



COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION

KAZAKHSTAN

Synthesis Report



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Country Portfolio Evaluation was conducted by the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service in coordination with the UN Women Country Office in Kazakhstan. It was conducted by an independent evaluation team comprised of Isabel Suarez Garcia, the UN Women Regional Evaluation Specialist for Europe and Central Asia; Magda Stepanyan, International Evaluation Consultant; and Maira Zeinilova, National Evaluation Consultant.

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While this report is the product of many contributions, any errors or omissions are solely the responsibility of the evaluation team. The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluators. They do not represent those of UN Women or any of the individuals and organizations referred to in the report.

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ACRONYMS

AWP	annual work plan
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CO	Country Office
CSAG	Civil Society Advisory Group
CSO	civil society organization
EBRD	European Bank of Reconstruction and Development
ECARO	UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office
EVAW	ending violence against women
GEEW	gender equality and the empowerment of women
IAES	UN Women Independent Evaluation and Audit Services
IES	UN Women Independent Evaluation Service
LGBTQI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning or intersex
MCO	Multi-Country Office
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
RBM	results-based management
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SWAP	System-wide Action Plan for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Country Framework
VAW	violence against women
WEE	women’s economic empowerment

COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION

KAZAKHSTAN

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This Country Portfolio Evaluation of the UN Women Country Office Kazakhstan Strategic Note (2016–2020) was conducted during the period April 2020–February 2021. The UN Women Strategic Note evaluated in this report covers the period 2016–2020. However, it is important to note that in 2018, in the middle of Strategic Note implementation, the UN Women Multi-Country Office (MCO) in Kazakhstan was transformed into a Country Office (CO) covering only Kazakhstan.

Context and capacities of the UN Women Office in Kazakhstan during 2016–2020

With the change from Multi-Country Office to Country Office, there was also a change in thematic priorities. In 2018, a new thematic area (“Women’s Economic Empowerment” (WEE)) was added to the existing two: Thematic Area 3 “Women and girls live a life free from violence (Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW))” and Thematic Area 5 “Governance and national planning fully reflect accountability for gender equality commitments and priorities (Leadership and Governance)”. In 2018, the UN Women global Strategic Plan was renewed with slight but important changes in its strategic priorities. Thematic Area 5 was combined with Outcome 2 “Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems” in the new Strategic Plan 2018–2021. This change was reflected in the annual work plans (AWPs) but not in the Strategic Note 2016–2020.

The shift to a Country Office also introduced major changes with regard to human resources. The number of programme personnel in the office was reduced from 15 to 6 in 2018, but in 2020 the personnel increased to 16. This is important to acknowledge to ensure that the progress made by UN Women in Kazakhstan over the period 2016–2020 is seen through the prism of the limited capacities of the Country Office and a largely unaligned theory of change as defined in the Strategic Note 2016–2020.

Evaluation approach and methodology

This Country Portfolio Evaluation was conducted by the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service (IES) in close collaboration with the Kazakhstan Country Office as a primarily formative (forward-looking) evaluation. It is geared to support the Country Office and national stakeholders’ strategic learning and decision-making for the next

Strategic Note. The evaluation had a secondary summative (retrospective) perspective, to support enhanced accountability for development effectiveness and learning from experience.

The evaluation was framed under the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) evaluation criteria, including relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. The evaluation was guided by the principles of gender-responsive evaluations and used a “utilization-focused lens” to generate forward-looking and actionable recommendations to ensure the information needs of the Country Office and stakeholders were met. A mixed-methods approach utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data was used to triangulate and verify data, increasing the internal reliability and consistency of findings. More specifically, a desk review of 180 resources was carried out, 25 interviews were held, a case study on a Country Office funding modality was implemented, and a survey was administered amongst key United Nations partners in the country.

The inception phase included an evaluability assessment and a stakeholder mapping exercise. The results of these exercises were used to design evaluation questions and support analysis.

Limitations

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a major limitation, making it impossible for the evaluation team to visit the country and requiring all consultations to be moved to the virtual space. Another important limitation was the low responsiveness of the informants, which limited consultations for an evaluation of this scope. The lack of a theory of change required the evaluation team to explore the progress of the Country Office without agreed commitments in terms of outcomes and outputs to be delivered.

MAIN EVALUATION FINDINGS

RELEVANCE

FINDING 1

The portfolio of activities of the Kazakhstan Country Office was largely consistent with the two impact areas prioritized for 2016–2017 and the three impact areas prioritized for 2018–2020 as reflected in its AWP.

However, since 2018, there has been a mismatch between the impact areas identified in the Strategic Note 2016–2020 and the actual impact areas prioritized by the Country Office. The theory of change that constituted the foundation of the Strategic Note 2016–2020 and the measures of progress towards expected outcomes had limited relevance and therefore were not largely adhered to by the Country Office.

FINDING 2

The portfolio of activities of the Kazakhstan Country Office remains largely relevant to national and international priorities on ending violence against women (EVAW), women's economic empowerment (WEE) and Governance and Leadership.

However, some of the interventions of the Country Office had a shortened lifespan, with little room to observe expected high-level outcome due to

- dependency on State funding;
- the way in which gender equality is conceptualized in the national strategy on the family; and
- limited capacities of the State authorities.

FINDING 3

The portfolio of activities of the Kazakhstan Country Office remains largely relevant to the implementation of UN Women's integrated triple mandate of normative, coordination and operational work.

However, the Country Office has demonstrated more progress in its normative and regulatory work and less in the coordination and operational programming areas.

COHERENCE

FINDING 4

The Kazakhstan Country Office demonstrated some degree of coherence and a targeted approach to partnering with the country's gender mechanism as a coordinating agency on the gender equality and empowerment of women agenda in Kazakhstan.

However, it would benefit from more strategic engagement with civil society organizations (CSOs) and a strengthened role as a coordinator of gender equality and the empowerment of women among United Nations agencies in the country.

FINDING 5

The organizational coherence of the Kazakhstan Country Office has shifted focus in terms of office coverage and has limited strategic direction.

Extending the programme portfolio beyond the Country Office – the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme for Central Asia and Afghanistan, nationalization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Central Asian countries – emphasizes the importance of ensuring that the Country Office has effective convening power, institutional capacities and governance mechanisms.

FINDING 6

While the Kazakhstan Country Office has a unique mandate with regard to coordination of gender equality and the empowerment of women across the United Nations system, its convening power as a coordinating agency in Kazakhstan is limited.

This is explained not only by its own capacities but also by the capacities, approach and perception of other United Nations agencies based in the country.

FINDING 7

UN Women has fostered limited strategic engagement with CSOs in Kazakhstan.

The CSOs demonstrated strong interest in cooperating with UN Women in Kazakhstan, and the few engagement avenues provided for such a cooperation resulted in heightened expectations to cooperate, which is impacting the role and position of UN Women.

EFFECTIVENESS

FINDING 8

The shifting priorities of national Government counterparts and lack of a strong voice from the Country Office in its partnership with State authorities resulted in sporadic focus across several interventions and limited systematic efforts in its chosen priorities.

FINDING 9

During 2016–2020, the Country Office made good efforts in its work on ending violence against women, with clear focus on improving the normative framework in Kazakhstan. However, this has not been translated into actual enhancement of normative frameworks.

FINDING 10

Positive results were achieved in the Leadership and Governance thematic area through strengthening the institutional performance of State authorities with regard to gender-responsive budgeting.

FINDING 11

The investment of the Country Office in women's economic empowerment was less systematic and demonstrated limited contribution towards achieving progress in this area in Kazakhstan.

EFFICIENCY

FINDING 12

Limited and stretched institutional capacities during the life cycle of the Strategic Note 2016–2020 prevented balanced attention to the implementation of UN Women's integrated triple mandate by the Country Office.

FINDING 13

The Country Office portfolio indicates some constraints related to the prevailing funding modality. Implementation of this modality demonstrates important efficiency challenges and constraints.

FINDING 14

High dependency on State funding of the whole United Nations Country Team (UNCT) creates internal competition among United Nations agencies in Kazakhstan, in which large offices have a stronger comparative advantage for resource mobilization.

The Country Office would benefit from more strategic resource mobilization through diversification of its donor base and investment in strategic partnerships with United Nations agencies and relevant ministries.

SUSTAINABILITY, GENDER EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

FINDING 15

The sustainability of the portfolio of interventions of the Country Office is affected by a high dependency on State funding. Unpredictability of funding and shifting national priorities on gender equality and the empowerment of women represent potential risks to the sustainability of UN Women's work in Kazakhstan.

FINDING 16

The long-term positive impact of interventions by the Country Office is set to be observed through strengthened normative and regulatory frameworks as instruments for rights holders and through enhanced capacities of State counterparts as duty bearers, which can have an impact on the root causes of gender inequality in Kazakhstan.

FINDING 17

The programmatic portfolio of the Kazakhstan Country Office includes some elements of the "leaving no one behind" principle; however, its strategy to address the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups is not clear. There is no clear evidence of gender-transformative changes that can be attributed to the interventions by the Country Office.

RECOMMENDATIONS



RECOMMENDATION 1: Strategically define the theory of change, focusing solely on Kazakhstan and carefully balancing it with the organizational capabilities and ambitions of the Country Office, and enhance the Country Office's analytical basis towards the realization of its triple mandate through its portfolio of interventions.



RECOMMENDATION 5: Advocate for stronger gender mainstreaming across United Nations programming through supporting the Gender Thematic Group by mobilizing strategic guidance of the UNCT and through strengthening the functioning of the Gender Thematic Group.



RECOMMENDATION 2: Mobilize evidence-based arguments and strategies to advocate for gender equality and empowerment of women priorities and promote a gender equality path in the Concept of Family and Gender Issues pursued by the national Government.



RECOMMENDATION 6: Strategically define the role of the presence of UN Women in Kazakhstan when leading multi-country/ regional initiatives or implementing joint regional initiatives.



RECOMMENDATION 3: Define the portfolio accountability mechanism with a clear monitoring and evaluation framework and adequate reporting according to the defined indicators both at the output and outcome levels.



RECOMMENDATION 7: Invest in resource mobilization and in diversification of the Country Office's donor base with primary focus on gender equality and equity for United Nations-wide socioeconomic recovery efforts from COVID-19, thereby finding a niche for UN Women in Kazakhstan to partner with other United Nations agencies and key strategic partners.



RECOMMENDATION 4: Improve the balance of efforts across implementation of UN Women's integrated triple mandate by strengthening the Country Office's focus on partnerships to create a strong alliance and enhance UN Women's role as a coordinator of gender equality and empowerment of women issues and improve its convening capacity.



RECOMMENDATION 8: Raise the reputation of the Country Office among its United Nations and external partners in the country and strengthen its portfolio of activities by strategically aligning with existing and emerging partners from the national authorities, the United Nations, CSOs and other national and international stakeholders.

Scope of the evaluation



**UN Women
Kazakhstan CO
Development Results
Framework**



3 key result areas
Leadership and Governance,
EVAW and Women's
Economic Empowerment



Organizations Efficiency
and **Effectiveness**
and **Efficiency**
Framework



SN 2016-2020
Evaluation was conducted
between April and
December 2020



US\$ 8M budget
including Core and
Non-core resources



Photo ©UN Women/Ryan Brown

1. COUNTRY CONTEXT

1.1 About Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan¹ is a Central Asian post-Soviet country with a population of 18.2 million people. It has one of the lowest population density levels in the world,² among which 60 per cent reside in cities.³ As stated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2021–2025 for Kazakhstan, according to the 2019 Sustainable Development Report, Kazakhstan is ranked 77 of the assessed 162 countries in the 2019 SDG Index. Kazakhstan's global index score is 68.7 per cent, which is 2.4 per cent below the regional average score of 70.4 per cent for Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

The second largest country of the former Soviet Union, Kazakhstan⁴ is known for its extensive mineral resources, which determine the country's economic profile.⁵ After Russia, Kazakhstan is the second largest crude oil producer in the post-Soviet area, and the twelfth largest in the world, possessing oil reserves of approximately 30 billion barrels.⁶ As a result of Kazakhstan's vast territory, the economic specialization of its regions is diverse and its social profile varies.

The export of natural resources has raised the country to the category of "upper middle-income states" since 2006, according to the World Bank, which predicts that fluctuating global oil prices, economic dependency on oil and the demands of its main trading partners (i.e. Russia and China) will have an impact on Kazakhstan's further development.⁷

As per the latest United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, the country's Human Development Index value is 0.817, which puts the country in the high human development category at 50 of 189 countries, and third among post-Soviet countries.⁸

Kazakhstan committed to achieving the SDGs by 2030, having started from a good position due to the "high level of integration of the goals and targets in national programmes and strategies."⁹ Kazakhstan has nationalized the global SDG indicators, and the established monitoring system includes 280 indicators, including 205 global and 75 national indicators. Almost 80 per cent of the SDG indicators are integrated in the national strategies of the Republic of Kazakhstan.¹⁰ The country has made progress in the areas of education, entrepreneurship development, expanding access to financial services and funds, reducing poverty severity and modernizing its judiciary. However, certain economic diversification domains, such as environmental protection and disaster risk reduction, still require action. The 2019 Voluntary National Review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹¹ does not sufficiently cover existing gender equality and empowerment of women issues and is limited in terms of its analysis, highlighting only formal achievements. Among the further steps required, the report mostly highlights family policy.

1 Image source: [Sajapong Rhienmora](https://www.123rf.com/photo_30394230_stock-vector-kazakhstan-world-map-with-a-pixel-diamond-texture-world-geography-.html), image no 30394230, downloaded from https://www.123rf.com/photo_30394230_stock-vector-kazakhstan-world-map-with-a-pixel-diamond-texture-world-geography-.html.

2 World Bank, Kazakhstan Overview, available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kazakhstan/overview>

3 Bureau of National Statistics, Ministry of National Economy, Key Socio-Demographic and Economic Indicators, available at http://stat.gov.kz/faces/wcnav_externalId/homeNumbersPopulation;jsessionid=NgF8EiPE-bVCc-WgV3qvFrTTIasWXuoFukYgc7PKnoyEOclo11yk!1944226179!819271923?lang=ru&_afLoop=3791182201307822#%40%3F_afLoop%3D3791182201307822%26lang%3Dru%26_adf.ctrl-state%3Dfncfotzis_4.

4 Gavin R.G. Hambly David Roger Smith Edward Allworth Denis Sinor, Kazakhstan, Encyclopedia Britannica, available at <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kazakhstan>.

5 Franke, A., Gawrich, A., & Alakbarov, G., 2009. "Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan as post-Soviet rentier states: resource incomes and autocracy as a double 'curse' in post-Soviet regimes". *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61(1), 109-140.

6 U.S. Energy Information Administration, Country Analysis Brief: Kazakhstan, 10 May 2017, available at http://www.ieee.es/en/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2017/EIA_Country_Aanlysis_Kazakhstan_10may2017.pdf.

7 World Bank, Kazakhstan: Overview, available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kazakhstan/overview>.

8 United Nations Development Programme, 2020. Human Development Report 2020, available at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2020-report>.

9 Ministry of National Economy, JSC Economic Research Institute, 2019 Voluntary National Review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, available at https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23946KAZAKHSTAN_DNO_eng_4_Jul19.pdf.

