



FINAL REPORT

REGIONAL EVALUATION OF UN WOMEN'S SUPPORT FOR
**CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT OF PARTNERS TO
RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF WOMEN AND
GIRLS IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA**



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This evaluation was conducted by the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service; by an independent evaluation team comprised of Isabel Suarez Garcia, UN Women Regional Evaluation Specialist for Europe and Central Asia and team lead for this evaluation; Aleksandar Zivanovic and Clare Castillejo, International Evaluation Experts; and Ayça Atabey, Research Assistant.

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Independent Evaluation Service (IES)

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ACRONYMS

CSO	Civil Society Organization
ECA	Europe and Central Asia
EU	European Union
EVAW	Eliminating Violence Against Women
IEAS	Independent Evaluation and Audit Services
IES	Independent Evaluation Service
L&G	Leadership and Governance
RMS	Results Management System
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

REGIONAL EVALUATION OF UN WOMEN'S SUPPORT FOR CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT OF PARTNERS TO RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

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The regional evaluation of UN Women's Support for Capacity Development to Respond to the Needs of Women and Girls in Europe and Central Asia was conducted by UN Women's Independent Evaluation Service (IES) of the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS). This regional strategic evaluation covered the period from 2018 to 2022. It was initiated in September 2022 and completed in April 2023. The findings, conclusions and recommendations arising from the evaluation are presented in this report.

The Regional Evaluation of UN Women's Support for Capacity Development of Partners to Respond to the Needs of Women and Girls in Europe and Central Asia was conducted in alignment with the corporate formative evaluation of UN Women's capacity development support. It served as a pilot exercise within UN Women to link regional and global evaluation processes for evaluations led by IES, with the aim of providing further evidence for findings; identifying any peculiarities of the regional context relevant for future corporate and regional efforts; and providing a coherent set of recommendations for each respective organizational level.

The evaluation looked at the effectiveness and efficiency of UN Women's support to capacity development in Europe and Central Asia; the role and contributions of the Regional Office to capacity development results; at how the COVID-19 and conflict in Ukraine crises shaped capacity development needs; to what extent UN Women managed to adjust and provide effective support in these emergency contexts; and to identify examples of good practices and different ways in which capacity development support contributes to the achievement of impact. The evaluation covered the period from 2018 to 2022 at the national and regional/subregional levels in Europe and Central Asia.

EVALUATION AND METHODOLOGY

The evaluation used a mixed-data collection approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Desk review, interviews and focus groups involving 109 key informants from UN Women, government and non-governmental partners, and two surveys involving 72 respondents were organized. Three case studies were developed (Georgia, Ukraine and Türkiye) and the case study on capacity development from the UN Women Country Office Moldova Country Portfolio Evaluation was used to provide in-depth understanding of how capacity development works in the region. Qualitative content analysis, descriptive statistics, theories of change mapping and contribution analysis were used in the analysis and presentation of collected data.

MAIN EVALUATION QUESTIONS



How does UN Women assess its partners' capacity needs to **ensure the relevance** of its capacity development interventions?

To what extent is the design of UN Women's capacity development interventions **aligned with the needs identified** and objectives set at the diagnosis stage?



To what extent did the delivery of these capacity development interventions provide an **adequate learning environment/ environment for change**?



To what extent did the capacity-building intervention provide continuous **follow-up support and link with other relevant UN Women or external interventions**?



To what extent are UN Women's organizational processes and structures, and its human, financial and technical **resources adequate to provide capacity development support to partners**?



To what extent did the capacity development support bring **change at individual, organizational and systemic level**?

How **sustainable** are the results from UN Women's support for capacity development?

CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSION 1:

Capacity development is a central element of UN Women's work within Europe and Central Asia and is recognized as valuable by multiple stakeholders. The focus of capacity development support is mostly relevant to the context; aligned with national priorities and processes; addresses core drivers of gender inequality; and is situated within women's rights and human rights frameworks.

Across all Country Offices, UN Women personnel had a strong understanding of country context and high-quality partnerships contributed to the relevance of capacity development interventions and alignment with national priorities. Some Country Offices also used a systematic and structured approach to diagnosis and design to deepen relevance; ensure that interventions address core gender inequality drivers; and build ownership. For example, in both Georgia and Ukraine (before the conflict), the evaluation found emerging practices in standardization of demand driven, participatory approaches to capacity development diagnosis and design, and the development of broad institutional action plans to ensure ownership. In other contexts, there is a high level of variation in the approach to diagnosis and design between projects and activities, which needs to be addressed.

