# TERMS OF REFERENCE

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# on

# Effectiveness and efficiency assessment of UN Women Flagship Programme Initiatives and Thematic Priorities of the Strategic Plan

# I Introduction

1. The Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), through Resolution Decision 2017/5, approved the Strategic Plan for 2018–2021 in August 2017. The UN Women Corporate Evaluation Plan (2018–2022), which was approved by the Executive Director and presented to the Executive Board in 2017, foresaw a Corporate Evaluation of UN Women’s Strategic Plan (2018–2021) in 2020.
2. In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, and based on initial consultations with different headquarters divisions, the evaluation was adapted to a desk-based study with a specific focus on the Flagship Programme Initiatives (FPIs). This focus on the FPIs and thematic priorities also responds to UN Women Executive Board decision 2019/4, which requested that UN Women include information *“on how the individual flagship programme initiatives contribute to the five outcome areas, identify their cooperating partners and indicate the role and contribution of these partners”* in its Annual Report.
3. Taking the 2018–2021 Strategic Plan (SP) Theory of Change (TOC) as an overarching framework, the evaluation will assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and coherence of the FPIs as a partnership, operational, resource mobilization and programming model to deliver high-impact and transformative results within the context of implementing the SP. In this light, the evaluation will analyse whether and how the FPIs and thematic priorities have delivered against their stated intent to ensure that UN Women fully leverages its unique composite mandate and becomes “*fitter and funded for purpose*”.
4. In terms of scope, the evaluation will examine the evolution of the FPIs since their roll-out in 2016 and their operationalization across headquarters, regional and field office levels. The aim is to provide an evidence-based analysis and lessons into what worked, what didn’t work and why, including an assessment of the factors that facilitated or constrained the combined and individual success of the FPIs/thematic priorities.

# II. Purpose

1. The evaluation will analyse the added value of FPIs and assess the extent to which the thematic priorities have:
2. changed the way UN Women works in terms of deepening programmatic priorities and implementation (focus, coherence, scale and rationalization of footprint);
3. improved operational efficiency (optimize, consolidate and streamline business processes to achieve economies of scale);
4. attracted high-quality resources (predictable, flexible and critical mass of resources to drive SP results); and
5. facilitated the delivery of high-impact programmes to achieve the vision encapsulated in the 2018–2021 SP.
6. The evaluation will be used for strategic decisions; organizational learning and accountability; and will serve as a key input to the development of the UN Women SP 2022–2025.

# III. Background on the Flagship Programme Initiatives

1. The FPIs were established in 2015 as the main operational and programming instrument to ensure that UN Women fully leverages its composite mandate to be *“fitter for purpose”* to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and UN reform commitments. Against this backdrop, the FPIs were devised to enable UN Women to move away from *“short duration, small scale and UN Women-only projects into a larger scale, longer duration and multi-stakeholder impactful initiatives”.[[1]](#footnote-1)* Twelve FPIs were developed with operational and financing modalities alongside TOC which articulated the linkages and actions required by UN Women and partners to achieve transformative change within each priority area of UN Women’s SP.[[2]](#footnote-2)
2. While roll-out of the FPIs goes back to 2016, the ongoing SP (2018–2021) departed from the previous SP format by seeking to ensure programmatic focus through prioritizing five development outcomes and a set of 15 outputs, including 12 thematic outputs reflecting globally agreed thematic priorities through a unified TOC.[[3]](#footnote-3) The FPI approach and modalities were subsequently embedded as thematic priorities and were a critical means of coalescing partners around a shared TOC to attract high-quality resources necessary to implement the ongoing SP.[[4]](#footnote-4) The FPIs were envisioned as a modality for stronger programmatic design, focus, results-orientation as well as an operational instrument for leveraging economies of scale through operational effectiveness and efficiency.
3. During previous and current SP implementation, the FPIs and thematic priorities have been cascaded and used as a key instrument in orienting strategic planning, such as in the development of Strategic Notes (SNs) and Annual Work Plans (AWPs) at the decentralized level. The thematic priorities and their accompanying TOCs were also designed to support field offices in mobilizing longer-term and high-quality funding by facilitating negotiations with potential donors to finance thematic priorities or full SNs.[[5]](#footnote-5)