10 Economic Research Institute, *Journal of Economy and Finance*, 2019. ISSN 1813-3989.

11 Ministry of National Economy, JSC Economic Research Institute, 2019 Voluntary National Review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The current COVID-19 crisis has negatively affected the economy of Kazakhstan. The oil industry is experiencing a sharp decline and collapse. Despite the Government's supportive measures, experts envisage difficulties in resuming business activity due to "disruptions caused by a prolonged standstill." The crisis will mostly hit low-skilled workers.¹²

The COVID-19 pandemic might have a negative impact on resource mobilization for UN Women in Kazakhstan given its dependency on State funding. At the same time, the crisis reveals new perspectives and opportunities for

the Country Office to focus on supporting the most vulnerable and affected groups in the country and to highlight the enhanced vulnerabilities of other beneficiaries, i.e. survivors of violence against women, women with disabilities, single mothers, rural women, etc. In this context, the Country Office may have an opportunity for resource mobilization from the funding provided for socioeconomic recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 with a focus on the most vulnerable, through promoting the principles of leaving no one behind, gender equality and the empowerment of women (GEEW) and human rights.



COVID-19 impact in Kazakhstan: key figures



↓ GDP and increased poverty rate

GDP growth^{*} in 2020 projected to be -3 per cent. The prolonged crisis will increase the poverty rate from the forecasted 8.3 to 12.7 per cent, which would mean 800,000 Kazakhstanis living in poverty.



Substantial learning losses

The COVID-19 pandemic is leading to "substantial learning losses" in education, pushing more students into functional illiteracy.



Income losses

The biggest losses in income for women and men were those generated from remittances, family businesses and farming.



More women impacted financially

More women than men anticipate difficulties paying for essential outgoings if restrictive measures continue. More women (56 per cent) than men (35 per cent) worked from home instead of their usual place of work during the outbreak.^{**}



Unpaid domestic activities

Gender discrepancies became more evident as the number of reported unpaid domestic activities increased: 34 per cent of women reported increased time spent on at least three unpaid domestic activities, whereas the same indicator for men was only 16 per cent.^{***}



Increase in cases of domestic violence

According to the assessment, there has been an increase in cases of domestic violence against women due to the forced self-isolation and loss of income.^{****} The highest rates are observed among urban female residents, divorced women and those with a low income.^{*****} At the same time, rural women and men seek assistance via hotlines more often than urban residents.

* World Bank, 2020. Kazakhstan Economic Update: Navigating the Crisis, 20 July 2020. Available [here](https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kazakhstan/publication/economic-update-summer-2020)

** UNFPA, UN Women, 2020. Rapid gender assessment (RGA) for the COVID-19 situation in the Republic of Kazakhstan, available at https://kazakhstan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/rga_eng_pdf

*** Ibid

**** Ibid, p.40. "According to the survey, 15.3 per cent of the participants noted that they had heard or experienced an increase in cases of domestic violence since the beginning of the spread of COVID-19".

***** Ibid, p.3, 10.

1.2 Gender equality and the empowerment of women in Kazakhstan against UN Women's strategic areas

Women in Kazakhstan enjoy formal **gender equality** enshrined in the Constitution, guaranteed by relevant legal acts. Kazakhstan's legal and policy framework governing gender equality has evolved significantly since the country's independence. In 2009, two laws, the Act on State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities of Men and Women and the Domestic Violence Act, were approved. Kazakhstan's gender policy is guided by the State strategy on gender equality. The first law was adopted in 2006 for a 10 year period. The Concept of Family and Gender Policy, which is endorsed until 2030, is a major focus for promoting support to families and marriage by linking this aim with the State policy on modernization.

Among other important steps the country is taking towards better implementation of gender equality policy are the Law on the Victim Compensation Fund (2018); the Law on Mandatory Social Health Insurance (2015, to be launched in 2020); the Gender-Responsive Budgeting Integration Plan (2020–2025) (developed in 2019 and under the President's approval as of July 2020); the Equal Retirement Age Act (64 years, to be achieved by 2028); the Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Crimes Related to Trafficking in Persons (2018–2020), adopted in 2018; and the Standard Procedure for Providing Special Social Services to Victims of Domestic Violence, adopted in 2016. Kazakhstan is ranked 72 of 153 countries¹³ in the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index 2020.

The national women's machinery, the National Commission on Women's and Family Demographic Issues, a separate institution responsible for formulation and implementation of the State gender policy, is integrated within the executive system/presidential administration. It was granted a consultative and advisory status to develop

measures aimed to improve the status of women, children and the family as well as to create conditions for women's political, economic, social and cultural participation.¹⁴

In terms of **women's economic empowerment**, the low Global Gender Gap Index ranking for women's labour-force participation and gender wage differences shows a gap in opportunities in the labour market for men and women.¹⁵ According to data provided by the Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Bureau of National Statistics), 80 per cent of women of working age are employed compared with 86 per cent of men.¹⁶ Women still face greater economic insecurity and are more vulnerable than men to living in poverty. Occupational segregation of women and men in the labour market and a gender pay gap are persistent challenges. Women are concentrated in low-paid sectors of employment, such as education and healthcare, which are usually State funded. Although women are active in the private sector, the key industries driving Kazakhstan's growth – minerals and oil – have few women in leadership positions, and there are no identified objectives or commitments to encourage women's participation in these fields. According to the conclusions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee 2019, there is a list of prohibited occupations for women, totalling 191 professions.¹⁷ Women are underrepresented in upper managerial positions, with less than 20 per cent in senior management positions.¹⁸ Gender segregation in the labour market has a direct impact on the gender wage gap, which is around 66 to 68 per cent¹⁹, and women spend more time on unpaid work.²⁰

13 World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report, available at http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf.

14 Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 22 December 1998, #4176, with annex "Statement of the National Commission on Women's Affairs".

15 UNDP Kazakhstan, Gender Equality, available at <https://www.kz.undp.org/content/kazakhstan/en/home/gender-equality.html>.

16 Bureau of National Statistics, Ministry of National Economy, available at https://gender.stat.gov.kz/page/frontend/detail?id=20&slug=16-58-16-63&cat_id=7&lang=ru.

17 CEDAW, Concluding observations on the fifth report of Kazakhstan, November 2019, CEDAW/C/KAZ/CO/3, Employment, paragraph 37, available at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolNo=CEDAW%2fC%2fKAZ%2fCO%2f5&Lang=en.

18 International Labour Organization, 2018. Women in business and management: Gaining momentum in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

19 LaFont, S., 2001. One step forward, two steps back: women in the post-communist states. *Communist and post-communist studies*, 34(2), pp.203-220, p.206.

20 Bureau of National Statistics, 2018. Available at https://gender.stat.gov.kz/page/frontend/detail?id=112&slug=-90&cat_id=2&lang=ru.

The most prevalent forms of **violence against women and girls** in Kazakhstan are domestic violence and sexual harassment in the workplace or educational settings (17 per cent of women have experienced different forms of violence at least once²¹). However, activists and non-governmental organizations highlight that violence against women is more widespread and the official statistics underestimate the real situation. The Country Gender Assessment commissioned by the Asian Development Bank in 2018 showed that the north, east and south Kazakhstan regions have the highest numbers of cases, while the lowest numbers of cases were reported in Kyzylorda and Zhambyl, which are southern regions. One issue of concern is the decriminalization of violence against women legislation in 2017 and a lack of coordinated efforts by the law enforcement authorities and judicial institutions to address cases of domestic violence.²²

Kazakhstan ranks low for **women's political representation**. It has a decreasing number of women in executive and other decision-making positions, and no woman has ever held the presidency. The proportion of women parliamentarians has been growing gradually since 2007, reaching 27 per cent in 2020.²³ The Global Gender Gap Index 2020 places Kazakhstan at 72 of 153 countries, indicating a low ranking in the subindexes of Political Empowerment (106) and Health and Survival (75). Since 2019, Kazakhstan has fallen from sixtieth position, a reduction of 12 points.

In 2020, the Kazakhstan initiated gender quotas for women and youth in the voting lists of political parties, followed by changes in the Constitutional Law, Elections Law and the Law on Political Parties.

In terms of access to education, as a country of post-Soviet heritage, Kazakhstan has a high literacy rate, with no gender difference (99.9 per cent). At the level of PhD and pre-doctoral studies, while women are slightly more prevalent at the pre-doctoral stage (52 per cent), more men advance to the PhD level (62 per cent).²⁴ This fact contributes to the gender wage gap and lower status of women even in some female-dominated areas, e.g. the education system, where heads of schools and deans of universities are usually required to have a PhD.

Women, peace and security objectives are included in the 2020–2022 National Plan of Implementation of Gender Strategy.²⁵ In particular, the plan includes the following indicators on women, peace and security: to increase the number of women in peace and security by 8 per cent by 2020, by 8.5 per cent by 2023 and by 10 per cent by 2030. Among the proposed activities to reach these targets are a workshop for civil servants and training women to be part of United Nations peacekeeping operations. However, no funds were allocated for these activities.

21 Bureau of National Statistics, 2017. A report on domestic violence in Kazakhstan, available at <https://kazakhstan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Report%20on%20Nat%20VAW%20survey%20RUS.pdf>.

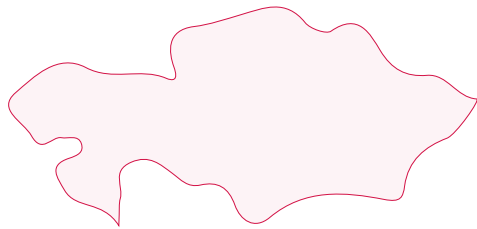
22 Asian Development Bank, 2018. Country Gender Assessment, p.35.

23 Bureau of National Statistics, available at https://gender.stat.gov.kz/page/frontend/detail?id=70&slug=-57&cat_id=9&lang=ru.

24 Ibid.

25 2020–2022 Plan for implementation of Gender Strategy, available at <http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/P2000000315>.

KAZAKHSTAN COUNTRY CONTEXT



14

14 provinces and the world's largest landlocked country

18.8M

Population of 18.8 million people, with one of the lowest population density levels in the world

52%

52% of the population are women and 48% are men

5.7%

Poverty level in Kazakhstan is 5.7%, the highest since 2010



Ranked **51 out of 189** countries in the **Human Development Index** in 2020, and the third among post-Soviet countries



Ranked **72 out of 153 countries** in the **Global Gender Gap Index 2020** with low rankings in Political Empowerment (106) and Health and Survival (75)



VULNERABLE GROUPS

- Rural women
- Single mothers
- Persons with disabilities
- LGBTQI community
- Women labour migrants



PRIORITY ISSUES IN GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

- Gender-responsive governance (focus on gender-responsive budgeting)
- Ending violence against women
- Women's economic empowerment

Gender-responsive governance and political participation



There are 29 women parliamentarians in the newly elected parliament (January 2021), which represents 27%.



Out of 17 ministers in the Kazakh Government, there are only 2 women, with a gendered pattern of portfolio allocation (Tourism and Culture, Information and Social Development).



Only 11.7% of women occupy political positions, i.e. the top management positions including the heads of ministries, regions and cities.

Women's economic empowerment



Less than 20% of senior management positions are held by women." Women earn 66-68% less than men. 80% of women are employed compared with 86% of men.



Women constitute 31% of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the country. 191 occupations are still prohibited for women.

Ending violence against women



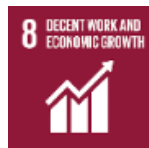
17% of women have experienced different forms of violence at least once (according to the official data). 218 protection orders are issued per day.

POSITIVE TRENDS IN SDG SCORES

Positive trends in SDG scores on the following SDGs with only SDG 1 with a promising path to be reached by 2030 (pre-COVID-19).



Positive trends in SDG scores on the following SDGs with only SDG 1 with a promising path to be reached by 2030 (pre-COVID-19).



1.3 UN Women in Kazakhstan

Background

UN Women's presence in Kazakhstan has undergone an organizational transformation since the creation of UN Women in 2011. In 2013, a Multi-Country Office in Kazakhstan was formed through the 2013 reorganization of UN Women's regional architecture, transitioning from a subregional office covering 12 countries in the region to a Multi-Country Office covering four Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan). The UN Women Strategic Note evaluated in this report covers the period 2016–2020. However, it is important to note that in 2018, in the middle of Strategic Note implementation, the UN Women Multi-Country Office in Kazakhstan was transformed into a Country Office, covering only Kazakhstan. Despite the major shift in its mandate and coverage, UN Women in Kazakhstan did not amend the Strategic Note 2016–2020; therefore, its operations from 2018 were no longer aligned with the Strategic Note.

Under the Multi-Country Office Strategic Note 2016–2020, two thematic areas were prioritized for Kazakhstan: Thematic Area 3 “Women and girls live a life free from violence (EVAW)” and Thematic Area 5 “Governance and national planning fully reflect accountability for gender equality commitments and priorities (Leadership and Governance)”. In 2018, a new thematic area, “Women's Economic Empowerment”, was added to the portfolio of the Country Office but reflected only in its AWP. All three thematic areas were in line with the corporate priority areas in the UN Women global Strategic Plan 2018–2021, and in general with the national interests of the Government of Kazakhstan.

In 2018, the UN Women global Strategic Plan was renewed with slight but important changes in its strategic priorities. In the new Strategic Plan 2018–2021, Thematic Area 5 “Governance and national planning fully reflect accountability for gender equality commitments and priorities” was combined with Outcome 2 “Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems”. This change was reflected in the AWP but not in the Strategic Note 2016–2020.

Gender equality and women's empowerment in the United Nations system in Kazakhstan

The importance of gender equality is clearly highlighted in the United Nations Partnership Framework for Development 2016–2020 for Kazakhstan.²⁶ Gender equality, along with youth involvement, is the focus of United Nations efforts towards achievement of the Partnership Framework. While Kazakhstan has made progress in achieving gender equality, it is important to mention the concern expressed by CEDAW regarding “... the persistence of patriarchal attitudes and deeply rooted stereotypes with respect to the roles and responsibilities of women and men within the family and across wider society.”²⁷

Gender equality is one of six outcomes adopted under the Partnership Framework's 2016–2020 three strategic pillars. Gender equality also remains a central theme in the new UNSDCF 2021–2025 for Kazakhstan developed in 2020, whereby “Effective Institutions, Human Rights and Gender Equality” is one of the three main thematic areas to be explored by the United Nations and its partners. This thematic area has two rather ambitious outcomes: (a) Outcome 2.1, “By 2025, all people in Kazakhstan are protected and enjoy full realization of human rights and gender equality and a life free from discrimination, violence and threats, and participate equally in decision-making” and (b) Outcome 2.2, “By 2025, State institutions at all levels effectively design and implement gender-sensitive, human rights and evidence-based public policies and provide quality services in an inclusive, transparent and accountable manner.”

The importance of gender-sensitive programming is highlighted across all UNCT interventions in Kazakhstan.²⁸ UNCT cooperates with the Government within the framework of the Partnership Framework for Development 2016–2020. Cooperation and coordination is also implemented through United Nations thematic groups, including four Partnership Framework Development Result Groups: the Interagency Group on HIV/AIDS, the Operations Management Group, the Communications Group and the Gender Theme Group. The Gender Theme Group is chaired by UN Women in close cooperation with the Resident Coordinator Office.

