

UN-Women

APRIL 2025



BACKGROUND

UN Women, the United Nations (UN) entity dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment, was established in 2010 in response to systemic challenges in gender-related initiatives such as insufficient funding and fragmented leadership through UN General Assembly resolution 63/311¹. UN Women consolidated four pre-existing entities: the Division for the Advancement of Women, the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues (OSAGI), and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). The sole UN entity exclusively focused on gender equality; it has a triple mandate:

1. Normative – Supporting UN member states in strengthening global norms and standards for gender equality and integrating gender perspectives across policy areas.
2. Operational – Implementing activities at country and regional levels, including assisting member states in developing gender-responsive laws, policies, and strategies.
3. Coordination – Enhancing accountability and collaboration across the UN system to drive progress in gender equality and women's empowerment.

1. United Nations, A/RES/63/311, System-wide coherence, 2009.



Jordan: Empowerment through employment for Syrian refugee women

Syrian women enrolled on the cash-for-work programme, handcrafting rugs at the 'Oasis Center for Resilience and Empowerment of Women and Girls' operated by UN Women in the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan. Photo: UN Women/Christopher Herwig

Over the past decade, UN Women has evolved into a more mature and strategically focused entity. The period from 2014-24 marked a critical phase, with significant strides in global advocacy, operational systems, and performance management. The Strategic Plan 2018-21 introduced a more results-driven approach, aligning key thematic outputs with global frameworks such as CEDAW and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 on gender equality. The Strategic Plan 2022-25 introduced a distinct outcome on UN Women's coordination work, which helped reaffirm its coordination mandate for results in key thematic areas and articulate the value proposition for it. Despite these advances, however, challenges remain, including persistent issues of decentralisation, resource allocation, and programmatic coherence.

The Strategic Plan 2022-25 further refines UN Women's priorities with a stronger focus on systemic outcomes. Its full implementation, however, is hindered by resource constraints and outdated allocation criteria for core programming resources. New processes, such as the Quarterly Business Review (QBR), have improved financial and budgetary planning, but reliance on non-core, earmarked funding for specific programmatic areas such as disaster risk reduction, has limited the entity's ability to proactively align resources with strategic objectives. Addressing these structural and financial constraints will be essential in sustaining progress and achieving transformational change at scale.

UN Women has made significant progress in strengthening its institutional foundations and aligning its operations with its ambitious mandate. It remains an indispensable actor in advancing gender equality worldwide. However, to realise its full potential it must address the structural inefficiencies that continue to limit its agility and impact. Ensuring that financial resources, human capital, and operational systems align with strategic priorities will be essential for positioning the organisation to meet future challenges and drive meaningful, sustainable change.



Guinea: Rural Women's Cooperative

Through a grant from UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality, the civil society organization Partenariat Recherches Environnement Medias has helped rural women form several cooperatives and taught its members how to plant a vitamin-rich tree called Moringa and how to clean, dry and sell its leaves. Used as medicine or a dietary supplement by societies around the world, Moringa also supports biodiversity and prevents soil erosion.

Photo: UN Women/
Joe Saade

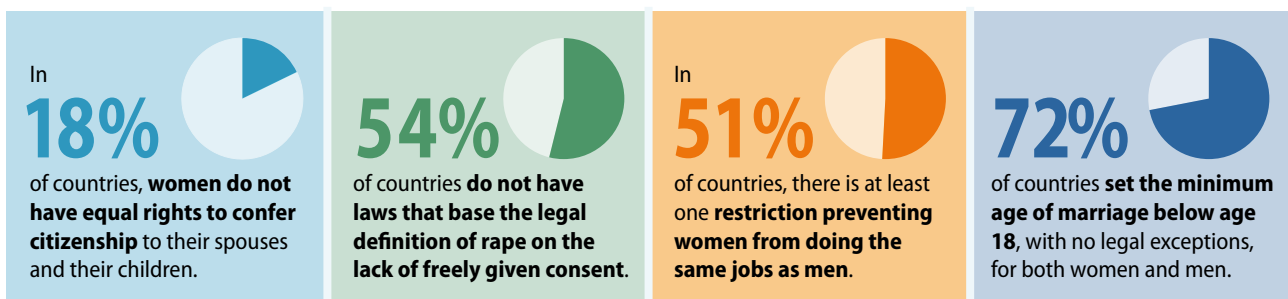


**South Sudan –
‘In Their Hands:
Women Taking
Ownership of
Peace’**

Zekia Musa is a 29-year-old visually impaired youth activist and peacebuilder who works with the South Sudanese Ministry of General Education and Instruction representing people with disabilities.