CONCLUSION 2:

There are significant differences in the quality of capacity development support both across the region and within Country Offices, highlighting the need for stronger systems to share best practice.

While some interventions were of a high quality; used appropriate (and in some cases innovative) delivery modalities; and brought in experts well matched to the needs of participants, other interventions exhibited much weaker design and delivery. Sharing learning and best practice could be one way to improve the situation and raise standards across the region. However, the evaluation found no systematic sharing of practices or experiences across the region, or attempts to standardize capacity development approaches based on evidence. This is part of a wider weakness across the organization, as the corporate evaluation concluded that there is no systematic approach within UN Women to ensuring quality standards across the various stages of capacity development interventions, resulting in significant differences in quality.

CONCLUSION 3:

Within monitoring and evaluation of UN Women's capacity development work in Europe and Central Asia there is an overreliance on tracking lower-level results and insufficient monitoring of longer-term outcomes and impact.

Monitoring of capacity development support is generally focused on tracking the delivery of capacity development support; the number and type of interventions; and the knowledge and skills that participants have gained, with far less focus on monitoring how participants use new knowledge and skills over time to create change for women and girls. This is a problem across the organization, as identified in the corporate evaluation.

UN Women personnel in the Europe and Central Asia region recognize the need to strengthen monitoring of capacity development results to identify such longer-term impact. This will require greater investment in time and resources, including investing in tracking results beyond the life of a given project. However, such investment could significantly strengthen UN Women's understanding of how capacity development support can contribute to impact, resulting in more realistic theories of change and effective interventions.

CONCLUSION 4:

UN Women personnel and stakeholders across the region recognize the critical importance of providing sustained follow-up to capacity development to support participants in applying their learning and creating change, and embedding and sustaining results. However, in practice, such follow-up is often not provided.

Follow-up support is provided in some capacity development interventions and is undertaken using a range of modalities. However, in many others such support is limited or entirely absent. This is due to a range of constraints, including short-term projects, short-term and limited funding, and limited human resources. However, there appears to be a growing focus across Country Offices to include follow-up support within capacity development interventions due to increased awareness of its importance for supporting action and generating results. It is important that plans for follow-up are built into capacity development design from the outset and are sufficiently resourced.

CONCLUSION 5:

The current focus of UN Women’s capacity development support across the region is on developing capacity at individual and (to a lesser extent) organizational levels, with limited focus on developing capacity at the systemic level or working across different levels.

Within capacity development support in the region, strong emphasis is given to developing the knowledge, skills, awareness and self-confidence of individuals; and to a slightly lesser extent on developing more gender-responsive organizational policies, processes and budgets. Much less emphasis is given to using capacity development interventions to contribute to change at systemic level: where this does exist, it is focused mostly on formal legal and policy frameworks, with very little focus on informal systemic aspects of gender inequality.

This is part of a wider pattern within capacity development work across UN Women, as the corporate evaluation also concluded that the current focus is on developing capacity at individual and organizational levels, with limited focus on developing capacity at the level of the enabling environment or working across multiple levels. Working in a joined-up way to develop capacities across multiple levels to advance gender equality goals could significantly strengthen the impact of UN Women’s capacity development work.

CONCLUSION 6:

Capacity development initiatives in the region are mostly perceived as efficient, with good organization, strong communication and a high level of responsiveness to the needs of partners, although some internal factors have hampered efficiency.

There is a relatively high level of satisfaction with the efficiency of UN Women’s capacity development support across countries, interventions and categories of stakeholders; in particular with the professionalism, expertise and supportiveness of UN Women personnel. However, in some cases, efficiency was undermined by what some stakeholders expressed as slow, centralized and inflexible organizational procedures, which have also made it difficult for grassroots organizations to access UN Women support. While some Country Offices had adequate financial and human resources for capacity development work, others reported their ability to provide capacity development support was hampered by inadequate personnel or insufficient funds.

CONCLUSION 7:

The sustainability of capacity development results in the region is currently weak and should be given greater priority and addressed from the outset within all capacity development interventions.

