

This brief presents the key conclusions and recommendations of the Country Portfolio Evaluation of the UN Women Moldova Country Office Strategic Note 2018–2022, conducted between December 2021 and June 2022. A Country Portfolio Evaluation is a systematic assessment of UN Women’s contribution to development results relating to gender equality and the empowerment of women at the country level and aims to contribute to the development of the Country Office’s next Strategic Note and to support decision-making and accountability.

About gender equality and women’s empowerment in Moldova

The Republic of Moldova is at the upper end of lower middle-income economies and one of the poorest countries in Europe. It has made significant progress in reducing poverty and boosting shared prosperity with average annual growth of 4.5% since 2000. However, the country is largely reliant on remittance-induced consumption and was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and drought in 2020¹. Women, and already vulnerable population were hardest affected. The country was further affected by the war in Ukraine, in terms of trade and remittances channels, inflation and a humanitarian crisis with more than 470,000 refugees hosted in Moldova as of May 2022 with women comprising 66 per cent of the total.

Although gender disparities are persistent in all areas of life, Moldova is a signatory to international commitments on gender equality, with the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) ratified most recently, in 2021. The country also developed extensive normative frameworks to promote and enforce gender equality. Some progress has been made in implementing the legislative framework, particularly in terms of women’s political participation; capacity development of institutions for gender equality; and protection mechanisms to support victims of gender-based violence.

The UN Women Moldova Strategic Note 2018–2022 was developed in 2017 in a consultative process with the government and civil society. It is aligned with the Republic of Moldova United Nations Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development 2018–2022, international standards on gender equality and the national policy and legal framework. Despite ongoing improvements, gender equality and women’s rights challenges are still persistent in areas related to empowering women in political, economic and social life; work and family-life reconciliation; domestic violence; and the specific situation of certain groups of disadvantaged women (Roma women, women from rural areas, women living with HIV, women in detention, women with disabilities, migrant women, etc.).

Programming was largely concentrated on Women’s Leadership and Political Participation and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls. The total budget for the Strategic Note period 2018–2022 was US\$ 18 million.²

Evaluation purpose, objectives and methodology

This Country Portfolio Evaluation was conducted by the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service in close collaboration with the Moldova Country Office as a 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 January 2023. The evaluation also has a summative (retrospective) perspective to support enhanced accountability for development effectiveness and learning from experience.

¹ World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=MD>
² This includes UN Women UN Women Core, Institutional Budget/Extra Budgetary funds and total final mobilized resources in the period 2018-2022, as of July 2022.



IN BRIEF

COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION MOLDOVA

The scope of this Country Portfolio Evaluation includes all activities undertaken by the Country Office under its current Strategic Note, including operational work, support to normative frameworks in the country and United Nations system coordination, from January 2018 to March 2022. UN Women's contribution to the COVID-19 pandemic response in Moldova was also considered. The geographical scope of the evaluation spanned all of Moldova, given the Country Office's work at national and local levels across the country.

The evaluation fostered a participatory approach and applied a theory-based, contribution analysis and included outcomes mapping and outcomes harvesting.

DATA COLLECTION



More than 90 documents



1 all personnel workshop



Online interviews with 81 key informants



Eleven focus group with 68 key stakeholders



Review of 8 past corporate, regional and country-level evaluations



4 online surveys

of Country Office personnel, donor partners, civil society organizations (CSOs) and end beneficiaries of capacity development interventions.



2 case study

were developed to provide insight into the Country Offices key approaches to implementation of its Strategic Note: a) the Country Office's support to capacity development of partners; and b) the Country Office's engagement modality with the Government of Sweden

Key achievements highlighted by the evaluation



The UN Women Moldova Country Office takes a holistic approach to its work, successfully combining policy advocacy and normative support with capacity development for the adoption or implementation of policies and empowerment for women's agency and social norms change.



The UN Women Moldova Country Office extensively engages in networking, coordination and normative support to the Government. Its implementing partners and beneficiaries consider these efforts key strategies that support an enabling environment for engagement of developed capacities, building of ownership and sustainability of results.



The UN Women Moldova Country Office has demonstrated strong adherence to international normative frameworks (CEDAW, Beijing, UNSCR 1325, SDGs) and proactiveness in advocacy for Istanbul Convention ratification.



The UN Women Moldova Country Office's adaptability to the COVID-19 context demonstrated the sustained relevance of the Country Office's actions throughout the entire Strategic Note period.