# IV. Proposed Theory of Change for the Flagship Programme Initiatives within the context of Strategic Plan implementation

1. Since 2016, the FPIs have been central to corporate programmatic and operational efficiency and effectiveness. The FPIs are expected to become the main programme modality to implement the SP and an instrument that supports the achievement of each output stipulated in the SP Integrated Results and Resources Framework (IRRF). Most importantly, the FPI approach was intended to enable UN Women to fully leverage its integrated mandate (normative, coordination and operations) to be fitter for purpose in the context of SDG and UN reform implementation.
2. In particular, the FPIs and subsequently the SP thematic priorities were formulated to enable UN Women to:[[6]](#footnote-6)
3. scale up results through partnerships to meet the significant expectations on gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls and the realization of their human rights embedded in the SDGs and other intergovernmental decisions;
4. ensure UN Women is fit for purpose to support implementation of the SDGs at national level, particularly as they relate to the achievement of gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls and the realization of their human rights; and
5. allow UN Women to successfully access high-quality non-core funding to complement its core resources and implement its SP.
6. Three implementation modalities were articulated for the FPIs:
7. portfolio of branded projects;
8. global/regional programmes (highly replicable and specialized initiatives based on common methodologies); and
9. UN multi-donor trust funds.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The FPIs also employed different financing schemes and gradual roll-out depending on the specific context and countries’ priority areas. In this context, the FPIs are a key tool in supporting UN Women to attract funds for a specific strategic outcome rather than for a project. Furthermore, SNs are required to focus on fewer outcomes, but with larger funding programmes to reduce the number of short-term, low-value projects and to increase strategic impact.

1. Figure 1 demonstrates a simplified visual model created by the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS) to map out the FPI building blocks to increase programmatic and operational effectiveness and efficiency and eventually facilitate the delivery of SP outcomes and impact. In the context of the overall SP TOC, the FPIs were established to achieve the following results:
2. Enhanced focus, scale and value through UN coordination (capacity to coordinate, convene and implement gender-responsive FPIs at scale within the continuum of development, humanitarian action and peacekeeping and also through joint programme and pooled funds).
3. Development of strategic, multi-stakeholder partnerships to scale up transformative results on gender equality and women’s empowerment (leveraging collaborative advantages through UN Women’s integrated mandate).
4. Deepened programmatic focus and strengthened results orientation in strategic planning, monitoring and reporting.
5. Streamlined business processes and systems and increased quality and flexibility of non-core contributions.
6. In consultation with members of the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG),[[8]](#footnote-8) the TOC will be further validated and expanded during the inception phase of the evaluation process.

Figure 1: Theory of Change for the Flagship Programme Initiative – alignment with UN Women’s Strategic Plan 2018–2021