Although there are some positive examples where sustainability has been prioritized, overall, the evaluation found that the sustainability of capacity development support is a major challenge that is not given sufficient attention. Sustainability is frequently undermined by a number of factors, notably interventions that are not locally owned and embedded; interventions that involve short-term capacity development support without meaningful follow-up or a realistic exit strategy; and high turnover of personnel or changing priorities within partner organizations. This reflects a key conclusion from the corporate evaluation that, across the organization, the sustainability of capacity development work has been hampered by limited ownership, the short-term nature of initiatives and limited funding. Where sustainability was achieved it was a result of building ownership of capacity development work; embedding capacity development support in local institutions; connecting capacity development support to national processes and agendas; and by providing follow-up support to participants.

LESSONS LEARNED

Capacity development support is most successful when it is clearly relevant to context, is owned by national actors and is based on strong partnerships.



Capacity development support that is delivered using multiple modalities, including innovative ones, and combines knowledge transfer with supporting participants to take action is particularly effective in supporting change across the region.



It is critical to provide follow-up with participants after a capacity development intervention to support them in applying new learning and skills.



Weaknesses in capturing higher-level and longer-term results from capacity development initiatives limit understanding of how UN Women’s capacity development work in the region contributes to gender equality goals.

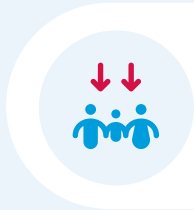


A holistic approach that seeks to develop capacity at individual, organizational and systemic levels is the most effective in advancing change within the region.



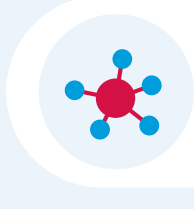
Sustaining results from capacity development support is a major challenge that is not given sufficient focus.

RECOMMENDATIONS



RECOMMENDATION 1

The ECA Regional Office should contribute to corporate efforts to build a systematic approach and bring a certain level of standardization to its capacity development support to partners. In consultation with Country Offices, the Regional Office should identify areas in which a certain level of flexibility should be open to Country Offices to adjust approaches to specific country needs.



RECOMMENDATION 2

The ECA Regional Office should develop a clearer regional vision for capacity development support followed by a strategy for stakeholders other than governments, primarily civil society stakeholders, business entities and grassroots organizations representing or working with the most vulnerable groups.



RECOMMENDATION 3

The ECA Regional Office should take a stronger lead on knowledge dissemination (including dissemination of any potential corporate guidelines on capacity development), knowledge generation from the country level and facilitation of knowledge exchange and communities of practice, both among UN Women personnel and prominent partners.



RECOMMENDATION 4

The ECA Regional Office should identify thematic areas of interest for national partners and analyse and strengthen its own capacities with regards to capacity development in conflict and crisis contexts.

DATA COLLECTED FOR THE EVALUATION

97

interviews:

with 109 key informants (97 women & 12 men) from UN Women Country offices and ROs, government and CSO representatives, development partners, end beneficiaries

246

documents reviewed:

annual plans and reports, budgets, project documents, analyses and knowledge products, evaluation reports, capacity development monitoring reports and records

4

country case studies:

Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Türkiye

2

Surveys

2 surveys involving 72 respondents (62 women, 9 men 1 preferred not to say)

PLANNED CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT BUDGETS PER THEMATIC AREA IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA (2018–2022)





Photo: ©UN Women/Gender Data Workshop, Kyrgyzstan

1.BACKGROUND

1.1. Introduction

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) regularly evaluates its work to enhance accountability, inform decision-making and contribute to learning. Corporate and regional thematic evaluations in UN Women are conducted by the UN Women's Independent Evaluation Service (IES), part of the Entity's Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS).

At the end of 2021, IES started a corporate, formative evaluation of UN Women's support for partner capacity development to respond to the needs of women and girls at the national level. A regional evaluation in Europe and Central Asia (ECA) followed in the period September 2022 to April 2023 to expand on the lessons from the corporate-level evaluation, with a focus tailored to the regional context and the needs identified in the inception phase. This regional evaluation focused on practices and results in ECA and explored additional issues of interest identified, such as the role of UN Women in capacity development in conflict and crisis situations; online provision of capacity development support; and capacity development support to partners at the regional level. The regional evaluation covered UN Women's support for capacity development to partners during 2018–2022 at the national and regional levels in ECA.