The UN Women Moldova Country Office is seen as a leader and strong advocate for gender equality in UN coordination efforts and its technical assistance was appreciated across the UN system in Moldova.



The UN Women Moldova Country Office's comparative advantages of leadership on gender equality, knowledge and expertise and convening power are well recognized by all partners.



Evidence of results is strongest in normative and individual capacity development and empowerment across all three impact areas, while the Ending Violence Against Women impact area shows progress beyond that, in systemic changes and influence on institutional practices and social norms.



The UN Women Moldova Country Office approach towards capacity development is supported by thorough needs assessment, tailored intervention design and a conscious combination of different types of interventions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusion 1



The Country Office demonstrated agility and sustained relevance over the entire period of Strategic Note implementation (2018–2022), operationalizing its theory of change; taking a multistakeholder approach; seizing opportunities for action and engaging in continuous assessment of the relevance of its priorities; and adjusting its work as needed, including for its contribution to address the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the most recent humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. There are opportunities to more strongly integrate the Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian agenda based on the most recent lessons from these two crises.

Conclusion 2



UN Women's broad coordination efforts, combined with strong expertise, were effective in gender mainstreaming UNCT planning, building trust and translating international standards into national legislation with the Government and in reducing tensions and ensuring better operational synergies with CSOs. Further clarification of UN Women's integrated mandate is required, particularly among UN partners and development partners/donors, and prioritization of areas of engagement in different coordination platforms.

Conclusion 3



UN Women took advantage of the Direct Strategic Note Funding by Sida as an opportunity to transform its way of working, expand partnerships, improve relations with existing partners, and strengthen internal capacities and resource mobilization strategies, which overall positively affected the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of its work.

Conclusion 4



Strategic engagement with Sida and the EU has provided a solid foundation for the internal sustainability of the office; however, the risks of relying on two large development partners need to be considered. Office capacity (both structure and staff) should be taken into account as well as the office's engagement in UNCT Belarus to avoid spreading resources too thinly.

Conclusion 5



One of the Country Office's key strategies for implementation of its Strategic Note is capacity development. Together with its partners, the office has already gained solid experience in all stages of capacity development management and a variety of capacity development interventions. However, systemic consolidation of the capacity development function in the Country Office is needed to ensure comprehensive management and quality assurance of capacity development interventions.

Conclusion 6



Despite its limited capacity, the technical assistance the Country Office has provided to the UNCT in Belarus has been highly effective and appreciated. As expectations of the UNCT Belarus rise and the Country Office capacity is increasingly thinly spread with growing crises in the region, there is a need to review this engagement and look for new solutions.

Conclusion 7



UN Women and its partners strongly contributed to an overall solid normative foundation and the establishment of human capacity for gender equality and women's empowerment in the Republic of Moldova. Strengthening sustainability strategies in the next Strategic Note, particularly in relation to the Government, including advocating for the establishment and strengthening of national gender institutional mechanisms and networking with champions across different government and civil society sectors, should be prioritized.

Recommendation 1

Take an integrated planning approach to development of the next Strategic Note and discuss various crisis/development scenarios.

Recommendation 2

Integrate other aspects of Women, Peace and Security in development of the next Strategic Note, beyond women's participation.

Recommendation 3

In the current context of crisis, leverage UN Women's mandate and added value to strengthen coordination in previous and emerging coordination priority areas.

Recommendation 4

Standardize capacity development management processes, particularly needs assessment, quality assurance of design and delivery, and implementing partner reporting; and strengthen overall monitoring and evaluation systems for relevant and tailored follow-up.

Recommendation 5

Further capitalize on the potential of Strategic Note Direct Funding in terms of strengthening the Country Office's holistic programmatic approach and its catalytic effect on resource mobilization.

Recommendation 6

Support further integration of project staff, particularly those engaged during the COVID-19 pandemic and those engaged in EU-funded projects.

Recommendation 7

Ensure that the promotion of transformative approaches and social norms change is continued, that vulnerable groups' needs are covered by the next Strategic Note and that these groups benefit from its implementation.

Recommendation 8

Taking into account the positive impact of UN Women's technical assistance to the UNCT in Belarus, and also the sustainability challenges of the current approach, initiate and contribute to the corporate discussion on UN Women's strategic approach to supporting UN Country Teams without a UN Women presence.