“Inequalities are rife across South Sudan. We have to have equal laws and equal justice for everybody.”
Photo: UN Photo/
Maura Ajak

FIGURE 1: **THE WORLD IS OFF TRACK TO ACHIEVE SDG5 BY 2030**



Source: UN Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2024

Key global gender indicators, including those for which UN Women holds a custodian role, show mostly negative trends. At the current rate of change, ending extreme poverty among women could take 137 more years; it will take nearly 300 years to fully eliminate discriminatory laws and 176 years to close the gender gap in leadership and decision-making (Figure 1).

While some countries have made strides in increasing women’s representation, systemic barriers including unequal access to economic opportunities, entrenched social norms, and the rollback of women’s rights in some contexts threaten the achievement of SDG5 by 2030. **UN Women plays a crucial role in advancing gender equality through advocacy, policy development, and partnerships, but its ability to systematically link these efforts to measurable, large-scale impact remains limited.** This raises the question whether the entity is basing its work on valid theories of change (ToC), e.g. given that evaluation evidence questions whether changes in legal frameworks lead to sustainable improvements for women and girls. As UN Women prepares for its 2026-29 Strategic Plan, addressing systemic constraints will be essential to remain grounded in practical realities. UN Women can position itself as a more agile, impactful leader in the gender equality space. Structural reforms will be critical in scaling successful initiatives, driving systemic change, and sustaining progress toward gender equality on a global scale.

KEY FINDINGS – STRENGTHS

UN Women has demonstrated notable progress across multiple dimensions of its operations since the last assessment. In strategic management, UN Women has successfully aligned its Strategic Plan 2022-25 with key international frameworks, including the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, and improved its results structure. This renewed strategic direction has reinforced its leadership in global gender equality efforts, while its thematic impact areas and the Integrated Results and Resources Framework (IRRF) provide a structured approach to tracking progress. Stakeholders have a good understanding of the organisation's vision, reflecting the clear articulation of its comparative advantage within the UN system. By leveraging its normative, operational, and coordination roles, UN Women has strengthened its ability to translate international gender norms into actionable outcomes, particularly in policy advocacy and legislative reform.

From an operational management perspective, the Pivot to Regions and Countries initiative has the potential to shift the entity toward decentralisation and to strengthen decision-making at the field level. While full decentralisation remains a work in progress, UN Women has increased the number of field-based staff, enhancing its ability to respond to country-specific needs. The BRC and the BAC have played a pivotal role in optimising resource allocation, ensuring that investments align with strategic priorities. UN Women has also made progress in digital transformation by joining the new Quantum Enterprise Resource Planning system, which facilitates real-time financial tracking, and the results management system (RMS), which enhances monitoring and evaluation processes. It has thus strengthened its operational efficiency and accountability, reinforcing its ability to measure and report on its impact.

In partnership management, UN Women has been a key driver of inter-agency collaboration, reinforcing gender equality integration across UN entities. Through mechanisms such as the UN System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) and the UNCT-SWAP Scorecard, against which each UN entity reports, it has ensured that gender equality



Guatemala: A house of art and memories seeks to bring closure

At least 200,000 people, mostly indigenous, have been killed or disappeared in the 36-year-long armed conflict between the military and guerrilla groups.

Rosalina Tuyuc Velásquez, a human rights activist and co-founder of a widows association, has spearheaded the construction of a memorial for victims of the conflict in Comalapa. It's called the "Center for the Historical Memory of Women".
Photo: UN Women/
Ryan Brown

remains a core priority within the broader UN framework. Its ability to convene and influence high-level discussions, particularly through the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), has positioned UN Women as a thought leader in gender policy advocacy. UN Women also played a significant role in the Spotlight Initiative, the largest inter-agency programme to address gender-based violence, primarily contributing to technical guidance, civil society engagement, and coordination among partners across multiple levels. Partnerships with international financial institutions (IFIs), civil society organisations (CSOs), and private sector actors have further expanded its reach, enabling innovative approaches to gender-responsive programming.