This report was developed based on the evaluation team's review of documents; analysis of entries in the corporate results-based management system (RMS) based on Strategic Plan outputs 2018-2021; review of financial information; and data collection (key informant interviews and focus group discussions with a total of 67 interviewees, surveys with a total of 48 partner respondents and 24 UN Women personnel at regional and country levels, as well as external stakeholders. The report was quality assured by the IEAS Director and IES Chief and peer-reviewed by an IES peer reviewer prior to finalization.

This regional evaluation was conducted simultaneously with the Corporate Formative Evaluation of UN Women's Support for Capacity Development of Partners to Respond to the Needs of Women and Girls at National Level. It served as a pilot exercise at UN Women to link regional and global evaluation processes for IES-led evaluations, with the aim of providing further evidence for findings; identifying any peculiarities of the context relevant for future corporate and regional efforts; and providing a coherent set of recommendations for each respective organizational level.

1.2 Overall and UN context

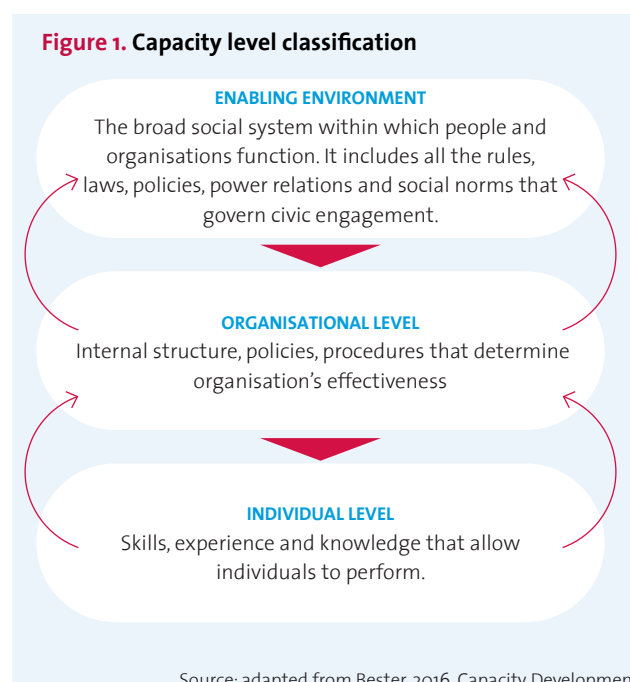
The definition of capacity development¹

Despite widespread agreement on the importance of capacity development within development discourse, the terms 'capacity' and 'capacity development' are open to interpretation. Over time, capacity development has evolved from the original understanding of being synonymous with education and training to a broader system of interventions – such as coaching, mentoring and peer-to-peer support – that foster the knowledge base and capacity of individuals and organizations.

The most widely accepted definition of 'capacity', and that utilized by the evaluation, is 'the ability of people, organizations and society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully.'² Capacity development is defined as 'the process whereby people, organizations and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain capacity over time.'³ In the context of this evaluation, it relates specifically to strengthening UN Women partners' capacities to support results in gender equality and women's empowerment.⁴

Dimensions of capacity development

Traditionally, capacity development efforts have focused on individual and organizational levels, but practitioners have increasingly recognized the importance of working at the system level to provide a conducive environment for change. Capacities can therefore be classified into three interlinked levels: individual, organizational and enabling environment, as depicted in Figure 1.



¹ Elaboration of key definitions is taken from the corporate evaluation inception report.

² Capacity Development DAC, 2006, The Challenge of Capacity Development - Working towards Good Practice.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Adapted from UN Women, 2021, Key Lessons Learned on Capacity Development.