# V. Relevant findings from previous evaluations, audits and reviews

1. The UN Women Independent Evaluation Service (IES) evaluated all strategic impact areas and the integrated mandate of the previous SP (2014–2017). IES also commissioned a series of corporate, regional and country-level evaluations such as the corporate evaluations of UN Women’s Political Participation; UN Women’s Contribution to Humanitarian Response; UN Women’s Contribution to Governance and National Planning; and a meta-synthesis of decentralized evaluations during the course of the current SP (2018–2021). A Corporate Thematic Evaluation of UN Women’s support to National Action Plans (NAPs) on Women, Peace and Security is currently ongoing. The UN Women Internal Audit Service (IAS) also undertook several risk assessments, thematic and country office audits, availing a wealth of insights on UN Women’s performance in a range of organizational priority areas.
2. Evaluations broadly concluded that UN Women, capitalizing on its 10 years of experience, has continued to achieve significant results across its integrated mandate. There is growing recognition that UN Women has contributed to a stronger enabling environment in support of gender equality and women’s empowerment in conformity with the commitments of the SDGs and the UN reform agenda. UN Women has matured organizationally, strengthened its global footprint and expanded its human and financial resources. UN Women has also invested in a suite of results and financial management systems and strengthened its operational and management arrangements.
3. On the other hand, evaluations and audits highlighted the need for UN Women to continuously adapt and improve its business processes and institutional capacity to drive its programmatic focus and use its limited resources strategically to deliver larger-scale results for women and girls. The relative efficiency and fitness for purpose of the Entity’s results-based management culture needs to be further improved, including through stronger monitoring mechanisms to better gather evidence on medium and longer-term changes and to use this evidence to support mid and long-term course corrections. Audit reports also recommended more feasible and concrete results frameworks at SN and related project levels, with well-equipped monitoring functions and an improved system of collection and validation of data, as well as the need to better match field office capacity with their ability to deliver through longer-term and sustainable local HR strategies. Constrained staffing, short duration of programmes and delays in programme start-up were mentioned in several evaluations and audits as factors impacting the timeliness, delivery and quality of some programme results. Underfunding is another frequently mentioned factor, constraining the ability of UN Women to achieve results.
4. In terms of better managing risks, IAS analyses highlighted the need for UN Women to:
	* 1. further enhance its second line of defense, in particular by identifying the business process owners responsible for risk-based and cost-effective policy, process design and compliance monitoring, and by clearly defining and communicating the role of regional offices as responsible for monitoring and oversight of the field offices in their region; and
		2. further demonstrate its accountability for risk management and related systems of internal control through preparing an annual Statement of Internal Controls.
5. The assessments and evaluations conducted by IEAS highlighted the need for UN Women to deepen the quality and breadth of its work to drive the significant investment required as it prepares a new vision for the next SP 2022–2025 to deliver transformative results for women and girls.
6. The MOPAN assessment, issued in 2019, echoed most of these observations from IEAS evaluations and audits. Pertinent to implementation of the SP and the FPIs, the MOPAN assessment identified a multitude of positive actions, and also highlighted bottlenecks for organizational effectiveness and efficiency, some of which will be further analysed in the evaluation.
* The assessment credits UN Women for having a clear, long-term vision for achieving its integrated mandate expressed in its SPs. UN Women’s collaborative and comparative advantage in working with other UN entities is now clearer but overlaps remain. Securing adequate core funding for its mandate and objectives has – since its launch – been challenging, although its budget has steadily and considerably increased.
* UN Women continues to develop and consolidate its structures, policies and processes as it matures organizationally. The speed of these changes demonstrates UN Women’s agility, responsiveness and capacity to ensure that it adapts as needed. However, many of these changes are relatively recent and are still embedding, and their impact is not yet fully proven.
* In terms of FPIs, the assessment acknowledged the initiatives as a vehicle for working in synergy with partners to avoid overlap and optimize impact. FPIs are beginning to improve both prioritization of activities and partnerships but these are not yet in universal use and legacy activities remain which are not integrated with the FPIs. There are examples where the Entity’s continued pursuit of donor funding for lower-priority activities at country level poses a risk to fidelity to strategic priorities. However, instances were citied of donors funding a SN rather than a specific project, showing evidence of more strategic funding.
* UN Women’s low capacity at country level negatively affects the quality and effectiveness of interventions. These factors, with the associated challenges of short-term funding, delays and capacity gaps in its implementing partners, limit the Entity’s delivery of sustainable results. This impacts the value of investments and the organization’s reputation.
* UN Women does not always work effectively with partners, which limits its ability to achieve results through building on partner synergies and through harnessing the capacity of its partners. While resources are clearly allocated, the criteria for allocating resources to strategic priorities and to regions and countries are responsive rather than strategic.
1. The recently concluded SP 2018–2021 mid-term review highlighted positive developments in terms of programmatic design, focus and enhanced partnerships, including through the FPIs. But the review also stressed the need to balance the ability to seize opportunities with a strategic approach and redressing funding challenges to ensure a consistent approach in the roll-out of FPIs and thematic priorities.