UN Women has strengthened results-based management (RBM) systems, embedding data-driven decision-making across its programmes. An improved results framework was adopted in the Strategic Plan 2018-21 and further refined as part of the Strategic Plan 2022-25, addressing previous gaps and ensuring a clearer linkage between activities and intended outcomes. UN Women's transparency tools, including the Transparency Portal, have reinforced its accountability by providing stakeholders with real-time access to financial and programmatic data. The generation of gender-sensitive data has been a critical contribution, particularly through initiatives like the Women Count programme, which has helped integrate gender-disaggregated statistics into national statistical systems. These efforts have improved the evidence base for policymaking, reinforcing UN Women's role as a global knowledge hub on gender equality.

In terms of results, UN Women's advocacy efforts have directly contributed to gender-responsive legal reforms in several countries, leading to enhanced protections against gender-based violence and increased women's political participation. It has played a catalytic role in advancing SDG 5, ensuring gender considerations are embedded across multiple SDGs. In humanitarian and development settings, UN Women's leadership has strengthened gender-responsive programming, providing targeted interventions for women and girls in crisis-affected regions. Through its growing field presence, improved strategic coherence, and refined results frameworks, the organisation has solidified its capacity to drive gender equality initiatives at both global and national levels.



UN Women Humanitarian Work with Refugees in Cameroon

UN Women Cameroon supports economic and social rehabilitation for vulnerable women and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in seven refugee camps in three regions of the country.

A refugee from CAR holds her granddaughter as she learns the French alphabet as part of an adult education class held at the UN Women Social Cohesion space.

Photo: UN Women/
Ryan Brown



“Voices against Violence” curriculum training in India

A regional training in Pune, India, teaches youth leaders how to challenge harmful attitudes and about child protection policies.

Photo: UN Women/
Urjasi Rudra

KEY FINDINGS – CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Despite its achievements, persistent challenges hinder the ability of UN Women to achieve transformational change at scale using its current approaches. One of the most pressing issues in strategic management is the difficulty in translating high-level policy influence into sustained, systemic change, particularly at the country level. While the Strategic Plan 2022-25 provides a structured approach, the absence of comprehensive programmatic tools has led to inconsistencies in how initiatives are implemented across regions. Give the direction in which SDG 5 indicators are moving, the assumptions underlying the results framework need to be reassessed for the next strategic plan. UN Women’s financial framework, while transparent, remains overly dependent on earmarked, non-core funding, restricting its ability to allocate resources strategically. While efforts to diversify donors and funding sources are underway in line with a new partnership and resource mobilisation strategy launched in 2023, they have not yet come to fruition in a significant way. The lack of an integrated financial sustainability strategy has compounded this issue, as resource constraints continue to limit UN Women’s ability to scale up its impact. Its recent admission to the Inter-Agency Steering Committee (IASC) positions UN Women in the humanitarian space, but limited capacity on the ground has disappointed stakeholders’ expectations.

In operational management, the QBR process has uncovered several operational bottlenecks, particularly in procurement and financial management. Procurement delays exacerbated by weaknesses in system integration and lack of reliable reporting have contributed to a lower delivery rate. Decentralisation efforts have stalled, with decision-making authority still largely concentrated at HQ. The intended shift toward increased field presence has not been fully realised, and staffing gaps persist at the country level, limiting the effectiveness of UN Women’s field offices. High staff turnover, reliance on temporary contracts, and bureaucratic inefficiencies have further strained operational effectiveness. The entity’s cost recovery mechanisms and outdated resource allocation criteria have been flagged as significant impediments that require urgent reform to enhance financial flexibility.