²⁶ United Nations Resident Coordinator Office, 2015, United Nations Partnership Framework for Development 2016–2020 for Kazakhstan, available here <https://kazakhstan.un.org/index.php/en/27247-partnership-framework-development-kazakhstan-2016-2020>

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ The UNCT in Kazakhstan is comprised of 19 resident organizations: FAO, ILO, IOM, UNAIDS, OHCHR, UNICEF, UNDP, UNDP, UNESCAP, UNESCO, UN Women, UNEP, UNHCR, UNOCHA, UNODC, UNFPA, UNRCCA, UNV and WHO. UNCTAD, UNECE, UNIDO, UNISDR and UNOPS are part of the post-2015 programming framework.

Since 2016, the group has been regularly issuing a gender newsletter to inform on major initiatives in the gender equality area. UN Women implements joint programmes with UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in the areas of women’s economic empowerment, advancing gender and family policy in Kazakhstan and ending violence against women.

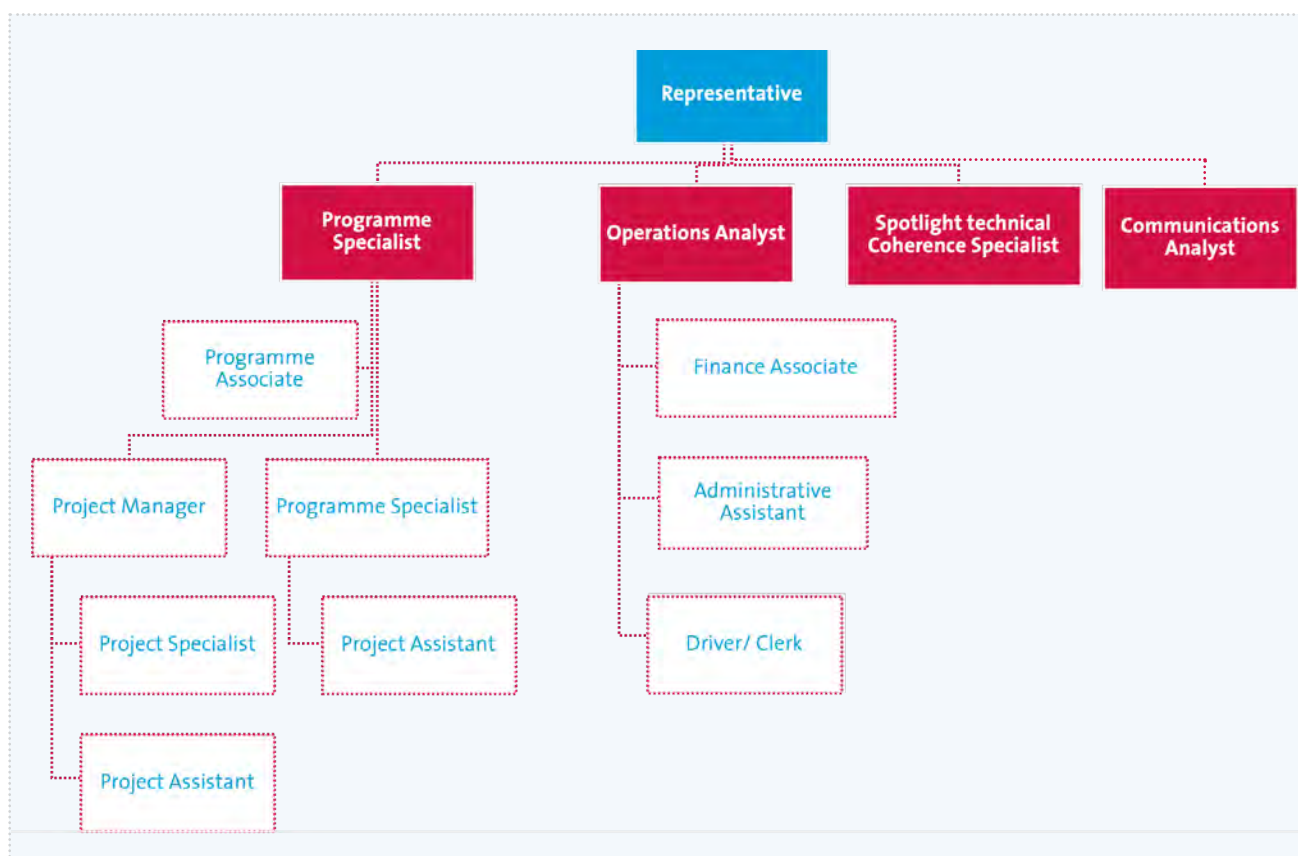
Kazakhstan Country Office financial and human resources

The total budget of the Strategic Note period was US\$8 million, of which the Country Office delivered US\$6.3 million, with a delivery rate of 78 per cent (see Figure 1). Overall, the total annual budget has decreased since 2016, from US\$1.93 million to US\$1.62 million in 2020. However, in 2020 the Country Office started implementation of the European Union-funded Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme for

Central Asia and Afghanistan, which increased its annual budget. The programme is implemented by UN Women, UNFPA and UNDP with a total budget of US\$4.4 million, with US\$2.5 million allocated to UN Women’s budget.

The level of available human resources at the Country Office has considerably varied during Strategic Note implementation. The former Kazakhstan Multi-Country Office initiated implementation of the Strategic Note 2016–2020 with 15 personnel based in Kazakhstan (in addition to 7 personnel based in Tajikistan, 1 in Uzbekistan and 1 in Turkmenistan reporting to the Director of the Multi-Country Office). With the 2018 transformation from a Multi-Country Office to a Country Office, the number of personnel was initially reduced to 6 personnel based in Kazakhstan. Since 2018, human resources have increased from 8 personnel in 2018 to 16 in 2020 (several of these additional recruitments were completed during the course of this evaluation process).

Kazakhstan Country Office organization chart provided by the UN Women Country Office (as of April 2021)²⁹



²⁹ This organization chart does not include six additional positions hired in the context of the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme for Central Asia and Afghanistan structure. The management of the programme is integrated in the overall office organigram but it is presented below to better represent the programme’s structure.

Management Structure of the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme for Central Asia and Afghanistan (as of April 2021)³⁰

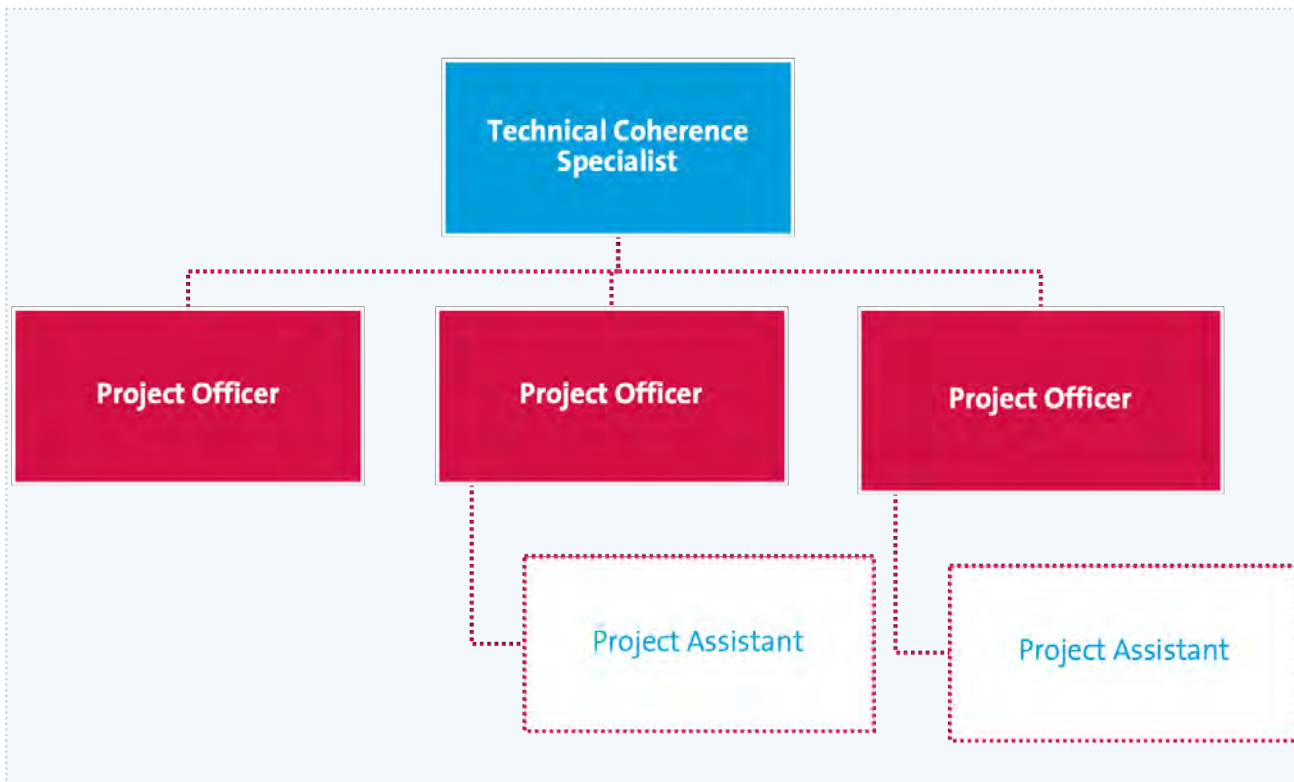
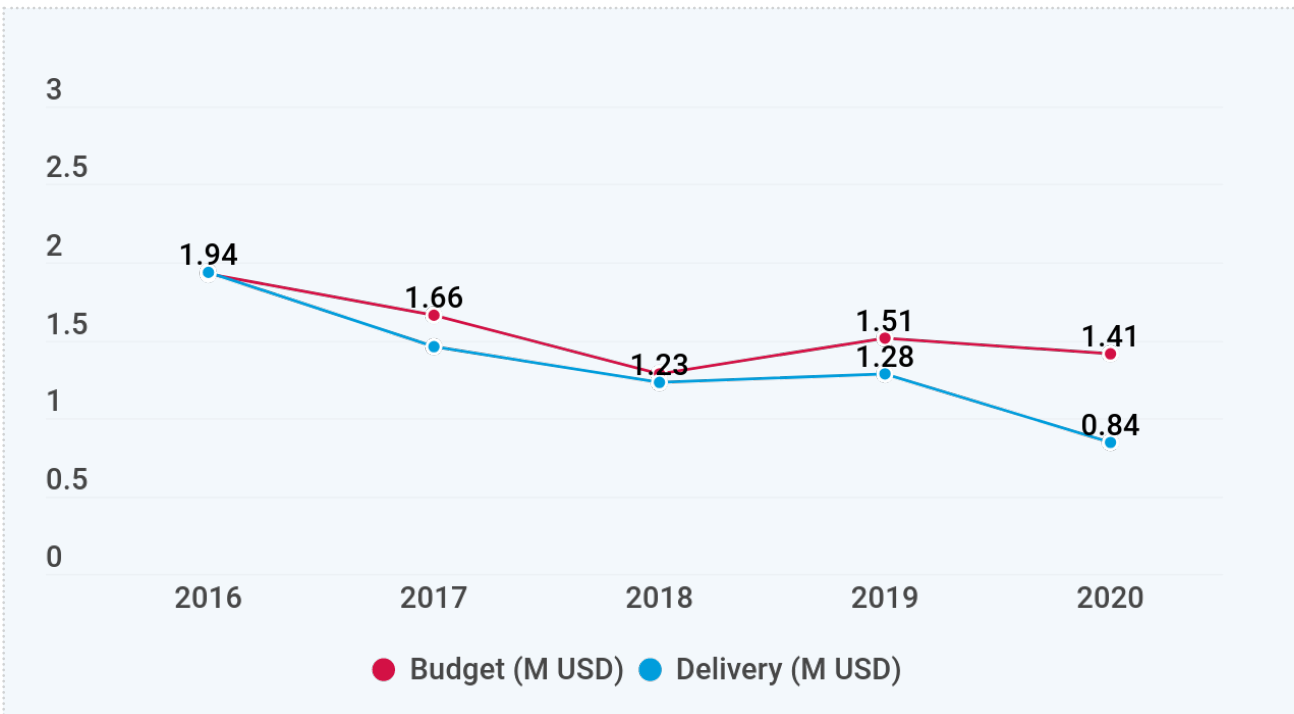


Figure 1. UN Women Kazakhstan Country Office annual budget and delivery rate (M USD), 2016–2020.



(Source: UN Women Executive Dashboard)

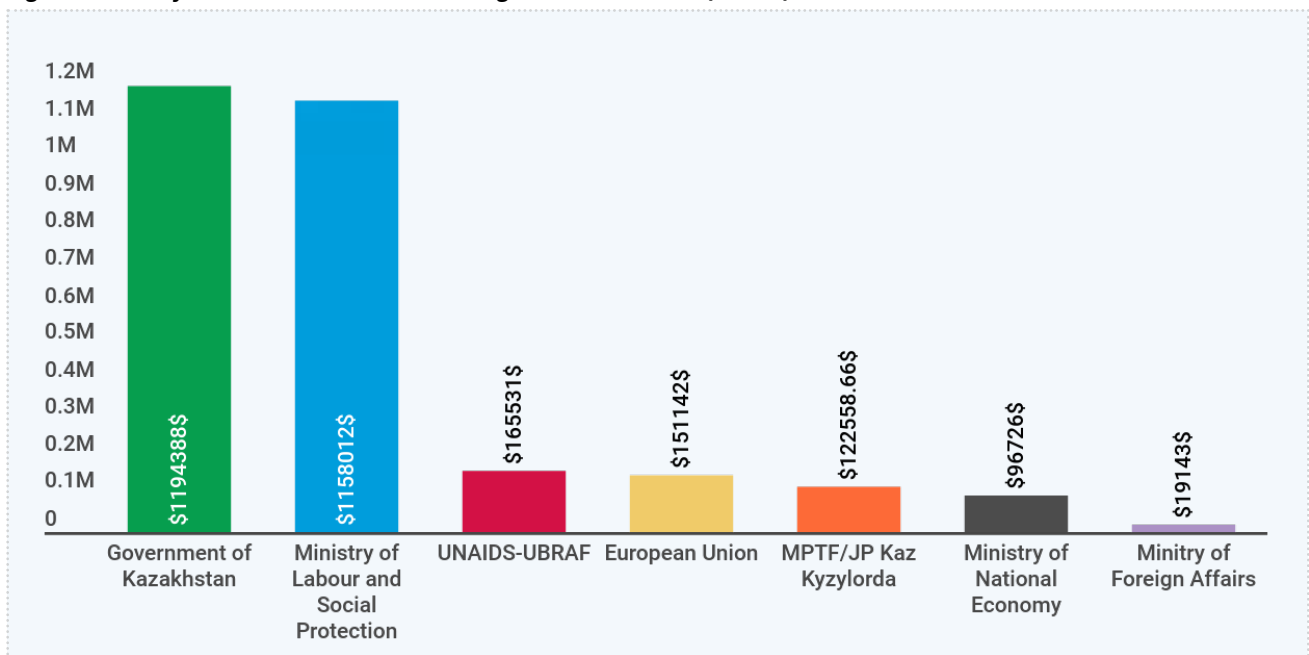
30 The Spotlight management team has a direct reporting line towards the UN Women Kazakhstan Representative

Resource mobilization

The primary donor is the Government, namely the Ministry of National Economy, which financially supports projects on SDG nationalization and gender-responsive budgeting. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection funds the thematic portfolio of Leadership and Governance, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides financial support in the form of an annual contribution to maintain the non-core activities of the office.