Capacities are often grouped into ‘technical’ and ‘functional’ types. Technical capacities are specific to a particular sector or area, e.g. nursing, primary education, water and sanitation, forestry, farming and animal husbandry etc. Functional capacities are relatively common across sectors or areas such as planning, budgeting, policymaking, financial analysis, strategy formulation and communications.⁵

Capacity development within the global normative framework

Capacity development has a long history as a means of achieving sustainable development. This is reflected in the outcome documents and action plans adopted by major international conferences on sustainable development. For example, Agenda 21, adopted at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, addresses capacity-building in Chapter 37.⁶

Decisions relating to capacity-building were taken by the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development at its fourth (1996), fifth (1997) and sixth (1998) sessions and by the UN General Assembly at its Special Session to review implementation of Agenda 21 (1997). The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, adopted at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, also recognized the importance of capacity-building to achieve sustainable development. Similarly, the outcome document of the Rio +20 Conference,⁷ *The Future We Want*,⁸ emphasized the need for enhanced capacity-building for sustainable development and for strengthening technical and scientific cooperation.⁹

Capacity development is now an integral part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, SDG 17, focuses on the global partnership for sustainable development and contains target 17.9 “Enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the Sustainable Development Goals, including through North-South, South-South, and triangular cooperation”. In this way, capacity development is considered a vehicle for meeting the SDGs and sustaining achievements over the long term.¹⁰

1.3 UN Women’s work related to capacity development

Capacity development support to partners has been a key intervention strategy in UN Women’s work and cuts across the Entity’s thematic areas and priorities. UN Women delivers on its commitment to support Member States in addressing structural barriers to gender equality and women’s empowerment by leveraging its triple mandate of normative support, UN system coordination and operational activities. Within this triple mandate, UN Women uses capacity development to partners as a key strategy to achieve its outcomes.

In line with its comparative advantage and objective to advance the gender equality and women’s empowerment agenda in a comprehensive manner, the UN Women 2018–2021 Strategic Plan envisioned capacity development as a key means of support in its operational activities to be provided to partnership stakeholders.¹¹

Strong importance is also given to capacity development in the 2022–2025 Strategic Plan, where capacity development is recognized as one of the intervention strategies to achieve results.¹² The 2022–2025 Strategic Plan contains 11 indicators aimed at measuring the capacity development of various stakeholders. To strengthen consistency in UN Women’s approach to capacity development, as part of developing the 2022–2025 Strategic Plan, the organization produced a document that articulates a definition of capacity development and proposes a standardized methodology to measure capacity development outputs.¹³

At the ECA regional level, both Strategic Plans covering the period from 2018 to 2022 (2018–2021 and 2022–2025) foresee the provision of access to knowledge and tools, and partner capacity development at the national level through regional programmes. In the Regional Office’s Strategic Note 2018–2021, 19 of 20 outputs clearly focus on the capacity development of various stakeholders in the region. There is a strong emphasis on cooperation with key UN and other regional and subregional organizations on research and knowledge products (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, European Institute for Gender Equality, Council of Europe and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe).

⁵ UNDG, 2017, Capacity Development: UNDAF Companion Guidance.

⁶ Agenda 21 - Chapter 37 National Mechanisms and International Cooperation for Capacity Building in Developing Countries, United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, 1992, p. 329.

⁷ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/rio20.html>

⁸ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/rio20/futurewewant>

⁹ <https://sdgs.un.org/topics/capacity-development>

¹⁰ Vallejo, B., and Wehn, U., 2016, Capacity Development Evaluation: The Challenge of the Results Agenda and Measuring Return on Investment in the Global South. World Development Vol.79, pp 1-13

¹¹ UN Women Strategic Plan 2018-2021, p. 13

¹² UN Women Strategic Plan 2022-2025, p. 9

¹³ Methodology for SP Indicators on capacity development, UN Women (For internal use only).

At the country level, capacity development is a key strategy for implementation of Country Office Strategic Notes. Between 62 per cent (Türkiye) and 100 per cent of outputs in Strategic Note Development Results Frameworks (Serbia, North Macedonia, Kosovo,¹⁴ Kyrgyzstan) clearly focus on capacity development. This finding is based either on an analysis of output statements or on the set of indicators on capacity development. The remaining indicators usually relate to building an enabling environment for gender equality and the rights of women and girls and the capacities to be applied (such as advocacy, awareness raising and intra or inter-institutional coordination for better service provision).

Capacity development cross-cuts all programmes and is managed by project/programme managers. No full-time personnel are dedicated solely to capacity development; however, programme and monitoring and reporting analysts are attempting to standardize the approach to needs assessments and to design, monitoring and reporting on capacity development to partners (Georgia and Ukraine) (see Table 1).