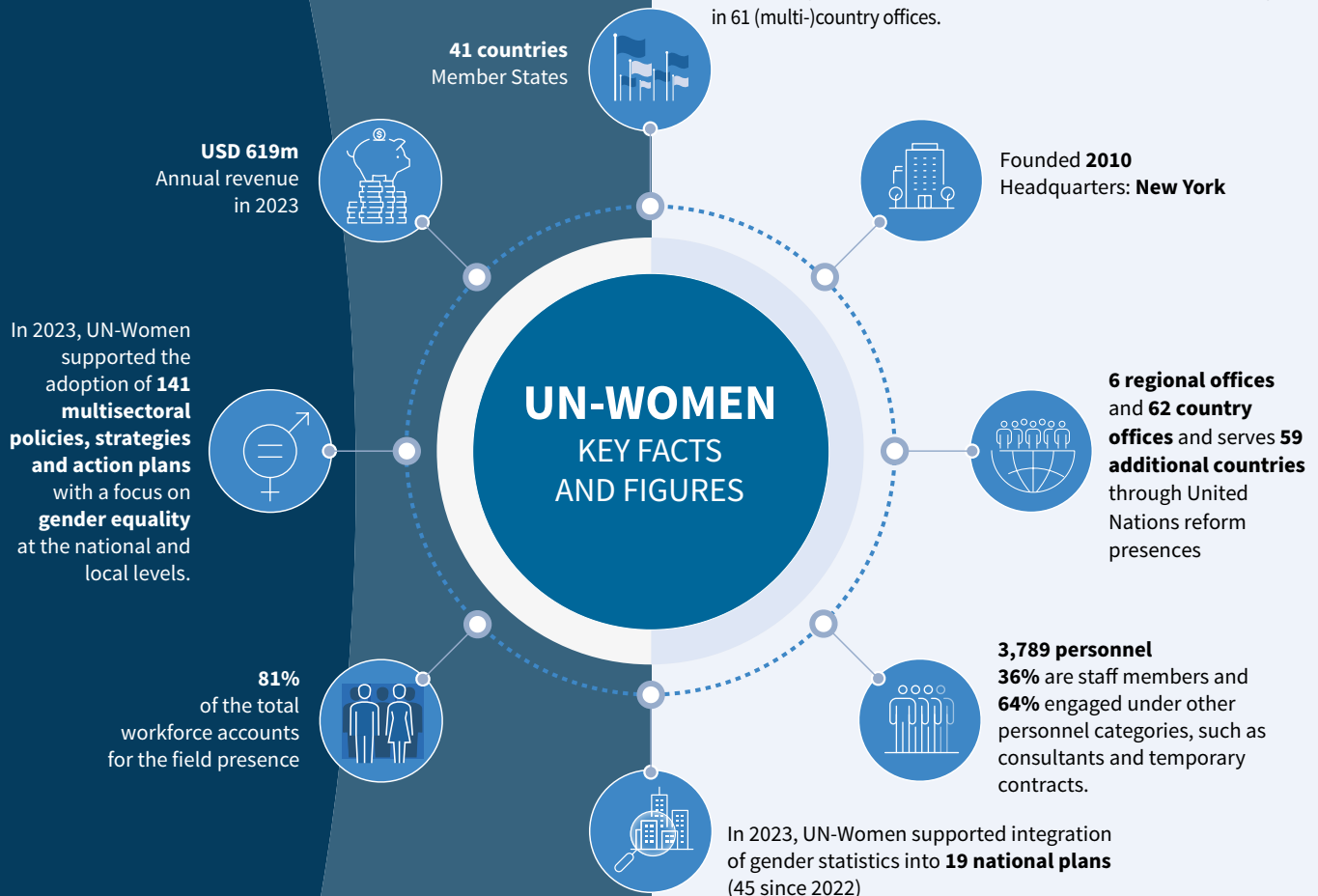
In terms of partnership management, UN Women’s coordination role within the UN system remains constrained by operational inconsistencies and the emerging role of the UN resident coordinators in advancing cross-cutting norms on gender and human rights. Evaluations point to their critical role in advocating gender norms, but they typically lack sufficient expertise and support, particularly in humanitarian settings.² While frameworks such as UN-