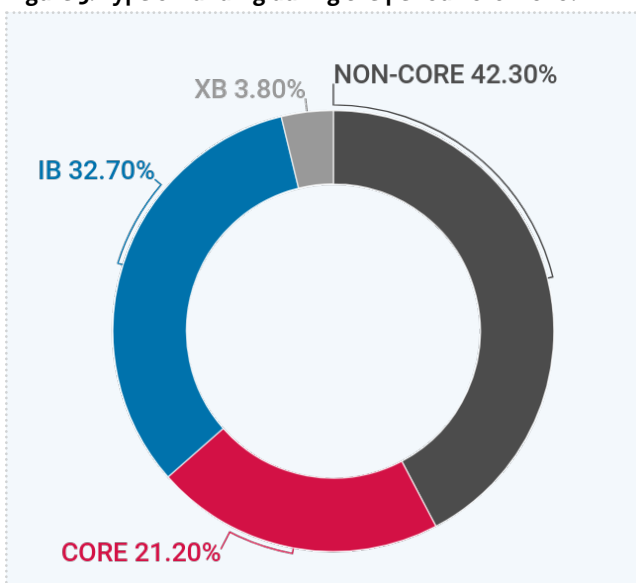
This annual contribution is not guaranteed for each subsequent year. The European Union is the largest donor for two regional programmes the Country Office participates in: the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme for Central Asia and Afghanistan 2020–2022 and Supporting the Economic Empowerment of Afghan Women through Education and Training in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan 2019–2025.

Figure 2. Country Office main sources of funding based on its AWP(M USD).



(Source: UN Women Executive Dashboard)

Figure 3. Type of funding during the period 2016–2020.



(Source: UN Women Executive Dashboard)

Figure 2 reflects only donor contributions, which constitute around 40 per cent of the total annual budget of the Country Office. Figure 1 includes all core and non-core funds. Figure 3 reflects the distribution of the aggregated types of funding the Country Office received during the period covered by this evaluation.

Result areas

The Country Office is focused on the following thematic areas: Leadership and Governance, Ending Violence Against Women and Women’s Economic Empowerment. Under the Leadership and Governance thematic area, the Country Office implemented projects on SDG localization and gender-responsive budgeting including capacity-building of State authorities in gender analysis. This portfolio was the largest within the Strategic Note period. The thematic area of Ending Violence Against Women focuses on the normative and institutional levels, while the area Women’s Economic Empowerment occupies less of the programme portfolio due to limited resources and a lack of strategic focus.



Photo ©UN Women/Aijamal Duishebaeva

2. EVALUATION APPROACH

2.1. Evaluation purpose and objectives

This Country Portfolio Evaluation was conducted by the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service (IES) in close collaboration with the Kazakhstan Country Office as a primarily formative (forward-looking) evaluation to support the Country Office and national stakeholders' strategic learning and decision-making for the next Strategic Note, set to start in April 2021. The evaluation had a secondary summative (retrospective) perspective, to support enhanced accountability for development effectiveness and learning from experience.

The evaluation objectives were developed in consultation with the Country Office at the outset of the evaluation process to:

1. Assess the relevance of UN Women's interventions at the national level and alignment with international agreements and conventions on gender equality and the empowerment of women.
2. Assess the effectiveness and organizational efficiency in progressing towards the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women results as defined in the Strategic Note.
3. Support the Country Office to improve its strategic positioning to better enable the achievement of sustained gender equality and empowerment of women.
4. Analyse how a human rights approach and gender equality principles are integrated into the design and implementation of the Strategic Note.
5. Identify and validate lessons learned, good practices and examples of innovation that support gender equality and human rights.
6. Provide insights into the extent to which the Country Office has realized synergies between its three mandates (normative, coordination and operations).
7. Provide actionable recommendations for the development of the next Strategic Note of the Country Office.

2.2. Evaluation scope

The scope of this evaluation includes all activities undertaken by the Country Office under its current Strategic Note 2016–2020, including operational work, general support to normative policy, United Nations coordination and, to some extent, operational efficiency, from the period January 2016 to mid-2020. UN Women's contribution to

the COVID-19 pandemic response in the country was also taken into account. Five country-, regional- and corporate-level evaluations³¹ were reviewed and drawn upon as secondary material. The geographical scope of the evaluation spanned the entire country.

2.3. Evaluation design

The evaluation applied a theory-based, contribution analysis and cluster design approach and included outcomes mapping and harvesting. A theory-based design assessed the performance of the Strategic Note based upon a reconstructed theory of change developed by the evaluation team during the inception phase of the evaluation process.

The evaluation team analysed the Strategic Note 2016–2020 and found that it did not match the performance of the Country Office and its portfolio composition. Therefore, the evaluation team reconstructed the theory of change and shifted its focus towards the evaluation of the Country Office portfolio of programming instead of the Strategic

Note. More details on the relevance of the Strategic Note 2016–2020 are provided in Section 3.1 of this report.

The evaluation was framed under the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria, including relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. A systematic assessment of the long-term impact of the Country Office interventions on beneficiaries and their contexts is not part of the evaluation scope, as this type of analysis requires resources and methods beyond the design of this evaluation. At the outset of the evaluation process, it was also considered too premature to assess the long-term impact of interventions in the country.

³¹ The following evaluations were used in the context of this evaluation process as key sources of secondary evidence: Kazakhstan UNDAF 2016–2020 Final Evaluation (2019); UN Women 2018–2021 Strategic Plan Evaluability Assessment (2018); Evaluation of UN Women's Contribution to Gender-Responsive Budgeting in Europe and Central Asia (2017); Evaluation of UN Women's Contribution to United Nations System Coordination on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in Europe and Central Asia (2016); Corporate Evaluation of the Regional Architecture of UN Women (2016).

The evaluation was guided by the principles of gender-responsive evaluations and used a utilization-focused lens to generate forward-looking and actionable recommendations to ensure the information needs of the Country Office and stakeholders were met. A mixed-methods approach utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data was used

to triangulate and verify data, increasing the internal reliability and consistence of findings.

The inception phase included an evaluability assessment and a stakeholder mapping exercise. The results of these exercises were used to design evaluation questions and support analysis.

2.4. Evaluation limitations and risk-mitigation strategies

Planning for the evaluation was significantly delayed by the advent of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The evaluation team, in consultation with the Country Office, adapted the plan and approach to ensure that the evaluation remained comprehensive, gender-sensitive and methodologically rigorous, while taking into account the changed global realities, including limitations on travel and in-person data collection. An important limitation of the evaluation was also the reduced number of relevant stakeholders that responded to the request to participate in this evaluation. It is important to note that interviews

with key national Government counterparts did not take place in the context of this evaluation process, despite several attempts by the Country Office and the evaluation team to arrange meetings with them. Another important limitation is the lack of a theory of change and updated planning frameworks.

Similar constraints relating to a lack of counterfactual analysis and measurement, and sampling limitations were identified and mitigated where possible.

2.5. Data collection and analysis

Using a mixed-methods approach, data was collected through a review of more than 180 documents; interviews with 25 key informants (19 women and 6 men); past corporate-, regional- and country-level evaluations; one online survey with UNCT partners; and one case study on UN Women's engagement modality with the Government of Kazakhstan³² (see Annex 1). The sample size was 52 United Nations personnel; however, responses were received only from 19 United Nations colleagues (18 women and 1 man). The ethical approach was aligned to the United Nations Evaluation Group Ethical Guidance as set out in the Inception Report.

Multiple methods of data collection and analysis were carried out using both primary and secondary data to triangulate evidence, including desk review, quantitative and qualitative analysis (contribution analysis, change analysis, responsibility mapping/system analysis) and cross-referencing to past evaluations. A survey was administered to all UNCT members and all members of the inter-agency thematic groups in which UN Women participates. The evidence in response to the evaluation questions is summarized in the Evidence Table in Annex 5.

2.6. Evaluation governance and quality assurance

The evaluation team comprised the UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Evaluation Specialist, who is a member of the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS) and acted as the team lead for the Country Portfolio Evaluation, an International Independent Evaluator and a National Independent Evaluator.

The Evaluation Management Group was comprised of the Country Office Programme Officer (who at the time of this evaluation was acting as Officer in Charge), the Country Office Operations Manager and the UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Evaluation Specialist. The Evaluation Management Group was responsible for

administrative and logistical support, contract management and accountability.

The Country Office established an Evaluation Reference Group, which validated the evaluation report and is expected to facilitate evaluation use. The group comprised Government partners, civil society representatives, development partners and donors, and members of United Nations sister agencies in Kazakhstan. In addition, all deliverables were shared with the Country Office team for internal feedback. IEAS provided quality assurance support to the process. The IEAS Director and IES Chief provided oversight and methodological guidance.

³² Deep-dive case study focusing on the CO's engagement modality with the Government of Kazakhstan.

CPE METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

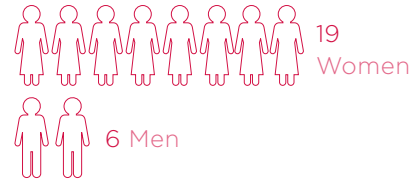
Kazakhstan CPE

The Kazakhstan CPE is a systematic assessment of the contributions made by UN Women to development results with respect to gender equality at the country level to contribute to the CO's strategic learning, improved decision-making and to support enhanced accountability.

Evaluation Process

- 1 Design
- 2 Inception: portfolio analysis
- 3 Data collection
- 4 Data analysis and reporting
- 5 Follow up and use

25 Stakeholders interviewed



Preliminary findings validation and final validation workshops



180 documents reviewed

Annual work plans, evaluations, project documents reports, financial documentation, meeting minutes, key national strategic documents, knowledge products etc.



1 Online Survey

Online survey to UN partners
36% response rate



1 Case study

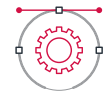
UN Women Kazakhstan CO's Engagement Modality with the Government of Kazakhstan

Methodology



- Gender-responsive evaluation
- Used Mixed-methods to triangulate evidence

- Theory-based and contribution analysis
- Outcomes mapping and utilization-focused



Scope of the evaluation



UN Women Kazakhstan CO Development Results Framework



3 key result areas
Leadership and Governance, EVAW and Women's Economic Empowerment



Organizations Efficiency and **Effectiveness and Efficiency** Framework



SN 2016-2020
Evaluation was conducted between April and December 2020



US\$ 8M budget
including Core and Non-core resources



Photo ©UN Women

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Relevance

FINDING 1:

The Kazakhstan Country Office portfolio of activities was largely consistent with the two impact areas prioritized for 2016–2017 and the three impact areas prioritized for 2018–2020 as reflected in its AWP. However, since 2018, there has been a mismatch between the impact areas identified in the Strategic Note 2016–2020 and the actual impact areas prioritized by the Country Office. The theory of change that constituted the foundation of the Strategic Note 2016–2020 and the measures of progress towards expected outcomes had limited relevance and therefore were not largely adhered to by the Country Office”.

As indicated above, in 2018, the Multi-Country Office was reorganized and became a Country Office, which relocated from Almaty to Astana in the same year. This transformation was expected to be reflected in the Strategic Note 2016–2020. Instead, the mid-term review of the Strategic Note 2016–2020 did not result in any revision, and the document remained untouched despite it being

the main strategic document to guide Country Office performance after 2018. In practice, however, the impact areas prioritized under the Strategic Note 2016–2020 changed to reflect the new corporate priorities defined in the UN Women Global Strategic Plan 2018–2021 as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Change in the thematic priorities of the Country Office over the period 2016–2020 based on its AWPs 2016–2020:

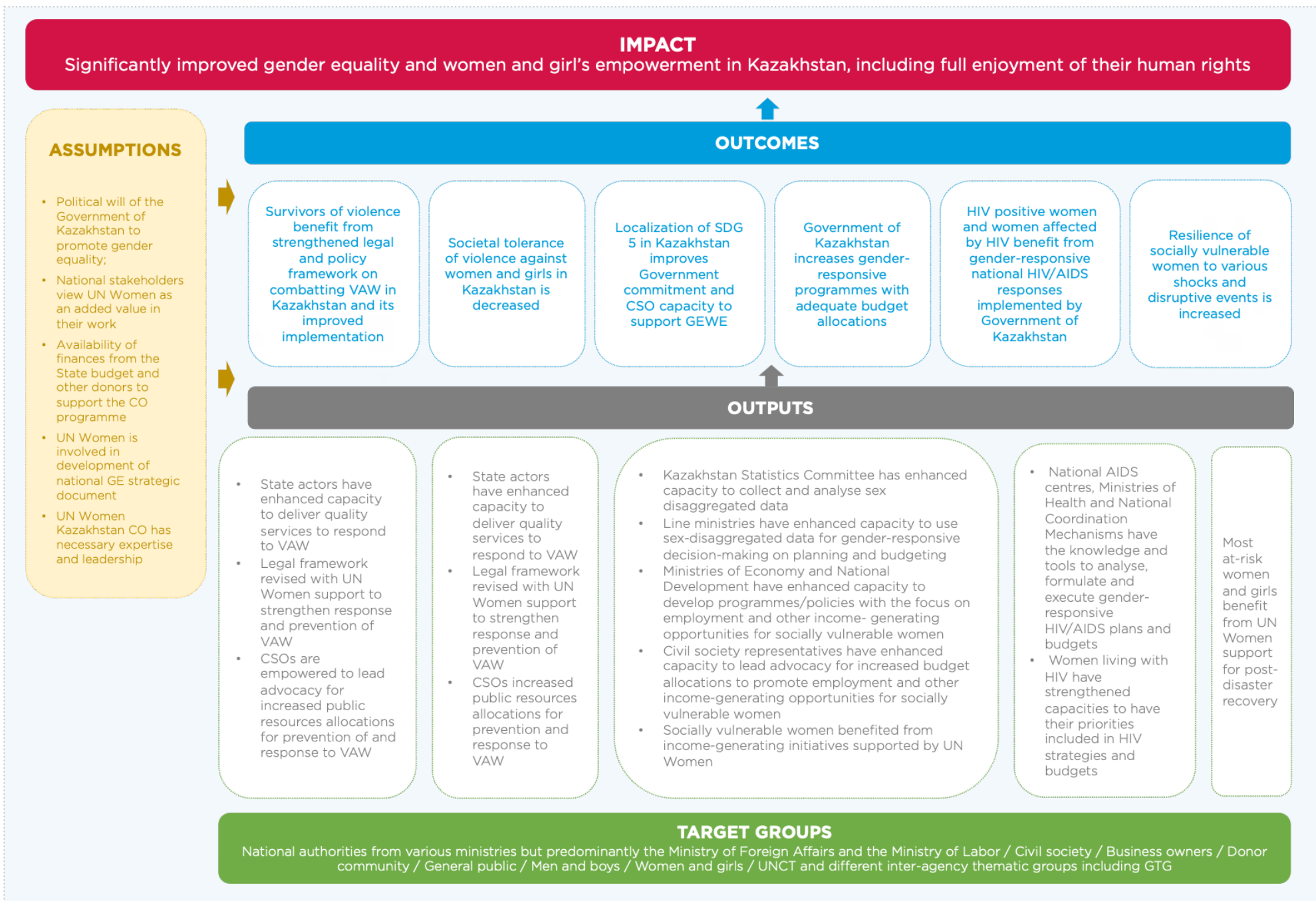
PERIOD 2016–2017	PERIOD 2018–2020
<p>Thematic Area 3: Women and girls live a life free from violence</p> <p>Thematic Area 5: Governance and national planning fully reflect accountability for gender equality commitments and priorities</p>	<p>Thematic Area 3: All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence</p> <p>Thematic Area 1: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from the governance system</p> <p>Thematic Area 2: Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy</p>

The exact wording and numbering of the thematic areas were changed in the latest UN Women Corporate Strategic Plan 2018–2021 and therefore in the AWPs of the Country Office. This has partially compensated for the shortcomings due to the absence of a meaningful Strategic Note for the UN Women Country Office in Kazakhstan. However, the fact that the changes were not reflected in the Strategic Note 2016–2020 suggests that the Country Office did not use the Strategic Note as a guiding document and that evidently it did not adhere to the document. The current Country Office team inherited a strategic document that is largely mismatched and does not meet the strategic needs of the Country Office. This major gap was not addressed after the office’s transition to a Country Office in 2018.