Table 1: Capacity development outputs in the development results framework sections of UN Women Country Office Strategic Notes/annual workplans⁵

STRATEGIC NOTES	CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT OUTPUTS / TOTAL OUTPUTS
Albania 2017–2021	14/15
Bosnia and Herzegovina 2015–2020	13/14
Bosnia and Herzegovina 2021–2025	10/11
Georgia 2016–2020	7/10
Georgia 2021–2025	8/10
Kazakhstan 2016–2020	12/16
Kazakhstan 2021–2025	9/12
Kosovo* 2015–2018	5/5
Kosovo* 2019–2021	16/21
Kyrgyzstan 2018–2022	14/14
Moldova 2018–2022	8/10
North Macedonia 2015–2018	8/8
North Macedonia 2019–2021	12/12
Serbia 2015–2018	2/2
Serbia 2019–2021	5/5
Tajikistan 2016–2020	12/17
Tajikistan 2021–2026	11/18
Türkiye 2015–2018	13/21
Türkiye 2019–2021	12/12
Ukraine 2018–2022	9/12

Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on UN Women's Country Office Strategic Notes

¹⁴ All references to Kosovo on this website should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

¹⁵ Some Country Offices including Kosovo, Serbia, North Macedonia, and Tajikistan (Country Offices that were previously named project offices) do not have Strategic Notes. The Tajikistan Country Office, despite being a former non-resident agency, has developed a Strategic Note for 2023–26, which includes capacity development of partners as an important intervention under specific objectives.

¹⁶ Reports of sessions of the UN Women Executive Board are available at this link: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/executive-board/reports>

¹⁷ UN Women's internal self-reported system.

UN Women's strategic frameworks demonstrate the commitment to develop the capacities of both duty bearers (to ensure that institutional and policy frameworks are gender-responsive) and rights holders (to foster their agency and empowerment and support them in the realization of their rights).

Many country-level Strategic Notes (for example, Georgia, Türkiye, North Macedonia, Tajikistan) emphasize the importance of capacity development for grassroots women's groups and vulnerable groups of women, including women survivors of violence, women affected by conflict, rural women and LGBTQI+ women.

Annual reporting of capacity development in Regional and Country Offices in the ECA region

The corporate evaluation found that in annual reports to the Executive Board,¹⁶ the Regional and Country Offices confirmed their commitment to developing the capacities of stakeholders in all its priority areas. In 2018, 2019 and 2020, several results were reported, with training being the primary method utilized to build capacities, often accompanied by technical assistance, dialogue facilitation and advocacy support.

Outcomes 2 (Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems) and 3 (Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy) appeared to be the priority areas where capacity development results were reported most consistently. According to the reports, a wide range of different stakeholders has received capacity development from UN Women.

The Regional Office's annual reports in RMS¹⁷ summarize key developments in the ECA region, elaborating on capacity development support for the advancement of national SDGs, and monitoring and reporting on human rights and international gender equality commitments. The annual reports also highlight capacity development delivered to national partners through regional programmes, such as gender-responsive budgeting "Promoting Gender-responsive policies in South East Europe and the Republic of Moldova" (2014–2019) and "Implementing Norms, Changing Minds" (Phase II: February 2020–July 2023), "Making Every Woman and Girl Count: Supporting the monitoring and implementation of the SDGs through better production and use of gender statistics (MEWGC)" (2018–2022) and to some extent "EU 4 Gender Equality: Together Against Gender Stereotypes and Gender-Based Violence" (2020–2023).

RMS reports also include target groups for capacity development, including national governments and government agencies (audit, statistics), local government, judiciary and civil society organizations (CSOs), and gender-based violence protection services. The reports mention training as the most frequent type of capacity development, while mentoring and coaching of national partners are occasionally mentioned. In addition to national capacity development, the Regional Office reports on effective cross-country exchange and knowledge generation and the establishment of a community of practitioners as another form of knowledge sharing.

1.4 Financial description of portfolio and information availability

Experiences from the corporate evaluation and the case study of UN Women's work in Moldova showed that output-based tracking of budget plans and delivery might not be fully accurate. This was because Country Offices were not necessarily labelling all relevant outputs as capacity development, or the output integrated more strategies than just capacity development.¹⁸ Therefore, the evaluation team opted to include an analysis of annual RMS budget plans 2018–2022 at the activity level to calculate the size of capacity development support in the ECA region.