# VI. Key issues to be addressed by the evaluation

1. The main analytical framework for the overall assessment builds on four OECD/DAC evaluation criteria – relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and coherence. The assessment will focus on how the FPIs/thematic priorities have influenced what UN Women intends to do; whether these intentions have been delivered efficiently and effectively; and whether and how this affects UN Women’s operations in delivering better results on gender equality and women’s empowerment. Within this framework, the evaluation will consider the operationalization of the FPIs through the lens of strategic planning and programmatic focus, governance and quality mechanisms, business processes/systems, coordination, partnerships and resource mobilization.
2. The evaluation will be guided by questions grouped by key areas of enquiry. An evaluation matrix summarizing key questions/subquestions, judgment criteria, sources of information and methodology will be developed to guide the analysis and triangulation. In recognition of the centrality of the human rights-based approach for the FPIs/thematic priorities, the study will analyse specific gender equality considerations, including disability and the focus on the Leave-No-One-Behind principle.

Overarching question:

**To what extent have the FPIs and thematic priorities supported the planning and delivery of transformative results on gender equality and women’s empowerment within the context of SP implementation?**

***1. Have the FPIs and thematic priorities been successful in creating a greater focus and coherence in UN Women’s programmatic work****?*

1. To what extent have FPIs and thematic priorities guided programmatic prioritization and strategic planning at headquarters and field offices?
2. To what extent has UN Women achieved the right balance in coherence and coordination between centralized and decentralized programmatic priority setting?
3. How well have FPIs/thematic priorities supported implementation of UN Women’s integrated mandate in a complementary and coherent manner to achieve results?
4. To what extent were strategic ownership, governance, accountability and quality assurance mechanisms for FPIs and thematic priorities defined and implemented?
5. How have the FPIs/thematic priorities helped to define and enhance UN Women’s comparative advantages and visibility?
6. Is there any correlations in terms of how different governance models are translated into better delivery/results/success?
7. Is there difference or any added value of FPIs versus regular programming? What are the pathways for scaling up successful FPIs?
8. How are FPIs coordinated and aligned to prevent silos or internal competition for resources?

***2.******Have the FPIs/thematic priorities enabled UN Women to better leverage partnerships and its coordination mandate?***

1. To what extent have the FPIs and thematic priorities played a catalytic role and scaled up results in the SP?
2. How effective were the FPIs and thematic priorities as vehicles for partnerships and coordination?
3. How effective were the FPIs and thematic priorities as tools for resource mobilization?
4. Have FPIs and thematic priorities contributed to establishing UN Women’s ‘identity’ and broadly recognized areas of expertise by partners?
5. How have FPIs/thematic priorities helped UN Women to leverage economies of scale associated with operations?
6. To what extent have the FPI/thematic priorities embedded an adaptive management process that can react to changing contexts such as the COVID-19 pandemic?

# VII. Evaluation approaches and methods

1. The evaluation will be a transparent and participatory process involving UN Women personnel at corporate, regional and country levels as well as relevant stakeholders, partners and member states. The evaluation methodology will be adapted to the uncertainties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, with as many activities as possible moved to desk-based research, meta-synthesis[[9]](#footnote-9) and online/remote engagements.
2. The evaluation will be guided by an analytical framework and a theory-based approach to be constructed based on the SP thematic priorities and FPI modalities. The study will seek an appropriate balance between coverage and depth of information from a variety of sources and through multiple streams of evidence. Core data collection methods include:
3. **Extensive desk review and synthesis** of evaluations, audits, external assessments and reviews.
4. **Portfolio analysis** of a sample of SN documents, AWPs and Annual Reports.
5. **Review** of UN Women management systems, reports and internal assessments.
6. **Remote semi-structured interviews** **and virtual consultations** with selected UN Women staff from country, regional and headquarters offices.
7. **Surveys of UN Women staff and partners** to gauge the opinions and views of external stakeholders and staff whose work should have been directly impacted by the FPIs.