2. OIOS, IED-24-029, Evaluation of the Resident Coordinator system in complex settings, 19 December 2024

UN-Women in numbers

INSTITUTIONAL LEADS

Italy and South Korea



TOP 20 MOPAN DONORS IN 2023

MOPAN members	Total 2023 revenue in USD
Germany	41,507,238
Sweden	37,078,406
Norway	33,931,249
Finland	27,650,786
Canada	21,109,352
Japan	21,041,581
Italy	19,577,767
Australia	19,571,190
United States of America	17,697,509
United Kingdom	16,481,595

MOPAN members	Total 2023 revenue in USD
Republic of Korea	16,058,378
Denmark	14,528,032
Switzerland	10,267,844
Ireland	9,957,641
France	7,993,793
Spain	7,607,495
Luxembourg	4,508,636
Belgium	1,958,647
Netherlands	785,163
Türkiye	201,800

Source: Revenue by Government donor | United Nations – CEB



**Philippines:
migrant workers
rebuild lives**

“Being a member of a women migrant workers’ group helps me and others find our confidence in facing the challenges of daily life.”

Photo: UN Women/
Norman Gorecho

SWAP provide a structured approach to gender mainstreaming³, their effectiveness is limited by the lack of enforcement mechanisms. The entity’s co-leadership role in humanitarian and development settings has been uneven; partners acknowledge UN Women’s normative contributions but express concerns about its ability to translate advocacy into effective coordination. Furthermore, engagement with men and boys in gender equality efforts appears limited, representing a missed opportunity to shift societal norms and address the root causes of gender inequality. The use of national systems is underdeveloped, and South-South and trilateral cooperation have not been used strategically.

From a performance management standpoint, UN Women has improved its results-based monitoring systems, but challenges remain in translating data into actionable insights. FOs have expressed concerns that corporate monitoring frameworks are compliance-driven rather than strategic, leading to limited uptake of performance indicators at the country level. The overwhelming number of indicators in the RMS has also diluted the focus on meaningful impact measurement. Additionally, while gender-sensitive data collection supported by UN Women has improved, inconsistencies remain in the application of performance metrics across different thematic areas, limiting the organisation’s ability to track long-term progress effectively. Moreover, while UN Women aspires to become a globally networked knowledge organisation, knowledge-sharing remains fragmented, and internal coordination mechanisms are not yet fully aligned with long-term strategic goals.

In terms of results, one of the most significant challenges UN Women faces is ensuring that its interventions generate long-term, sustainable change rather than isolated, project-based successes. As previously noted, key global gender indicators, including those for which UN Women holds a custodian role, show negative trends. While the organisation plays a crucial role in advancing gender equality through advocacy, policy development, and partnerships, its ability to systematically link these efforts to measurable, large-scale change remains limited. Many UN Women’s initiatives remain fragmented, donor-driven, and overly reliant on short-term project cycles, making it difficult to sustain meaningful progress beyond the lifespan of individual programmes. This fragmentation is particularly evident in humanitarian and peacebuilding settings where UN Women has struggled to maintain consistent engagement and establish robust mechanisms for monitoring impact. Additionally, while there has been progress in influencing legal and policy reforms, implementation gaps persist at the national level, hindered by entrenched social norms; many policies lack the necessary institutional support and financial backing to be effectively enforced. Furthermore, results reporting remains inconsistent, with significant variations in how COs measure and communicate impact. Despite improvements in data tracking, the aggregation of results across different thematic areas remains a challenge, making it difficult to demonstrate a cohesive, systemic change. Enhancing the sustainability of UN Women’s interventions will

3. UN Women, Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming for Gender Equality Results, (undated)

require a more integrated, long-term programming approach that prioritises systemic change over short-term projects, ensuring stronger institutional support and financial backing for policy implementation. Additionally, improved results reporting through standardised impact measurement, stronger alignment between resource allocation and strategic priorities, and better data aggregation across thematic areas will contribute to enhanced accountability and more clearly demonstrate cohesive, large-scale progress (Box 1).

