measures to prevent and address violence against women in politics. This strategic pivot was considered effective. Engagement with the Arab Women Parliamentarians Network for Equality (Ra'edat) was recognized as a promising mechanism for sustaining leadership pipelines and strengthening knowledge infrastructure, essential for long-term gender equality outcomes. However, delays in implementation were observed.

Finding 6. UN Women's support to Tunisia's second National Action Plan on WPS was widely acknowledged. However, the Country Office's attempt to address all areas of the plan was seen as ambitious. While support to the Women's Mediation Network has effectively strengthened local capacities in conflict prevention and mediation, persistent legitimacy barriers remain, as public authorities have often been hesitant about engaging with the network due to its perceived "informal" status. Declining donor engagement on WPS in Tunisia has led to constrained financial resources for this portfolio.

Finding 7. The Country Office has made notable contributions to implementation of Organic Law No. 58 of 2017 on eliminating violence against women through technical assistance, capacity-building and multi-stakeholder coordination. The Country Office also produced credible diagnostics and mobilized youth. However, the EVAW portfolio is dispersed across normative, downstream work, social norms and urban-safety initiatives (e.g. support for implementation of Law No. 58 of 2017, Dare to Care and the Safe Cities Flagship Initiative) indicating the need for an integrated EVAW prevention-to-response approach. Overall delivery is not yet commensurate with the scale and persistence of violence against women, pointing to the need for a clearer EVAW strategy.

Finding 8. The Country Office's cross-cutting portfolio made the greatest and most system-level progress through GRB, complemented by emerging work on social norms and gender statistics. Together, these investments strengthened the enabling environment for equitable public policies and services, despite uneven capacity, data gaps and decision makers' limited uptake of evidence.

Finding 9. UN Women in Tunisia has acted as a bridge between national institutions and civil society to advance gender equality, a role that is relevant to national priorities and stakeholder needs. These efforts have increased the visibility of gender issues in national planning and have strengthened inter-institutional dialogue. However, engagement with CSOs and the women's movement appears less robust than expected and advisory groups and consultative mechanisms remain limited in scope. A clearer strategy for engaging civil society and feminist movements is required.

EFFICIENCY

Finding 10. Several critical positions, including Head of Programmes and Operations Manager, remained vacant for extended periods, undermining strategic leadership and oversight. The Country Office faced limited resource mobilization and relied heavily on regional programmes and joint initiatives, while partnership opportunities were increasingly constrained by shrinking civic space and operational bottlenecks. Within this context, the Tunisia–Libya cluster model – originally intended to leverage synergies and mutual learning – faced implementation challenges, affecting its ability to consistently deliver on coordination functions and its operational effectiveness across both contexts.

GENDER EQUALITY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Finding 11. The Country Office has progressively embedded "leave no one behind" and disability inclusion across its portfolio, especially for rural women, young women and survivors of violence. However, the approach is not fully institutionalized internally: standardized tools, monitoring, and resourcing are still required. Climate and environmental integration are emergent and largely procedural rather than programmatic.

Finding 12. The portfolio has catalysed system-level changes, most notably through the institutionalization of GRB and gender statistics, while contributing to social norms shifts. However, the depth and consistency of transformation are moderated by political constraints and uneven uptake across sectors.

Conclusions and Recommendations

CONCLUSION 1

While the Country Office's portfolio is relevant and strategically placed to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women, reprioritization is required given the current context. The Country Office has demonstrated agility by adapting to Tunisia's evolving context, particularly in the area of women's political participation.

CONCLUSION 2

Constraints on political participation and WPS within a tightening operating environment have limited downstream influence. UN Women's value add is strongest where normative engagement is paired with support to women's leadership across public and private sectors, subnational reach and resilient CSO partnerships.

CONCLUSION 3

Internal enablers, including leadership continuity, appropriate levels of staffing and a fit-for-purpose structure are decisive for performance. In the Tunisia–Libya cluster context, leadership vacancies and limited capacity have amplified constraints, particularly across monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning, and operations functions. The appointment of a new Country Representative in August 2024 began to restore leadership stability and strengthened internal coordination processes. This is being reinforced through an ongoing functional review and change-management process, offering an opportunity to better align the office's structure with strategic priorities.

CONCLUSION 4

The Country Office has made significant progress in embedding "leave no one behind" and disability inclusion principles throughout its portfolio, although there is potential for further strengthening. Its work is well aligned with gender-transformative principles.

RECOMMENDATION 1



Under the next Strategic Note, the Country Office should aim to achieve greater thematic coherence and engage deeply on a limited number of thematic areas of work that address the most pressing gender equality challenges where the Country Office has a clear comparative advantage.

RECOMMENDATION 2



The Country Office should build on the recommendations of the recently completed functional review to address the structural and operational challenges that have constrained the efficient delivery of its mandate.

RECOMMENDATION 3



The Country Office should foster resilient partnerships with civil society, feminist movements and grassroots organizations, with a focus on protecting achieved rights; building alliances to counter pushback; supporting gender equality actors; and sustaining gender equality action.

RECOMMENDATION 4



Building on its disability inclusion efforts to date, the Country Office should further strengthen its work, paying attention to commitments under the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy and recommendations arising from the Country Office's EnAbility audit (2024),² including the systematic collection and reporting of data on disability inclusion.

The analysis and recommendations of this evaluation are those of the Independent Evaluation, Audit and Investigation Services (IEAIS) and do not necessarily reflect the views of UN Women. This is an independent publication by the UN Women Independent Evaluation, Audit and Investigation Services (IEAIS).