As for the portfolio of activities, the impact areas mentioned for the period 2016–2020 in the AWPs were relevant to the high-level priorities of gender equality, the empowerment of women and human rights. The seven projects implemented by the Country Office during the evaluation period (as presented in Table 3 below) were largely consistent with all impact areas mentioned above. However, when exploring the Country Office’s initial theory of change, the outputs and outcomes contained therein raise questions about their relevance and feasibility to the Multi-Country Office during 2016–2018 and the

Country Office during 2018–2020, i.e. the indicators do not stand up to scrutiny. For instance, outcome indicator 3.2.1, “% of people who think it is never justifiable for a man to beat his wife”, has a proposed target of 70 per cent, with a baseline to be established in 2016. It would be difficult for the Country Office to report on this indicator because (a) no baseline was established, (b) it is not clear if the 70 per cent relates to the total or adult population, (c) whatever assumption could be made about the 70 per cent (of the total or adult population), in order to conclude about any increase there would be a need for a country-wide assessment which requires targeted resources and efforts not allocated for this purpose within the country portfolio. As a result, the Country Office has never reported on this outcome indicator. Another example is output indicator 3.1.1.1, which states “number of State coordination mechanisms among service providers developed/supported”. The Country Office reported on the “significant progress” made on this quantitative indicator each year without specifying its “significance”. This is to illustrate that performance and reporting were not linked to the theory of change. As indicated in the methodology section, this evaluation used a reconstructed theory of change to guide its assessment of the Country Office’s implementation of UN Women’s threefold mandate in Kazakhstan during 2016–2020.

Figure 4. Reconstructed theory of change developed by the evaluation team.



FINDING 2:

The Kazakhstan Country Office portfolio of activities remains largely relevant to national and international priorities on ending violence against women, women's economic empowerment and Governance and Leadership. However, some of its interventions had a shortened lifespan, with little room to observe expected high-level outcomes due to (a) dependency on State funding, (b) the way in which gender equality is conceptualized in the national strategy on the family and (c) limited capacities of the State authorities, .

The portfolio of activities of the Country Office remains largely aligned to national priorities, including ending violence against women, women's economic empowerment and governance and leadership. The national priorities on gender issues are fixed in the Concept of Family and Gender Policy 2016–2030. The concept consists of two separate elements of family and gender equality issues, whereby the national gender policy prioritizes family issues and the revival of traditionalism as part of moral and ethical education. For example, the review of the annual plan of activities revealed that of 52 activities in the first action plan of the policy for 2017–2019, 22 were related to gender equality issues, including gender-responsive budgeting; introducing gender-related indicators in strategic planning; addressing violence against women and domestic violence; prevention of early marriages; women, peace and security; and improvement of gender statistics. Although there was an alignment to national priorities in certain broad areas, the approach to ending violence against women was different. For example, in the Ending Violence against Women thematic area, the Government prioritized improving services to address violence against women, with less attention to the normative side, i.e. criminalization and legislation on domestic violence. On the contrary, the Government moved cases of domestic violence from the Criminal to Administrative Code.

The portfolio of programming is in line with the key issues mentioned in the CEDAW concluding observations (2019), including the empowerment of rural women,

ending violence against women (criminalization of violence against women, improvement of statistics) and enhanced cooperation with women's CSOs.

The Kazakhstan 2016–2030 National Gender Strategy combines two focus areas, family and gender policies, which are contradictory in certain parts of the document, as also stated in the CEDAW concluding observations.³³ For example, one of the key messages of the family policy is the revival of traditional Kazakh family values, which are characterized by strong patriarchal norms. Meanwhile, the gender policy prioritizes women's empowerment and the eradication of stereotypes. The combination of both messages might lead to different societal interpretations of the strategic vision of the gender policy. In addition, the plan stipulates the allocation of funds to implement mostly family-related activities. This situation puts the national gender policy at risk, i.e. the gender equality and empowerment of women agenda may be compromised in favour of family and demographic priorities. The CEDAW Committee argued that “substitution of the State party's gender equality strategy for the period 2006–2016 with the concept for family and gender policy for the period up to 2030 [...] by combining gender equality and family issues, reinforces traditional stereotypes about women's roles and responsibilities in the family.”³⁴ The strategy had led to debates and opposition in society.

³³ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women 2019, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Kazakhstan, p.5, available at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolNo=CEDAW%2fC%2fKAZ%2fCO%2f5&Lang=en.

³⁴ Ibid.

FINDING 3:

The Kazakhstan Country Office portfolio of activities remains largely relevant to implementation of UN Women’s integrated triple mandate: normative, coordination and operational work. However, the Country Office has demonstrated more progress in its normative and regulatory work and less so on coordination and operational programming aspects.

Normative dimension

During 2016–2020, the Country Office portfolio of activities remained largely relevant to the implementation of UN Women’s triple mandate. The portfolio has a strong focus on normative work through (a) direct support to normative activities such as the fifth periodic review of CEDAW, the comprehensive review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action implementation progress for 2015–2019 and the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council 2015–2019, and gender equality and empowerment of women mainstreaming in the SDGs and (b) support to the normative and regulatory frameworks in the country while implementing its programming scope, for instance, through introducing necessary legal clauses to ensure gender-responsive budgeting in Kazakhstan. The Country Office has made progress towards achievements of its objectives on the provision of direct support to normative activities.

The Country Office produced (a) a number of studies (e.g. on economic costs and damage resulting from domestic

violence, an analysis of national and international legislation, organizational and practical activities of existing social protection services and best international practices in prevention of social deprivation and domestic violence) and (b) data-driven policy papers (e.g. draft concept law on prevention and response to domestic violence, recommendations to improve the State planning mechanisms in preventing and combating domestic violence, review of existing international and national practices to introduce psychosocial work with aggressors, etc.) for the State stakeholders responsible for addressing violence against women, i.e. the Prosecutor’s Office and law enforcement bodies, etc.

A great deal of effort was made towards improving the legal and regulatory frameworks in the country through various recommendations. However, none have been adopted so far. Table 2 below presents some of the recommendations developed and proposed by the Country Office in the context of different programmes. Annex 13 provides detailed information on the recommendations.

Table 2: Examples of normative recommendations proposed by the Country Office (compiled by the evaluation team)

THEMATIC AREA	PROPOSED RECOMMENDATION BY UN WOMEN KAZAKHSTAN COUNTRY OFFICE
Sexual harassment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To include a definition of sexual harassment in the national legislation in line with CEDAW recommendations and Kazakhstan obligations within the Convention of the International Organization of Migration.
Domestic violence criminalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To criminalize the articles related to domestic violence (light injury to health and beating); to provide for the mandatory conduct of pre-trial proceedings by the body of inquiry; to include the definition of stalking with interpretations. To consider inclusion of the possibility of forced resettlement for a certain period of time of a person acting as an aggressor in the sphere of family and household relations. To consider the possibility of acceding to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.
Prevention of domestic violence (work with aggressors)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To review the approaches to working with offenders/perpetrators of drug abuse (both the capacity in the country among the relevant institutions and the available financial resources, as well as the need to amend the current legislation/amendments to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of this work).
Social entrepreneurship law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommendations to the regulatory legal acts (2019–2020 UN Women study on gender aspects in entrepreneurship). To create a pool of women investors who are considering the potential of women entrepreneurship ideas. To develop social communications between women, connections for discussion of new projects, ideas, approaches, mutual advertising and support. To develop a law on social entrepreneurship.

Operational programmatic dimension

During 2016–2020, the Country Office programmatic work was limited to seven projects as listed in Table 3, which had some distinctive features:

- (a) Initially, the portfolio had a regional dimension when the office was functioning as a Multi-Country Office. Even after shifting to a Country Office presence, the office has maintained some regional work, e.g. the project Assistance for Nationalization of Gender-Related Sustainable Development Goals in Countries of Central Asia 2017–2019, funded by the Kazakhstan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 2019, the Country Office was granted another regional project, the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme for Central Asia and Afghanistan 2020–2022.
- (b) A large share of projects are funded by the Government of Kazakhstan either through funding individual projects (such as Phase I and Phase II of the Assistance to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals and Enforce Commitments on Gender Equality Promotion in Kazakhstan project) or through annual voluntary contributions, whereby the annually allocated funds (around US\$150,000 annually) are channelled to addressing any of the pressing gender equality and women's empowerment-related issues in the country along with covering some structural and operational costs. The annual voluntary contribution is a secured funding source for UN Women. However, it is very uncertain in terms of its volume, thematic priority and scope of activities. **This modality has led to a pattern of sporadic initiatives in the Country Office portfolio in Kazakhstan.**

Table 3: Operational programmatic interventions in the Country Office portfolio

(compiled by the evaluation team with information from UN Women Executive Dashboard and provided by the Country Office)

PROJECT	DURATION	BUDGET	DONOR
Umbrella Programme 2019–2021: Comprehensive Programme in the Field of Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, Women's Economic Empowerment and Ending Violence against Women in Kazakhstan	2019–2021	US\$1.8 million	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection
Annual Voluntary Contribution to the United Nations from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for non-core funding <u>earmarked</u> for preparation of the Beijing+25 review meetings, the Partnership Development Framework, preparations for the 74th session of CEDAW, SDG advocacy, gender equality in private sector	2019	US\$150,000	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan
Annual voluntary contribution to the United Nations from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for non-core funding <u>earmarked</u> to support socially vulnerable women impacted by COVID-19, advocacy work and support to the Civil Society Forum to the Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting and Generation Equality	2020–2021	US\$100,000	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan
Annual voluntary contribution <u>earmarked</u> for Assistance for Nationalization of Gender-Related Sustainable Development Goals in Countries of Central Asia	2017–2018	US\$335,000	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan
Assistance to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals and Enforce Commitments on Gender Equality Promotion in Kazakhstan, Phase 1	2017–2018	US\$433,000	Ministry of National Economy of Kazakhstan
Assistance to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals and Enforce Commitments on Gender Equality Promotion in Kazakhstan, Phase II	2020–2021	US\$159,145	Ministry of National Economy of Kazakhstan
Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme for Central Asia and Afghanistan	2020–2022	UN Women's share: US\$2,541,617 Total programme: US\$4,248,584	EU
Supporting the Economic Empowerment of Afghan Women through Education and Training in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan	2019–2025	Total budget: US\$2,238,400 UN Women share: US\$102,284	EU

Coordination dimension

The UN Women coordination mandate on gender equality and the empowerment of women in the United Nations system entails working to promote the accountability of the United Nations system on gender equality and the empowerment of women, including regular monitoring of system-wide progress. In addition to its coordination mandate, UN Women works on mobilizing and convening key stakeholders to ensure greater coherence and gender mainstreaming across the United Nations.

The United Nations coordination efforts of the Country Office in Kazakhstan are largely limited to some modest attempts to coordinate gender equality and empowerment of women mainstreaming through working with the UNCT (to ensure the Country Office's strategic input in mainstreaming gender equality and the empowerment of women in UNCT activities), chairing the Gender Thematic Group (to ensure operational and technical coordination of gender equality and empowerment of women efforts within the UNCT) and the implementation of joint programmes.

3.2 Coherence

FINDING 4:

The Kazakhstan Country Office demonstrated some degree of coherence and a targeted approach to partnering with the country's gender mechanism as a coordinating agency on the gender equality and empowerment of women agenda in Kazakhstan. However, the Country Office would benefit from more strategic engagement with CSOs and a strengthened role as a coordinator of gender equality and the empowerment of women among United Nations agencies in the country.

During 2016–2020, the Country Office maintained its partnership with the national women's machinery (the National Commission on Women and Family Demographic Affairs under the President, which is the coordinating agency on gender equality in the country). The partnership is based on a long history of successful cooperation (since the early 2000s). However, since 2015 the context has changed. The State changed its focus towards prioritization of family policy over gender equality, proposing a new consideration of gender equality issues through the perspective of the family and reproductive health. In such conditions, UN Women found itself in a weaker position to foster the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda. Dependency of United Nations agencies on State funding and the focus on family issues has put the Country Office in a difficult position, limiting its influence in the national gender agenda in terms of the prioritization and perspective of gender equality and empowerment of women issues that are different from the official governmental approach. Currently, the Country Office is performing the role of implementing partner for the Government rather than influential actor promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women in the country.

The Country Office's partnership with CSOs and the feminist movement in Kazakhstan was not strong and consistent, which can be explained by several contributing factors. Civil society in Kazakhstan has a limited role and

influence on policy- and decision-making processes, and women's organizations reflect this tendency. There is competition among women's organizations for funding from international donors, and quite often this rivalry impacts cooperation. However, young feminist activists and organizations have recently started to mobilize and coordinate their efforts, but quite often face challenges in building partnerships and uniting with "old school" women's organizations.

In this context, CSOs have high expectations of obtaining support from international organizations to bring their voices to the decision-making level. However, given the specificity of its functions the Country Office has largely not met this demand. Nevertheless, the Country Office attempted to gather women CSOs in a Civil Society Advisory Group (CSAG), but with limited success: support was provided in the form of logistical support to gender activists participating in global forums, such as the Civil Society Forum to the Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting (October 2019) and the Beijing+25 Asia Pacific Regional Review Meeting (November 2019). During the 16 Days campaign in 2020, and within the framework of the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme for Central Asia and Afghanistan, the Country Office joined CSO and gender activists in transmitting stronger messages to enhance its advocacy on gender equality and the empowerment of women in the country and region.

FINDING 5:

The organizational coherence of the Kazakhstan Country Office has shifted focus in terms of office coverage and has limited strategic direction. Extending the programme portfolio beyond the Country Office – the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme for Central Asia and Afghanistan, the nationalization of SDGs in Central Asian countries – emphasizes the importance of ensuring that the Country Office has effective convening power, institutional capacities and governance mechanisms.