Box 1. Main strengths and areas for improvement

Main strengths

- The results structure of SPs and their alignment with relevant global frameworks in support of a well-articulated vision improved, and UN Women's vision is well understood by its primary stakeholders.
- Resource allocation and alignment with strategic priorities was optimised through the BRC, the Budget Allocation Committee (BAC), and the QBR process, which covers the country, regional, and global level. The Quantum Enterprise Resource Planning systems supports real-time financial tracking while the RMS improves monitoring and evaluation.
- UN Women-led inter-agency collaboration, reinforcing gender equality integration across the UN system through frameworks like UN-SWAP. Policy advocacy through high-level engagements, particularly through the CSW, remains a priority.
- Addressed previous gaps in the results framework, ensuring clearer linkages between activities and outcomes. Increased accountability and transparency through the Transparency Portal, offering real-time financial and programmatic data.
- UN Women played a catalytic role in advancing SDG 5 and embedding gender considerations across multiple SDGs. It directly contributed to gender-responsive legal reforms, enhancing protections against gender-based violence and increasing women's political participation.

Areas for improvement

- Translating high-level policy influence into sustained systemic change remains a challenge; programme implementation across regions is inconsistent for lack of comprehensive tools. Resource constraints and the lack of a financial sustainability strategy further limit the organisation's ability to scale its impact.
- Operational bottlenecks in procurement and finance have contributed to lower delivery rates. Decentralisation efforts have been slow: decision-making authority remains concentrated at HQ and the shift toward a more field-based workforce ongoing.
- UN Women has established some initial structures and incentives to support the utilisation of country systems, though they remain limited. It has been a strong advocate but its ability to turn advocacy into effective coordination remains uneven. Its coordination role within the UN system is weakened by operational inconsistencies and limited incentive mechanisms for gender mainstreaming.
- Despite improvements in results monitoring, corporate frameworks are often seen as compliance-driven rather than strategic, leading to inconsistent uptake at the country level. The large number of indicators in the RMS complicates data collection and knowledge management and dilutes meaningful impact measurement.
- Gaps in policy implementation at the national level, coupled with weak national ownership, institutional support and financial constraints, undermine the long-term impact of UN Women's advocacy and programmatic efforts. Several initiatives remain fragmented and overly reliant on short-term, donor-driven projects, making systemic change difficult to sustain.

METHODOLOGY

The approach to MOPAN assessments has evolved over time to adjust to the needs of the multilateral system. The MOPAN 3.1 Approach, the latest iteration, was taken in this assessment. A key refinement in this assessment was the explicit inclusion of humanitarian action as a cross-cutting issue (MI 2.5), reflecting UN Women's growing engagement in crisis response and conflict resolution. This addition ensures that the assessment captures the organisation's effectiveness in integrating gender-responsive approaches within the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

The assessment began in October 2023. It consisted of four phases: inception, evidence collection, analysis, and reporting (See Chapter 4). It was informed by three lines of evidence:

- **Document Review** – Covering 344 documents from January 2019 to March 2024, the review focused on policies, operations, partnerships, and performance. Documents were included only if finalised and recognised by management.
- **Interviews and Consultations** – Conducted in two stages (January and May-July 2024), including 54 focus group interviews. Field visits to Jordan and Uganda involved 83 interviews with CO staff, donors, and partners, while Geneva and HQ-based interviews engaged liaison offices, regional staff, and Executive Board (EB) members.
- **Partner Survey** – Conducted from 22 July-27 September 2024, with 275 responses (19% response rate) from governments, UN agencies, donors, and civil society partners. Gender-disaggregated data was collected for the first time, revealing some gender-based differences in perceptions, particularly in coordination, staffing adequacy, and financial transparency.

All evidence was triangulated, ensuring a balanced, rigorous assessment of UN Women's institutional effectiveness, strategic alignment, and operational challenges. Full details on the scoring and rating process are outlined in the MOPAN 3.1 methodology.