However, the financial information might not be completely accurate, as this analysis did not take into account the salaries of the UN Women personnel who engaged in capacity development work.

During 2018–2021, the Regional Office and Country Offices budgeted US\$ 122 million¹⁹ for capacity development to partners (Country Offices: US\$ 106,307,955.00 and Regional Office US\$ 15,049,010.00). This represents 47.4 per cent of the total planned budget.

The corporate evaluation identified overall capacity development expenditure for the entire organization at approximately US\$ 152,000,000 and in the ECA region US\$ 9,700,000.²⁰ This again confirms the challenges in analysing financial data, as the accounting systems are not meant to capture the nature of interventions but rather the type of Country Offices.

Table 2. Capacity development budgets per office

COUNTRY OFFICE/ PRESENCE	CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT BUDGET (US\$, 2018-2022)	TOTAL BUDGET (US\$, 2018-2022)	% OF THE TOTAL BUDGET	IMPACT AREAS WITH LARGEST INVESTMENT
Albania	5,991,734	14,111,592	42.5%	EVAW
Bosnia and Herzegovina	7,194,689	17,231,547	41.8%	EVAW
Georgia	13,317,102	28,188,639	47.2%	WEE
Kazakhstan	6,847,189	15,421,121	44.4%	L&G
Kosovo*	3,130,579	7,200,694	43.5%	EVAW
Kyrgyzstan	7,036,593	12,038,934	58.4%	EVAW
Moldova	10,872,929	22,782,151	47.7%	EVAW
North Macedonia	6,129,740	10,597,316	57.8%	L&G
Serbia	8,571,267	14,554,118	58.9%	EVAW
Tajikistan	2,411,247	4,988,533	48.33%	EVAW
Türkiye	16,477,645	37,607,131	43.8%	L&G
Ukraine	18,327,241	31,129,301	58.9%	WPS
ECARO	15,049,010	41,603,899	36.2%	EVAW

Source: UN Women RMS (accessed August 2022)

Table 3. Planned capacity development budgets per thematic area (2018–2022, all offices)

EVAW	46,363,818	38%
WEE	12,387,048	10%
L&G	44,230,630	37%
WPS	18,082,633	15%
Global norms	292,836	
Total	121,356,965	100%

Source: UN Women RMS (accessed August 2022)

¹⁸ The Country Portfolio Evaluation of the UN Women Moldova Country Office Case-Study on UN Women's Support to Capacity Development during 2018–2022, showed that Country Office costs labelled as 'training, workshops, conferences' were disproportionate in comparison to the planned budgets for capacity development. The accounting data provided by the Moldova Country Office for the period showed that the budget for 'training, workshops, conferences' was 4 per cent of the total Moldova Country Office budget, while the review of the annual budget plans revealed the planned budget for capacity development activities was over 47 per cent of the total budget. This discrepancy was due to the accounting codes and accounting practices that make some capacity development related costs 'hidden' under other budget categories, such as other services, supplies and contractual services.

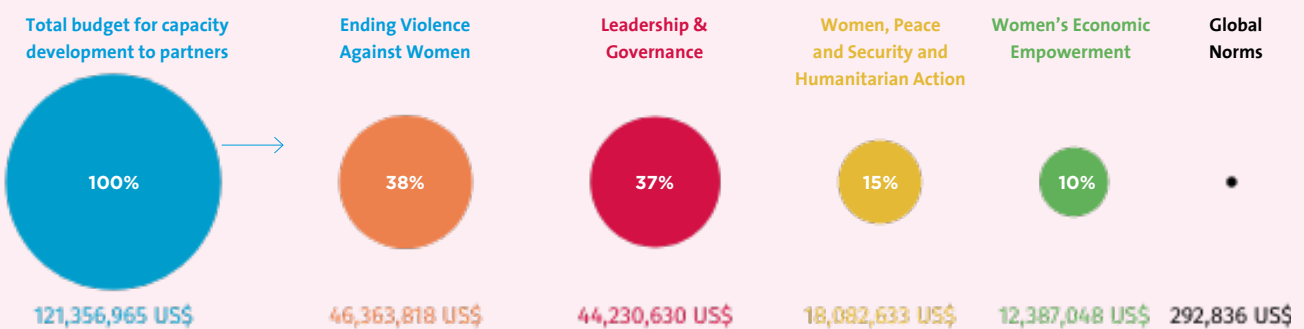
¹⁹ Financial data was extracted from the UN Women annual budget plans from RMS (August 2022). All the activities that clearly mentioned needs assessments and gender analyses linked to capacity-development activities, skills, ability, capacity development or building, training, technical and advisory support, knowledge products, guides and manuals were considered.