As previously noted, the Country Office shifted its geographical scope from subregional coverage in Central Asian countries to country coverage. This shift in geographical coverage suggests that it has been responsible for implementation of UN Women's triple mandate only in the territory of Kazakhstan since 2018. However, the programmatic portfolio maintained regional programmes, such as Assistance for Nationalization of Gender-Related Sustainable Development Goals in Countries of Central Asia 2017–2019, which was not transferred to the UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECARO) when the Multi-Country Office transitioned to a Country Office presence. The rationale for maintaining this regional programme in the Country Office portfolio is unclear. Moreover, in 2019, driven by and under the direct leadership of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Kazakhstan, the Country Office was granted a large regional programme, the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme for Central Asia and Afghanistan 2020–2022, funded by the European Union. The programme is implemented by UN Women, UNFPA and UNDP with a total budget of US\$4.4 million, with US\$2.5 million allocated to UN Women's budget.

Such a change of strategic priorities raises several questions relating to:

- The Country Office's convening power – what are the Country Office's geographical coverage and leadership among peers under this programme?
- The Country Office's institutional capacities – does the Country Office have the necessary personnel and capacity to manage programme implementation, including its financial management?
- Programme governance mechanisms – how should the Country Office build its management and communication lines with other UN Women offices and partners in other countries covered by the programme?

This fluctuation in the strategic aspirations of the Country Office indicates shifting strategic leadership in the context of a presence that is limitedly equipped to initiate a programme beyond its geographical coverage and gives a confusing message to its peers from other UN Women offices in the region, as well as external partners from United Nations agencies and beyond.

The programmatic portfolio of the Country Office indicates confusion about whether to maintain a regional dimension in its portfolio. In 2018, the shift was made from Multi-Country Office to Country Office, and in 2020 there appears to be a programmatic shift back, i.e. a shift from Multi-Country Office to Country Office coverage in 2018 while keeping projects with regional components, which in many instances can be explained by a donor preference to fund a regional initiative. However, this fluctuation of geographical focus is also confusing for external partners, as the findings from interviews suggest. Clearly, **UN Women needs to take an urgent strategic decision on the strategic focus of the Kazakhstan Country Office that is pragmatically aligned to its institutional capacities, human resources and geographical coverage.**

The Government of Kazakhstan has expressed interest in setting up a regional knowledge hub under the umbrella of UN Women and UNFPA in the country. Through encouraging regional programmes, UN Women could further encourage such interest. However, without addressing the issues related to the structure and geographical coverage of the Country Office in Kazakhstan, this ambition might remain unfulfilled. There also seems to be a particular donor preference to prioritize supporting and funding multi-country/regional initiatives in the Central Asia region, and UN Women needs to address this demand, which since the transition from Multi-Country Office to Country Office has increased the managerial complexity of the Country Office's programmatic portfolio.

FINDING 6:

While the Country Office in Kazakhstan has a unique mandate with regard to coordination of gender equality and the empowerment of women across the United Nations system, its convening power as a coordinating agency in Kazakhstan is limited. This is explained not only by the capacities of the Country Office, but also by the capacities, approach and perception of other United Nations agencies based in the country.

The Country Office has a mandate to coordinate the gender equality and empowerment of women efforts of the UNCT in Kazakhstan, which incorporate at least three avenues: strategic leadership and support to the UNCT, work through the Gender Thematic Group and joint programming. Over the years, several respondents from the UNCT have mentioned that the Country Office provides strong support to United Nations partners, including in the review of the Common Country Analysis, United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) implementation and implementation of projects or programmes of different United Nations partners. The engagement of the Country Office in joint programmes is limited and rather nominal. For instance, in the Afghan women project, the Country Office performs the role of an intermediary, receiving funds from UNDP for a summer school and outsourcing the work to a third party.

There are more opportunities for the Country Office to influence and coordinate UNCT programming through the Gender Thematic Group, an institutionalized platform for all United Nations partners to share information and engage, align and foster gender equality and women's empowerment mainstreaming and priorities in the different United Nations entities and in the UNCT. The Gender Thematic Group has annual workplans and meets every quarter to discuss progress towards the implementation of its annual workplan. Since 2016, it has regularly issued a gender newsletter to provide information on major initiatives in the gender equality area. The composition of the Gender Thematic Group varies in terms of number (from 26 members in 2017 to 10 members in 2020), but also in its level of representation, ranging from the Head of UNFPA in Kazakhstan to project officers from various United Nations agencies.

The interviews conducted in the context of this evaluation revealed diverse perceptions of the importance and added value of the Gender Thematic Group among its members

but also a shared understanding that the Gender Thematic Group is not utilized to its maximum capacity to actually coordinate the UNCT's gender equality and empowerment of women efforts. There is recognition of the importance of high-level buy-in for the Gender Thematic Group from the UNCT executive team. This would ensure strategic alignment among United Nations agencies towards gender equality and the empowerment of women, which is not possible to achieve solely at the technical or operational level, as is the current representation of the Gender Thematic Group. In this context, the great efforts made by the Country Office in the Gender Thematic Group will not lead to the expected outcomes.

For the first time in 2017, the UNCT reported on the updated UNCT System-wide Action Plan for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (SWAP) Gender Equality Scorecard, an accountability framework that promotes improved UNCT planning, coordination, programming and results for gender equality and the empowerment of women at the country level. It showed that the United Nations team in Kazakhstan exceeds only in its partnership work and partially in leadership areas, which means (a) the UNCT established good relationships with the national women's machinery and CSOs and (b) positions in United Nations agencies are evenly distributed between women and men (in some cases women outnumbered men). Performance in other areas such as planning, programming and monitoring and evaluation, gender architecture and capacities, financial resources, and results is below the UNCT SWAP standard. The performance report recommended that a further report on the implementation of the UNCT SWAP indicators be carried out by January 2020 to compare with the 2017 baseline and to track progress. The reports mainly focus on the description of the figures rather than analysis. In 2019, the UNCT conducted a self-assessment against a reduced number of indicators, and not all agencies participated in the assessment.

FINDING 7:

UN Women has fostered limited strategic engagement with CSOs in Kazakhstan. The CSOs demonstrated strong interest in cooperating with UN Women in Kazakhstan, and the few engagement avenues provided for such a cooperation resulted in heightened expectations to cooperate, which is impacting the role and position of UN Women.

The few CSOs in Kazakhstan that are focused on gender equality and the empowerment of women are small and lack a strong CSO coalition. Analysis of the Country Office portfolio of operations revealed that the UN Women Kazakhstan Country Office had not built strong relationships with or engaged in systemic interactions with CSOs. Interactions with CSOs were short-term and lacked strategic focus.

The interviews revealed rather superficial one-off interactions with CSOs and private sector organizations in most cases. For instance, organizations might be invited to participate in a workshop or a meeting only once or just a few times, but without a clear picture of the purpose and direction of such events for follow-up. However, as the interviews revealed, even these one-off interactions have created heightened expectations for cooperation on behalf of CSOs and private sector organizations. **This indicates a strong potential for the Country Office to explore opportunities for more strategic engagement with CSOs and private sector organizations.** Contacts with a few private sector organizations took place but the organizations could not explain why they were invited and invited to participate in one workshop related to entrepreneurship. Contacts with CSOs took place more often but had no systematic course of action.

In 2018, the Country Office established a CSAG to support its efforts in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and bringing these issues to the attention of the Government. The CSAG is comprised of women

CSOs and gender activists. The evaluation team contacted several members of the renewed CSAG; none of those contacted could clearly indicate the purpose of the CSAG or their role in the group. Instead, they asked for more clarifications and directions from the evaluators. The interviewees stated that they had only met once since the establishment of the group and indicated that a non-active WhatsApp group had been established. This indicates a lack of communication and follow-up with the CSAG by the Country Office. Engagement with CSOs is one of the undecided strategic priorities for the Country Office. It is a corporate priority to work with CSOs, and there is recognition of the importance of this work; however, the Country Office is fully dependent on State funding, and State priorities do not include active engagement with CSOs. Therefore, the Country Office is left short of resources (financial and human) to follow up with CSOs at a strategic level.

It is important to note that the CSAG is a corporate mechanism established by UN Women in 2012 to formalize dialogue between UN Women and leaders from the gender equality movement on key gender equality issues and priorities at the national, regional and global levels. CSAG is meant to have a double and complementary role, as an adviser to UN Women and as an advocate for the realization of the gender equality agenda. One key major limitation in appointing CSAG members is that they should not receive any funding from UN Women.

3.3 Effectiveness

FINDING 8:

The shifting priorities of national Government counterparts and lack of a strong voice from the Country Office in its partnership with State authorities resulted in sporadic focus across several interventions and limited systematic efforts in the chosen priorities of the Country Office.

Being largely dependent on State funding, the Country Office is inevitably impacted by the shifting priorities of the national Government. First, the **engagement modality** with the State authorities (see Annex 1, UN Women Kazakhstan Country Office Engagement Modality with the

Government of Kazakhstan) creates an additional layer of uncertainty for UN Women, whereby the volume of funds per year, the timing of disbursement and the thematic focus of the funding are defined by the State authorities.

Second, the **funding modality** for specific programmes, the design of which is very large horizontally, requires that a wide range of thematic issues are covered, and stakeholders have a limited depth of engagement beyond one-off events or activities. For instance, the Umbrella Programme 2019–2021 funded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection not only covers a wide range of thematic areas around gender equality and the empowerment of women, Women’s Economic Empowerment and Ending Violence Against Women, but also shifts its thematic priorities each year. **This raises questions about project design, its sustainability and the potential transformative change expected to be triggered by the investment.**

One exception to this pattern of sporadic investment is Phase I of the project Assistance to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals and Enforce Commitments on Gender Equality Promotion in Kazakhstan, funded by the Ministry of Economy. Interviews in the context of this evaluation

revealed that the project was highly regarded by the ministry. Funding for the project was acquired largely as a result of successful networking by the Country Office, as the project was not a specific request from the Ministry of Economy. However, after initiation of the project and due to the quality efforts invested by the Country Office, there was a growing appreciation of gender-responsive budgeting as well as the efforts of the Country Office. The success of project implementation during Phase 1 of the project has led to funding being secured for Phase 2.

This example illustrates that when there is the right modality for meaningful engagement, the Country Office can deliver the expected results. If the approach is different, in this case, only driven by the State authorities, the investments remain shallow.

FINDING 9:

During 2016–2020, the Country Office made good efforts in its work on ending violence against women, with clear focus on improving the normative framework in Kazakhstan. However, this has not been translated into actual enhancement of normative frameworks.

The Country Office has put in a great deal of effort in the thematic area of Ending Violence Against Women at the normative and institutional levels within the programmes funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (under the voluntary contribution modality) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (Umbrella Programme), producing a number of studies and data-driven policy papers, as described in Finding 3 above.

Thus far, **none of the normative recommendations made by the Country Office have been adopted by the Government, which suggests that the Country Office should continue its advocacy efforts in this area.** In many cases, the development of the normative recommendations was preceded by expert work and submitted to parliamentarians and advocacy groups. It is assumed that work at the parliamentary level has been disrupted due to the COVID-19 crisis and the prioritization of other issues. In addition, regular parliamentary elections will be held in January 2021, which might hamper work on normative changes on domestic violence and violence against women.

The Country Office invested in analysis of service providers’ capacities to respond comprehensively and in a more coordinated manner to cases of violence against women, including support to survivors and work with aggressors. The Country Office also reported on the enhanced capacity of the State institutions involved in the referral mechanism to address violence against women. This was achieved through the provision of training to law enforcement authorities, specifically the unit that investigates cases of violence against women, as well as social workers and non-governmental organizations; development of a training kit on the functioning of referral mechanisms; the establishment of a comprehensive system of measures to work with victims of violence and perpetrators, providing recommendations for addressing domestic violence at the normative level. It is difficult, however, to evaluate whether all of these achievements are sustainable and integrated in the daily practices of stakeholders as no assessment, review or evaluation has so far been conducted.

FINDING 10:**Positive results were achieved in the Leadership and Governance thematic portfolio through strengthening the institutional performance of State authorities with regard to gender-responsive budgeting.**

In the **Leadership and Governance thematic portfolio**, the Country Office achieved positive results in the area of **gender-responsive budgeting, which focused on strengthening the capacity of sectoral ministries** in developing strategic and budget policies through gender mainstreaming and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of planning and budgeting processes through the integration of social and economic needs and the priorities of women and men into normative and legal acts. **One of the major achievements in this area was the development of a gender-responsive budgeting plan in Kazakhstan for 2020–2025 by the Ministry of National Economy.** The plan

stipulates integration of gender principles in budgeting and strategic planning.³⁵

However, the high turnover of staff in the ministries and non-mandatory gender budgeting training courses for civil servants put these achievements at risk, as was the case with previous attempts to integrate gender-responsive budgeting principles in strategic planning in 2011–2014. Another serious obstacle could be the variability of civil servants' interpretation of gender-sensitive strategic and budgeting processes.

FINDING 11:**The investment of the Country Office in Women's Economic Empowerment was less systematic and demonstrated limited contribution towards progressing women's economic empowerment in Kazakhstan.**

The Country Office's work in the thematic area of Women's Economic Empowerment lacks a strategic approach and has been inconsistent in its activities. The Country Office produced a series of studies within the framework of the Umbrella Programme funded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, including studies of women's unpaid domestic work, causes and effects of women's economic inactivity and their involvement in the informal economy, gender aspects in entrepreneurship, identification of barriers at institutional and legislative levels for the development of women's entrepreneurship, and concrete policy instruments to promote the employment of rural women, including in entrepreneurship. **The evaluation did not find evidence of follow-up by the Country Office on the studies** with the relevant State authorities after a public discussion of the studies and the presentation of recommendations to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection.

The rationale of this diversity of interests, the Country Office's broad thematic range of engagement and the choice of topics in the Women's Economic Empowerment portfolio is unclear and lacks strategic focus. For example, given that the European Bank of Reconstruction and

Development (EBRD) is implementing a large-scale programme on women in business in Kazakhstan (from 2015, with a first credit line of more than US\$20 million, with a Government contribution of US\$8 million), it is presumed that the barriers and challenges of women entrepreneurs had been analysed previously.

Nevertheless, in some cases, the Country Office brought new focus on women's economic empowerment, for instance by exploring the role of rural women in Kazakhstan. The issue had previously been rather invisible and not a priority for stakeholders. UN Women conducted a study on the socioeconomic and structural barriers rural women faced in starting their own businesses, including the existing mechanisms to address these obstacles (review of the current country-wide initiative Women in Business).³⁶ The recommendations and the findings from the study were discussed with the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs (Atameken) and the national women's machinery. **Apart from this, only limited interventions were organized in the form of workshops, with no follow-up with relevant partners.**

³⁵ Plan on integration of gender principles in gender-responsive budgeting (План по интеграции гендерно-ориентированного формирования бюджета в существующую систему государственно-бюджетного планирования).

³⁶ The study on opportunities and barriers for economic and public participation of rural women in the Almaty region, 2018. Prepared by the foundation of local communities of Enbekshikazakh region, funded by the Country Office.

Unfortunately, despite several attempts by the evaluation team, no interviews with the representatives of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection were possible in the context of this evaluation, which limited the inclusion of this key national stakeholder in the analysis of this area

of work. This is one of the limitations faced by the evaluation team, as previously stated, given that the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection is one of the main strategic partners and donors to the Country Office.