# VIII. Management arrangements and process

1. The evaluation will be coordinated and led by IES in collaboration with IAS. It will be conducted over the next six months, with an inception phase due to begin in June 2020. The goal is to have the final report by October 2020 for consideration by the UN Women Executive Board at the first regular session in February 2021.
2. The Evaluation Team will include the Chief of IES, Chief of IAS, two Evaluation Specialists, one Audit Specialist and a Senior Evaluation Expert with organizational performance expertise.
3. Methodological rigour and report quality will be ensured through an internal Evaluation Reference Group and IES quality assurance process. The former will consist of senior managers/staff from regional and country offices as well as key divisions at headquarters responsible for normative, operational, coordination, and management and administration work. The IES quality assurance will include an internal IES peer review and review of the evaluation products by the Director of IEAS.

Evaluation time frame and expected products

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| Phases Phase  | Key activities Planned activities  | Tim Timeframe me  |
| Design and inception  | Draft Terms of Reference to initiate consultation with internal stakeholders  | Mid May  |
| Review and synthesis of secondary data and inception meetings  | End June  |
| Evaluation design and organization  | End June  |
| Finalization of inception report with inputs from UN Women stakeholders, ERG and external advisory panel  | Mid July  |
| Data collection and processing  | Preparation of structured analytical pieces on various areas of enquiry, based on the synthesis of evaluation, audit and external assessment, SP mid-term review and other secondary data, to serve as the initial hypothesis  | June–July  |
| UN Women and external stakeholder consultations, including members of the Executive Board, to validate, refine and complement initial hypothesis through interviews, Focus Group Discussions and participatory workshops  | June–July -September  |
| Survey to UN Women staff and external stakeholders  | June–July  |
| Team analysis meeting and presentation of preliminary findings to ERG  | End July  |
| Analysis, write up and presentation  | Report drafting  | Sept–Oct  |
| Presentation and discussion of preliminary findings with Senior Management Team and stakeholders  | Mid-September |
| Report finalization upon receipt of comments  | Mid October |
| Presentation of findings to the first session of the UN Women Executive Board  | February 2021  |

1. UN Women Strategic Plan 2018–2021, page 23. https://undocs.org/en/UNW/2017/6/Rev.1 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2015 UN Women Flagship Initiative Brief (2015), page 3. https://papersmart.unmeetings.org/media2/7656075/flagships\_programmes\_booklet\_final.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [3] Theories of Change for UN Women’s Thematic Priorities: Achieving Transformative Results for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/executive%20board/2017/second%20regular%20session%202017/theories-of-change-for-un-womens-thematic-priorities-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5133 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. UN Women Strategic Plan 2018–2021, page 23. https://undocs.org/en/UNW/2017/6/Rev.1 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. UN Women Strategic Note Guidance (2019), page 11. https://unwomen.sharepoint.com/Policy-Programming/ProgrammeDivision/SPU/Resources%20Library/Strategic%20Note%20(SN)/2019%20SN%20Guidance%20&%20Materials/Strategic%20Note%20(SN)%20Guidance\_FINAL%20PPG.pdf#search=SN%20guidance%20note%202019 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Structured Dialogue on Financing: Report on Financing the UN Women Strategic Plan, including its flagship programme initiatives https://www2.unwomen.org/~/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/executive%20board/2016/1st%20regular%20session%202016/unw-2016-crp1-structured%20dialogue%20on%20financing-en.pdf?v=1&d=20160108T212723 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. These three options are not mutually exclusive and could be used differently depending on region and contexts. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The ERG will be constituted involving a wide range of key UN Women staff at headquarters, regional and country levels. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The evaluation will build on the mid-term review of the SP, internal change management initiatives, external performance and organizational effectiveness reviews (e.g. MOPAN assessment) and synthesis of evaluations and audits covering UN Women’s integrated mandate. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)