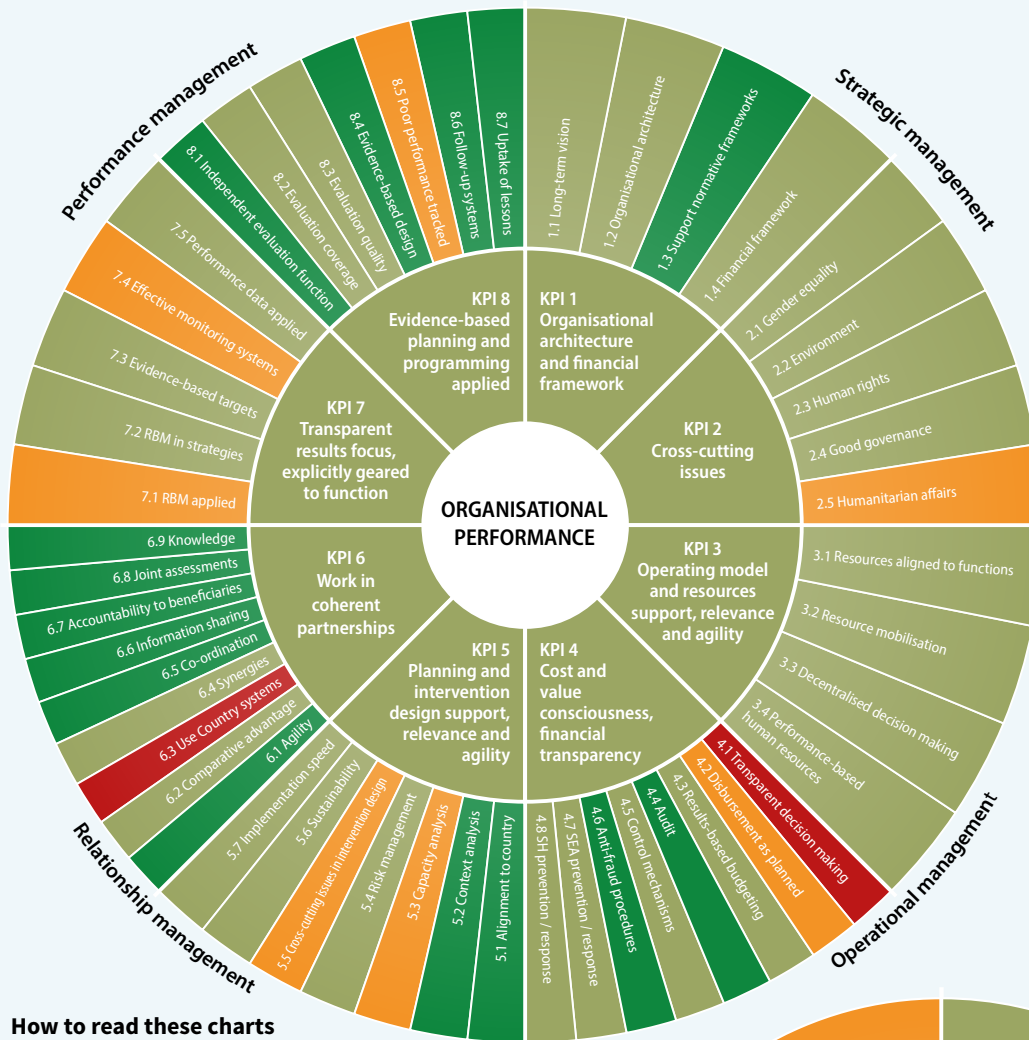


Women in the Security Sector

The role women play in the detection, investigation and prosecution of maritime crimes is often neglected, whether they act as facilitators, financiers, law enforcement officers, perpetrators or victims.