3.4 Efficiency

FINDING 12:

The Kazakhstan Country Office's limited and stretched institutional capacities during the life cycle of its current Strategic Note 2016–2020 prevented balanced attention to the implementation of UN Women's integrated triple mandate.

The institutional capacities of the Country Office have been extremely stretched since 2018³⁷, when the shift from Multi-Country Office to Country Office took place. As a consequence of this transition to covering only Kazakhstan, the number of personnel was significantly reduced to only three personnel with programmatic responsibilities, while the remaining personnel covered operational and administrative functions. In addition, the position of Country Office Representative was vacant from November 2019 to November 2020. The lack of institutional capacities lies not only in the limited number of personnel but also in the degree of technical expertise in key thematic

areas available in the Country Office and expected from UN Women by its national and United Nations partners.

In the evaluation team's view, during the period covered by this evaluation the Country Office was not capacitated and resourced to be perceived as a thought leader on gender equality. Some representatives of United Nations agencies interviewed in the context of this evaluation explicitly suggested that they would primarily contact their internal corporate gender advisers rather than reaching out to UN Women for advice or support.

FINDING 13:

The Country Office portfolio indicates some constraints related to the prevailing funding modality. Implementation of this modality demonstrates important efficiency challenges and constraints.

The prevailing funding modality of the Country Office is State funding (see Annex 1, Case Study: UN Women Kazakhstan Country Office's Engagement Modality with the Government of Kazakhstan). This has its own implications, as quite often the actual disbursement of funds does not match the agreed road map. For example, the funding

for annual voluntary contributions is expected to be disbursed at the beginning of each year. However, in most cases, the Country Office receives the funding in July or even August, with the expectation to fully deliver by the end of the year. This inevitably puts pressure on the programme and financial management of the office.

³⁷ During the conduct of this Country Portfolio Evaluation a very significant number of vacancies, including the Country Representative and the entire management structure for the Spotlight Regional Programme for Central Asia and Afghanistan, were recruited and, hence, the organigram presented in this report reflects the current Kazakhstan Country Office composition.

The analysis of the portfolio of interventions and specifically those initiatives funded by the Government of Kazakhstan suggests that the Country Office faced several systemic risks during 2016–2020:

- **Delay in disbursement of funds.** This is a symptomatic problem for all types of engagement with the Government. For instance, for the annual voluntary contributions, the funding could be disbursed around June–August, while the Country Office would still need to ensure the realization of the full scope of what is promised under that funding. Given the Country Office’s high delivery rate, it should be mentioned that great efforts were made to mitigate this situation and to “catch up” with outstanding tasks under each annual voluntary contribution.
- **Delay in decisions.** In some cases, when the Country Office requires approval from the respective Government agency, it can take much longer than justified for smooth implementation of the agreed activities. Multiple evidence showed that the Country Office made great efforts to follow up. However, the State machinery has its own pattern of response, which is not always conducive to effective realization of time-bound interventions.
- **Limited funding and ambitious scope.** This is particularly valid for the annual voluntary contributions. While the impression is that the Government supports the Country Office with a wide range of initiatives, the sustainability of these initiatives and expected transformational impact on overall gender inequality in Kazakhstan is minimal. This is explained by the mismatch of funding and the scale of the problem to be addressed. This presents a risk to the reputation of UN Women in the country, as stakeholder expectations remain much higher than is actually realistic.
- **Lack of high-level strategic dialogue between the Country Office and the Government.** In the absence of a Country Office Representative, there was limited strategic engagement and dialogue between the Country Office and the Government of Kazakhstan.

Despite the challenges, the overall delivery rate remained high throughout the whole period covered by the evaluation (2016–2020), with the only exception being 2020, when delivery significantly dropped, as indicated by the data above (see Figure 1 on annual budgets and delivery rates and Figure 2 on the main sources of donor funding).

FINDING 14:

High dependency on State funding of the whole UNCT creates internal competition among United Nations agencies in Kazakhstan, in which large offices have a stronger comparative advantage for resource mobilization. The Country Office would benefit from more strategic resource mobilization through diversification of its donor base and investment in strategic partnerships with United Nations agencies and relevant ministries.

All United Nations agencies in Kazakhstan are recipients of State funding from the national Government (as confirmed by the UNDAF evaluation of 2019). This leads to very high competition among United Nations agencies for State funding, whereby strong relationships with national authorities and a strong corporate presence in the country and demonstrated support from headquarters and/or regional offices plays a critical role. In this context, the successful networking of the Country Office leadership at the beginning of implementation of the current Strategic Note allowed mobilization of funds for Phase I of the gender-responsive budgeting project, the successful

implementation of which has led to funding for Phase II of the project. Country Office management is making great efforts to establish stronger relationships with national authorities and specifically with the national women’s machinery and other United Nations agencies. However, this can only be managed to a limited extent due to multiple limitations it faces.

Apart from institutional restrictions, it is clear that the key limitation for the Country Office remaining dependent on State funding is the lack of a strategic approach towards resource mobilization.

It has not invested in designing proposals, diversifying its donor base or searching for partnerships to strengthen its value proposition. The existing joint initiatives with other United Nations agencies are rather nominal, whereby the Country Office receives a very modest share of the project budget to administer or, when in the role of project coordinator, provides largely high-level reporting rather than leading implementation of the project. For instance, under the joint project Supporting the Economic Empowerment of Afghan Women through Education and Training in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan 2019–2025 with UNDP, the Country Office is tasked with organizing a summer camp for Afghan women, but the work is outsourced to

an external partner. This example raises questions about the added value and strategic priority of UN Women's participation in this type of initiative. Another example is the Umbrella Programme 2019–2021, Comprehensive Programme in the Field of gender equality and women's empowerment, women economic empowerment and ending violence against women in Kazakhstan, funded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. UN Women has a coordination role and implements this programme in partnership with UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF and UN Women. However, the partners operated in a rather autonomous ways, with limited awareness about each other's activities, as confirmed during the interviews conducted.

3.5 Sustainability, gender equality and human rights

FINDING 15:

The sustainability of the Kazakhstan Country Office's portfolio of interventions is affected by a high dependency on State funding. Unpredictability of funding and shifting national priorities on gender equality and the empowerment of women represent potential risks to the sustainability of UN Women's work in Kazakhstan.

The sustainability of the Country Office's portfolio is explored through the prism of financial, governance and technical sustainability. The sustainability of the portfolio of programmes is explained in terms of the sustainability of its outcomes (technical sustainability), which refers to the knowledge, skills and expertise built by the Country Office. The sustainability of the governance mechanism is explored through the perspective of multi-stakeholder decision-making on gender equality and the empowerment of women in Kazakhstan, or how various actors engage to shape the strategy and the course of action to address gender equality and issues related to the empowerment of women in the country. Financial sustainability refers to the predictability and availability of funds for the Country Office's work on gender equality and the empowerment of women. The conclusion on financial sustainability is very straightforward. As mentioned earlier, the Country Office is largely dependent on unpredictable State funding, and there are no strategic efforts to diversify its donor base and mobilize additional resources. As for governance sustainability, this is also uncertain.

The governance mechanisms that the Country Office could potentially apply to steer, coordinate and facilitate gender equality and the empowerment of women in Kazakhstan, such as the Gender Thematic Group and CSAG, are rather weak.

The outcomes achieved by the Country Office during 2016–2020 are less ambitious than those included in its development results framework. However, there is some progress to be acknowledged, specifically with regard to the gender-responsive budgeting programme, strengthening the normative framework and the Ending Violence Against Women thematic portfolio, which provide an opportunity to observe the longer-term impacts of Country Office efforts in Kazakhstan. The sustainability of development results is also limited due to the possible mixed interpretation of the State agenda on gender equality and the empowerment of women in Kazakhstan, which is also visible through the prioritization of themes and the depth of the portfolio of programmes.

FINDING 16:

The long-term positive impact of interventions by the Country Office is set to be observed through strengthened normative and regulatory frameworks as instruments for rights holders and through enhanced capacities of State counterparts as duty bearers, which can have an impact on the root causes of gender inequality in Kazakhstan.

Interventions related to Governance and Leadership and Ending Violence Against Women achieved positive results at the normative level, e.g. the introduction of gender-responsive budgeting as a requirement in the Action Plan of the Women's Machinery, which implies that all ministries and State agencies must comply with this requirement. There are some additional positive preconditions that anticipate impact. In particular, within the Umbrella Programme, amendments to the existing legislative acts were developed based on consultations with CSOs and researchers. These amendments relate to regulation of violence against women, e.g. sexual harassment in the workplace (Labour Code), criminalization of domestic violence (Code of Administrative Offences and Criminal Code), stalking (Criminal Code) and work with aggressors (Code of Administrative Offences).

The gender-responsive budgeting programme contributed to the enhanced capacity of civil servants in the line ministries responsible for strategic planning in gender-responsive budgeting and planning. To ensure sustainability of the achieved results, i.e. the capacity of civil servants to apply gender-responsive budgeting skills in their work, a set of knowledge products was developed, including a practical methodology for conducting gender analysis of national and local strategic plans, budgets and programmes, and a step-by-step algorithm of gender-responsive budgeting implementation. Although the gender course curriculum proposed to the Agency of Civil Service is not mandatory, there are grounds to continue advocacy in this area. These achievements, among others, can serve as the basis for long-term impact to eradicate gender stereotypes and the root causes of gender inequality in Kazakhstan.

FINDING 17:

The Kazakhstan Country Office programmatic portfolio includes some elements of the leaving no one behind principle. However, the strategy to address the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups is not clear. There is no clear evidence of gender-transformative changes that can be attributed to interventions by the Country Office.

The evidence suggests that the analytical knowledge production to support strategic decision-making within the Country Office is limited. In this context, while adhering to the leaving no one behind principle, the strategy to address the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups is not sufficiently supported by data. Therefore, **the Country Office remains in the position of follower of State priorities and State funding, rather than an active partner who can, is willing and does shape its own portfolio by guiding State authorities with strong arguments and advocacy efforts to support the most vulnerable and marginalized groups.**

For instance, the Country Office invested in women's economic empowerment through promoting employment and entrepreneurship of rural women as part of the Umbrella Programme 2019–2021. This was against the backdrop of the large country-wide initiative Women in Business, led since 2015 by the EBRD, whose programme funds currently exceed US\$76 million.³⁸ A series of workshops organized by the Country Office could potentially trigger further interest from rural women, but more strategic engagement with EBRD and its programme could provide more solid grounds for expected transformational change at the local level.

38 <https://astanatimes.com/2019/07/ebrd-finance-for-women-in-business-programme-reaches-561-million/>.

The Sample Survey on Violence Against Women in Kazakhstan, conducted with the Bureau of National Statistics in 2017,³⁹ revealed that around 17 per cent of women experienced physical violence during their life-time, and about 5 per cent currently experience some form of violence. Against this background, the indicator of raising intolerance to domestic violence to 70 per cent as mentioned in the Strategic Note 2016–2020 appears rather confusing. These data contradict the real situation of violence against women in the country and the region, according to the studies organized by other research centres and CSOs.⁴⁰

The evaluation did not find any evidence to support the early signs of the Country Office's expected transformative change in the country. This is explained by the persistence of local challenges as well as the limited engagement of the Country Office with civil society, United Nations agencies and State authorities in the country. **The progress made by the Country Office towards improving legal and normative frameworks has laid the groundwork** for an expected longer-term impact on gender equality and the empowerment of women in the country. However, **further improvement in this field requires more strategic engagement, including creating a basis for the arguments supported by solid evidence, building partnerships to raise the voices of women and mobilizing funding to ensure the piloting and scaling up of interventions.**

39 <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eoca/attachments/publications/country/mco-kazakhstan/kazakhstan%20vaw%20reportfinal%20engcompressed.pdf?la=en&vs=2115>.

40 Harassment in taxis in Central Asia, available at <http://longreads.cabar.asia/taxi>.

4. LESSONS LEARNED

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Without a relevant Strategic Note and theory of change, the performance of the Country Office's portfolio and its measurement lacks benchmarks that can be used to measure and demonstrate results.

The theory of change and development results framework that inform the foundation Strategic Notes in every UN Women office are critical to guide successful realization of a country portfolio of programming. In the absence of such a foundation, the Country Office's portfolio performance could not possibly be steered, adjusted when necessary and geared towards its expected high-level results. Most importantly, lack of valid and relevant benchmarks inevitably limits understanding of progress.

A solid Strategic Note in the future needs to be based on a realistic theory of change that is ambitious but at the same time realistic, accounting for the challenges and opportunities in the country and institutional contexts. The next Strategic Note should demonstrate strong strategic guidance from the Regional Office and be based on realistic partnership modalities.

2

The continuously shifting focus of the Country Office's coverage (regional versus national) leads to a confused perception of its role, mandate and portfolio by other United Nations agencies, international partners, State authorities and sister field presences in the Central Asian region.

The Country Office needs to provide a clear message to its existing and potential partners on its mandate, capacities, ambitions and expertise. This is critical for potential partners to consider how they can engage and build solid coalitions with the Country Office. For the Country Office, the added value of its performance largely lies in the partnerships and networks it can mobilize rather than in building diverse expertise in-house to address its corporate priorities vis-à-vis its triple mandate and country needs vis-à-vis gender equality and the empowerment of women. At its current capacity, it is premature for the Country Office to lead any regional programmes, especially in the role of leading partner.

3

Spreading its interventions too thinly might lead to missed opportunities to maximize the expected strategic outcomes of the Country Office portfolio.

In an extremely challenging context such as in Kazakhstan, the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women-related priorities is a complex task that requires careful prioritization. From its triple mandate, the Country Office needs to define a set of strategic priorities for each dimension but in such a way as to create synergies and amplify impact. This requires strong analytics for priority setting and understanding interlinkages between objectives that can lead to transformative change.

4

The engagement of CSOs is more effective and meaningful when it is based on clear goals and objectives to be pursued, as well as longer term engagement beyond one-off exercises.

Irrespective of the fact that the CSOs interested or engaged in gender equality and the empowerment of women in Kazakhstan are not very well developed or organized, during interviews conducted in the context of this evaluation process CSO representatives expressed a strong interest in cooperating with the Country Office. This is an opportunity for the Country Office to shape its approach on how to engage with CSOs in a strategic way, beyond one-off events.

5

Lack of strategic leadership in the Gender Thematic Group both from UN Women and participating United Nations agencies leads to limited functionality and commitments within the Gender Thematic Group.

The Gender Thematic Group will remain the major forum for the UNCT to coordinate and mainstream gender equality and the empowerment of women in its programming at the operational level, while at the strategic level the UNCT is such a forum.

The findings suggest that stronger strategic guidance and, most importantly, oversight on gender mainstreaming is required from the UNCT, otherwise the performance of each United Nations agency in the Gender Thematic Group is rather limited. The point here is that the involvement of lower-level personnel might not trigger the necessary alignment across the UNCT's portfolio of action. Involvement in the Gender Thematic Group should be a conscious choice with realistic modalities to support the portfolio of operations across all United Nations agencies.

6

Resource mobilization ambitions might not be successfully realized if not based on a carefully calibrated partnership strategy.

It remains critical for the Country Office to invest in a viable resource mobilization strategy. This requires not only that resources be allocated for such activities, but that first of all a carefully strategized understanding of which donors, implementing partners, thematic areas, regions, etc. should be included. This analytical work would be the basis of informed decision-making but should be the result of strategic management in the first place. The role of the Regional Office in this process remains critical.

7

Building the Country Office's portfolio predominantly on the shifting gender priorities of State authorities will significantly hinder its capabilities to become a thought leader in gender equality and the empowerment of women in Kazakhstan.

The Country Office has already managed to build a positive reputation among national and United Nations partners. However, this is not sufficient to meet its ambition of becoming a thought leader in the field. To this end, there is a need to demonstrate its strength as an organization that pursues its strategic priorities and can successfully advocate for them vis-à-vis various partners, including the Government. This is a balancing act between organizational ambitions based on solid analytical work and meaningful compromise with external partners to achieve the most optimal match of various interests.

8

If there is no strong analytical base related to country contextual needs, with clear estimation of the Country Office's capacities and its stakeholders, there cannot be a substantive contribution to Ending Violence Against Women, Governance and Leadership and, especially, Women's Economic Empowerment.

The voice and impact of any organization is stronger when its message is based on reliable data and solid analytics. For the Country Office to define its target groups, the areas of strategic involvement under the overall umbrella of UN Women's triple mandate, and the partners that can eventually maximize the capacity profile to ensure the expected impact, it remains critical to create such an analytical base. This has not yet occurred, and there is no evidence that the Country Office has prioritized this line of activities. Some studies have been carried out within different projects, but to serve the purpose of the projects' objectives rather than to create an analytical base for the Country Office's advocacy on gender mainstreaming in Kazakhstan. With limited but targeted investment in producing analytical products, the Country Office could create that solid foundation for its advocacy and strategic programming.

9

Strategic management integrated in all aspects of the Country Office's performance vis-à-vis its limited resources and multiple external constraints could open up opportunities for the Country Office to guarantee the sustainability of its efforts and transformative change in gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The Country Office was left with limited strategic guidance from the Regional Office and headquarters. Under such conditions, its performance is already beyond what one would expect. However, this is not sufficient for the Country Office to maintain the corporate and United Nations reputation at large. The transformation of the Country Office requires very strong and objective-oriented strategic management at various levels, i.e. at the Country Office, Regional Office and headquarters levels.



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5. CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSION 1



With strong Country Office leadership and support from the Regional Office and headquarters, there is an opportunity for the Country Office to sharpen its strategic vision based on a pragmatic assessment of its internal capacities and external expectations and reconsider its portfolio of interventions in pushing forward the gender equality and empowerment of women agenda based on empirical evidence and strong advocacy efforts.

Strategic management is the main precondition and defining element for all findings in this evaluation, which implies, first of all, setting a strategic vision. The Strategic Note 2016–2020 was conceived for the former Multi-Country Office and did not provide clear guidance for the Country Office on its strategic course of action. The Country Office performed within the range of its seven projects; however, the strategic selection of the interventions, the activities within those interventions and the partnerships and funding modalities were decisions that in the main did not originate from the its strategic planning. As highlighted on multiple occasions, the Country Office remains largely dependent on State funding and has little room to manoeuvre or power to shape its own portfolio of operations.

A pragmatic and ambitious assessment of capabilities vis-à-vis external expectations is another factor to calibrate the future strategic vision of the Country Office, including the scope and the scale of its interventions, thematic priorities, partnerships to be established and risks to face. This analytical work, if evidence based, would be a solid basis for revision of the portfolio of interventions and for setting new strategic goals towards gender equality and the empowerment of women in Kazakhstan. It is not only the role of the Country Office, but also that of the Regional Office and headquarters to support the Country Office in this strategic management process, by mobilizing missing expertise; supporting the building or strengthening of relationships with key players in the country, including State authorities; and positioning the Country Office vis-à-vis other United Nations and non-United Nations actors. There is a need to shape a clear vision for the Country Office in Kazakhstan.

CONCLUSION 2



It is critical that prior to exploring regional dimensions the Country Office strengthen its coherence with the national women's machinery, United Nations agencies and CSOs and concentrate its efforts on demonstrating strong results-based management (RBM) performance and building its reputation as an expert in gender equality and empowerment of women at the national level.

The Country Office has many challenges to ensure its effective performance in Kazakhstan and should sustain its efforts within Kazakhstan. Shifting efforts to manage regional programmes could represent a risk; hence, the Country Office should establish a coordination mechanism with ECARO on implementation of the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme for Central Asia and Afghanistan.

The Country Office needs to demonstrate strong RBM skills and track records, as well as the capacity to establish viable partnerships with national authorities, CSOs, United Nations agencies and other non-United Nations international partners, many of which are still ongoing challenges for the Country Office in Kazakhstan.

CONCLUSION 3



Throughout its portfolio of interventions, the Country Office has implemented various activities and achieved a large set of outputs. However, the lack of a strategic layer has led to a portfolio of activities that did not capture the critical link between project-level results and the high-level contribution to the expected outcomes.

The challenge is to ensure that the various projects that comprise the Country Office portfolio contribute to the transformative change expected from its operations in Kazakhstan. This is the missing link between all projects and expected outcomes, the lack of which is the result of the missing strategic layer in Country Office management, i.e. the inadequacy of the Strategic Note 2016–2020, the long absence of a Country Representative, insufficient organizational guidance and insufficient capacities within the Country Office itself. And, most importantly, stronger management oversight, support and guidance to improve UN Women's performance in Kazakhstan is needed.

CONCLUSION 4

To ensure the effectiveness of the Country Office portfolio, it is critical to (a) move beyond the fund-dependency mentality, (b) choose strategic interventions with defined selection criteria (i.e. in line with the new Strategic Note), (c) follow up on those interventions to ensure maximum impact and (d) maintain a balanced voice and assertiveness, sufficiently backed by substantive support and expertise from the Regional Office and headquarters.

The challenges the Country Office is facing in Kazakhstan are multiple and are complex by their nature and intertwined and interdependent. However, there are a few areas where minimum requirements are needed to strengthen performance. First, there is a critical need to move beyond the fund-dependency mentality. Even without additional funds, the Country Office can bring expertise, reputation and international recognition to Kazakhstan. The role of the Regional Office is absolutely crucial in supporting the Country Office to communicate this message to the national authorities and find a way to be an effective partner on a more equal basis.

Moving forward, it is important to maintain an RBM approach and principles when engaging in each intervention, i.e. the decision on each project or programme should be impact-driven: are we going to observe the expected impact? It might not be possible with one project but could be achieved with systematic engagement in the chosen thematic priority without spreading the Country Office too thinly.

To be able to choose interventions strategically from a myriad of gender equality and empowerment of women challenges in Kazakhstan, there must be strong selection and prioritization criteria. These criteria are also part of the analytical work required to establish a strategic vision and road map towards its realization. There is a need for evidence-based analytics in the Country Office, which should not necessarily be a resource-consuming exercise but more targeted consultations and mobilization of the already existing scientific and advocacy expertise in the country.

CONCLUSION 5

To overcome the challenges related to the sustainability of Country Office interventions, it is important to invest in strengthening CSOs in the country and building strategic partnerships with United Nations agencies and CSOs to address critical gender equality and empowerment of women priorities within the country, adopting an incremental value-building strategy.

It must be acknowledged that the Country Office in Kazakhstan is a small office with limited resources and capabilities. It cannot be expected to possess all comparative and competitive advantages to successfully engage in meaningful competition for resources with other United Nations and non-United Nations organizations, or to perform the role of knowledge hub for the country, or even to perform the technical role of project manager for all of its ambitious objectives today and in the future. It is important for the Country Office to strategically choose with whom to partner to maximize the comparative and competitive advantages necessary for the realization of its strategic priorities. These partnerships should be sought within United Nations agencies, non-United Nations partners and also CSOs in the country. The latter in particular could be a new avenue to enlarge its support base and to strengthen its voice by strengthening gender equality and the empowerment of women through cooperation with interested CSOs in Kazakhstan. Building partnerships is yet another avenue for the UN Women Country Office in Kazakhstan to demonstrate its adherence to the principle of leaving no one behind.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations presented in this section are to be addressed by the Country Office in partnership and consultation with relevant national stakeholders in Kazakhstan.

Presentations of the evaluation's preliminary findings and discussions on lessons learned and proposed recommendations and final sessions to validate the report took place between the Country Office and the members of the Evaluation Reference Group in January 2021 and informed the final recommendations presented below.

The recommendations below were reviewed by the Evaluation Management Group and Evaluation Reference Group, and subsequent modifications were integrated as appropriate. The recommendations section also includes potential key actions for consideration by the Country Office, based on their feasibility within its current programme of work. Some of the suggested actions below are already under way given the time lag between issuance of the preliminary findings and finalization of the report. The level of assessed impact, priority, difficulty and suggested time frame for implementation are indicated below each specific recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Strategically define the Country Office's theory of change, focusing solely on Kazakhstan and carefully balancing it with the Country Office's organizational capabilities and ambitions and enhance its analytical basis towards the realization of its triple mandate through its portfolio of interventions.

Priority

HIGH

(see recommendation 6 related to multi-country cross-regional programming)

Actions for consideration:

Impact

HIGH

- Mobilize external expertise (from Regional Office, headquarters, third parties) to shape a realistic and ambitious new Strategic Note
- Ensure that Country Office personnel, relevant personnel from the Regional Office, as well as all national stakeholders, including State, non-State and United Nations partners, are included in the process
- Allocate sufficient time for this exercise and prioritize it
- Invest in high-quality studies to sharpen the arguments for advocacy in promoting of gender equality and the empowerment of women in Kazakhstan
- Invest in the development of key knowledge products in different thematic areas such as Ending Violence Against Women, Women's Economic Empowerment, and Leadership and Governance

Timeframe

IMMEDIATELY

Difficulty

MEDIUM

RECOMMENDATION 2

Mobilize evidence-based arguments and strategies to advocate for gender equality and empowerment of women priorities and promote a gender equality path within the Concept of Family and Gender Issues pursued by the national Government.

Priority

MEDIUM

Actions for consideration:

Impact

MEDIUM

- Partner with leading national research institutions and the Bureau of National Statistics and define priority areas to explore, e.g. needs assessments, identification of the most vulnerable groups, etc.
- Create an analytical base to support advocacy efforts with the national women's machinery to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women across State policy and programming in Kazakhstan
- Strengthen capacities of the Bureau of National Statistics to produce gender-disaggregated data across key indicators related to the SDGs in Kazakhstan
- Create open platforms to discuss the trends across key indicators on gender equality and human rights with a broad audience in Kazakhstan and develop innovative approaches to awareness-raising on the key strategic thematic priorities

Timeframe

2021-2022

Difficulty

HIGH

RECOMMENDATION 3

Define the portfolio accountability mechanism with a clear monitoring and evaluation framework and adequate reporting according to the defined indicators both at the output and outcome levels.

Priority & Impact

HIGH

Timeframe

Aligned with new SN

Difficulty

MEDIUM

Actions for consideration:

- Design a monitoring and evaluation system for the new Strategic Note
- Consider investing in a dedicated human resource for monitoring and evaluation
- Be realistic in selecting performance indicators, and when selected, adhere to their achievement, invest in their measurement and monitoring, and report accordingly

RECOMMENDATION 4

Improve the balance of efforts across implementation of UN Women's integrated triple mandate by strengthening the Country Office's focus on partnerships to create a strong alliance and enhance UN Women's role as a coordinator of gender equality and the empowerment of women and improve its convening capacity.

Priority & Impact

HIGH

Timeframe

2021-2024

Difficulty

LOW

Actions for consideration:

- Carry out a stakeholder mapping exercise to define how to best maximize the capacity and competitive advantages of the Country Office when the strategic objectives are set under the new Strategic Note
- Based on the to-be-defined theory of change, strategically select stakeholders from CSOs to partner with under the umbrella of CSAG and beyond
- Explore programmatic opportunities with CSOs on a multilateral basis, building networks to create a multiplier effect among fragmented local CSOs
- Similarly, based on the to-be-defined theory of change, strategically select United Nations and non-United Nations international partners to negotiate shared interests and possible programmatic interests.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Advocate for stronger gender mainstreaming across United Nations programming through supporting the Gender Thematic Group by mobilizing strategic guidance of the UNCT and through strengthening the functioning of the Gender Thematic Group.

Priority & Impact

HIGH

Timeframe

2021

Difficulty

LOW

Actions for consideration:

- Engage with the UNCT to elevate gender equality and the empowerment of women on the agenda of United Nations agencies at the highest level
- Advocate to revise the requirements for Gender Thematic Group membership to ensure members have sufficient convening power in their agencies to promote gender mainstreaming in programming
- Lead the annual fully fledged UNCT SWAP reporting
- Develop and promote a gender equality and empowerment of women training package to be mandatory for each newcomer to United Nations agencies in Kazakhstan

RECOMMENDATION 6**Strategically define the role of the presence of UN Women in Kazakhstan when leading multi-country/regional initiatives or implementing joint regional initiatives.***Priority & Impact***HIGH***Timeframe***IMMEDIATELY***Difficulty***LOW***Actions for consideration:*

- Clearly define regional- and country-level responsibilities when programmes implemented in several Central Asian countries are managed from Kazakhstan
- Strategically differentiate and prioritize UN Women efforts to consolidate the country presence in Kazakhstan from the implementation of regional interventions
- Advocate for coordination of efforts and peer cross-fertilization among different UN Women Country Offices and Programme Presence Offices based in Central Asia
- Put in place a mechanism to ensure the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme for Central Asia and Afghanistan is under the oversight and supervision (technical, financial and logistical) of ECARO

RECOMMENDATION 7**Invest in resource mobilization and in diversification of the Country Office's donor base with primary focus on gender equality and equity for United Nations-wide socioeconomic recovery efforts from COVID-19, thereby finding the niche for UN Women in Kazakhstan to partner with other United Nations agencies and key strategic partners.***Priority***HIGH***Impact***MEDIUM***Timeframe***IMMEDIATELY***Difficulty***LOW***Actions for consideration:*

- Engage a qualified expert to analyse business opportunities aligned with the five pillars of socioeconomic recovery from COVID-19 for the Country Office
- Identify clear entry points for UN Women to partner with other key actors in the context of socioeconomic recovery from COVID-19
- Collaborate with UN Women ECARO and headquarters to build viable partnerships and develop a resource mobilization strategy
- Embark on a COVID-19 impact assessment for the most vulnerable groups in Kazakhstan and ensure gender equality and the empowerment of women is mainstreamed and the needs of those most vulnerable are duly addressed in the United Nations-wide socioeconomic recovery strategies
- Invest in developing key, solid, targeted project proposals

RECOMMENDATION 8**Raise the reputation of the Country Office among its United Nations and external partners in the country and strengthen its portfolio of activities by strategically aligning with existing and emerging partners from the national authorities, the United Nations, CSOs and other national and international stakeholders.***Priority & Impact***HIGH***Timeframe***2021-2024***Difficulty***MEDIUM***Actions for consideration:*

- Attract strong gender experts and leading feminists to the Country Office
- Invest in building partnerships
- Strategically define the opportunities for the Country Office to foster partnerships with the larger stakeholder landscape and avoid duplication and enhance complementarity
- Clearly define how the chain of results to be pursued by the Country Office is linked/connected and can impact the ongoing and emerging activities across the whole stakeholder landscape.

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MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.**

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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