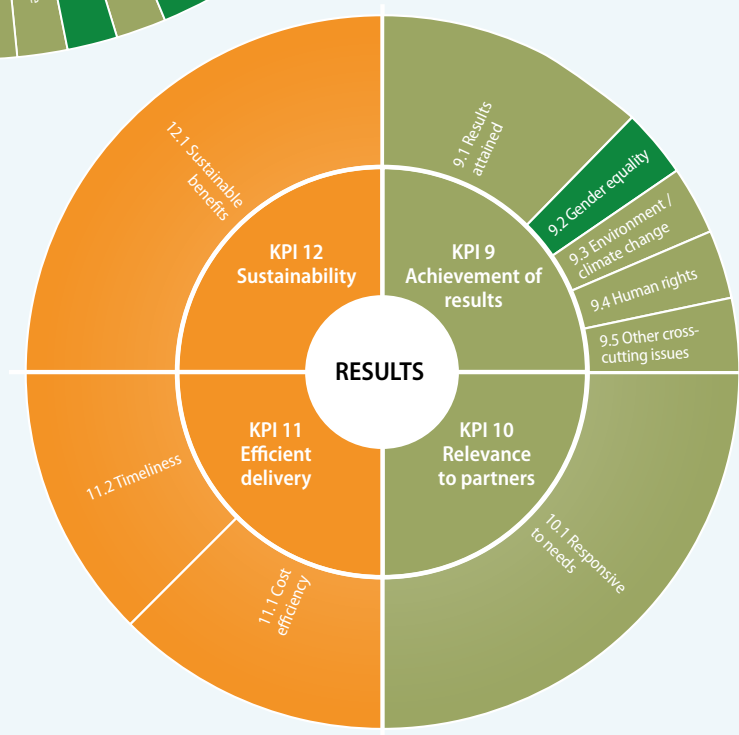
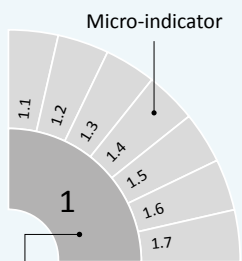
Ms Safia A. Kongo, Assistant Police Commissioner with the Maritime Police of Mwanza, Tanzania points out. “When you train a woman, you train a nation,” she says.
Photo: UNODC/ Pareet Shah

FIGURE 2: UN WOMEN PERFORMANCE RATING SUMMARY 2025



Disclaimer:
Each organisation MOPAN assesses has a unique mandate, business model and operating environment. In the dynamic context of multilateral development and cooperation, expectations and good practices change over time. The MOPAN framework reflects this unique context and evolution across different types of multilateral organisations. As such, comparison across assessments is strongly discouraged. More information on the rationale underlying MOPAN's assessment ratings can be found in Chapter 4 of this report or in Part II.

How to read these charts



It should be noted that MOPAN's approach to rating indicators has evolved since UN Women was last assessed. Compared to the pre-2019 rating scale, the threshold for each rating has been raised to reflect the increasing demands of organisational performance in the multilateral system. This may explain some of the variation against previous assessments. A scoring graphic relating to this assessment, but using the previous rating methodology, can be found in the main report (Part I), Chapter 4.

ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT OF UN WOMEN

The full MOPAN report provides a diagnostic assessment and snapshot of the organisational performance of the UN Women within its mandate. It covers the period from 2019 to 2023. This is the third assessment that MOPAN has conducted of UN Women. The first assessment was carried out in 2014, shortly after the 2010 creation of UN Women. The second assessment was carried out in 2017-18. UN Women was assessed through a rigorous process and a collaborative approach, integrating the perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders. It provides UN Women and its members with a robust account of UN Women's organisational strengths and the areas where improvements can be made. The assessment draws on multiple lines of evidence (documentary, survey, interviews) from sources within and outside the organisation to validate and triangulate findings across 12 key performance indicators (KPIs) which are further broken down into more than 220 individual indicators. The assessment framework reflects international best practice and has been customised to take account of UN Women's individual mandate and circumstances.

THE ASSESSMENT APPROACH

The approach to Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) assessments has evolved over time to adjust to the needs of the multilateral system. Starting in 2020, all assessments have used the MOPAN 3.1 methodology (MOPAN 2020), which was endorsed by MOPAN members in early 2020. The framework draws on the international standards and reference points, as described in the MOPAN Methodology Manual that is publicly available on the MOPAN website.

ABOUT MOPAN

MOPAN is a network of 22 members⁴ who assess multilateral organisations, shape performance standards, and champion learning and insights to strengthen development and humanitarian results and promote accountability. Capitalising on the Network's unique cross-multilateral system perspective and expertise, MOPAN members work together to deliver relevant, impartial, high-quality and timely performance information as a public good through an inclusive and transparent approach. MOPAN's performance information mitigates risks, informs decision-making and supports change, helping to increase knowledge and trust among all stakeholders and ultimately to achieve a stronger and better-performing multilateral system.



For more
information

4. Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Qatar, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States. *Türkiye is an observer.