²⁰ For the corporate evaluation, financial data was extracted from the UN Women <https://apps-oneapp.unwomen.org/Dashboard>. The data reflects the 17 Strategic Plan outputs identified as relating to capacity development to partners from 2018 to 2021 (data exported in December 2021 and January 2022).

In terms of thematic areas, the data shows that Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW) (US\$ 46,363,818) and Leadership & Governance (L&G) (US\$ 44,230,630) have the highest budgets for capacity development to partners, followed by Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action, and Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and lastly Global Norms, Policies and Standards. Budget share for the latter three areas is probably somewhat higher as in some Country Offices these areas were small and integrated into other thematic areas.

The financial analysis clearly shows the size of the capacity development portfolio in UN Women's overall programming and the need for corporate attention to strengthen the Entity's own capacities, approaches and effectiveness in this area of work.

PLANNED CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT BUDGETS PER THEMATIC AREA (2018–2022)



2. EVALUATION PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

2.1 Purpose, objectives, scope and focus

The purpose of the evaluation was to extend the analyses of the corporate evaluation of UN Women's support to capacity development and provide a more in-depth understanding of the context and approaches to capacity development in Europe and Central Asia at the country, regional and subregional level.

The objectives of this regional evaluation were to:

- a. Expand corporate-level analysis of UN Women's support for capacity development of partners to respond to the needs of women and girls with the aim to achieve gender equality at national level in the Europe and Central Asia region.
- b. Evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of UN Women in the Europe and Central Asia region in providing support for the capacity development of partners to respond to the needs of women and girls at the national level.
- c. Understand the role and contributions of the Regional Office to capacity development of partners at the national, regional and subregional level; knowledge generation and exchange; and potential multiplication or spill-over effects across country borders.
- d. Identify how the COVID-19 and conflict in Ukraine crises shaped capacity development needs and to what extent UN Women managed to adjust and provide effective support in the emergency context.
- e. Identify examples of good practices and different ways in which capacity development support contributes to the achievement of impact from key interventions that include support for capacity development of partners in different countries across Europe and Central Asia that Country Offices can leverage for capacity development initiatives.
- f. Develop lessons learned and recommendations to strengthen UN Women's national and regional capacity development support strategies to partners to respond to the needs of women and girls.

The evaluation looked at the capacity development support UN Women provided to partners from 2018 to 2022 at the national and regional/subregional levels in the ECA region. Focus was on the capacity development of external partners: the evaluation did not assess internal capacity development of UN Women personnel or for UN system partners.

2.2 Stakeholder mapping

Based on the inception interviews, and review of Strategic Notes and annual workplans, reports and programme evaluation reports, the evaluation team mapped key stakeholders engaged in and/or affected by capacity development activities supported by UN Women at the regional and country level (see Annex 2). Stakeholders were grouped into two main categories: duty-bearers and rights holders.

The duty bearers included the internal stakeholders that play an active role in designing, developing and delivering capacity development interventions (the UN Women Regional Director and Country Representatives; programme managers and specialists engaged in specific thematic areas; and monitoring and reporting specialists for their programmatic and implementation work related to capacity development); external stakeholders (development partners and donors were considered for their contribution to funding capacity development activities, but also as beneficiaries of some knowledge generation and capacity-development interventions); and implementing partners (such as governments, national gender machineries, civil servant training agencies, statistic agencies, CSOs and the private sector).

Rights-holders are the end-beneficiaries of capacity development interventions, and women and girls, with a particular focus on marginalized or left behind groups (e.g. women with disabilities, women survivors of violence, women living with HIV/AIDS, women belonging to LGBTQI+ groups, women living in rural areas etc.). The evaluation sought to understand their perspectives as individual recipients of empowerment interventions but also as ultimate beneficiaries of actions by duty bearers that resulted from UN Women-supported capacity development interventions.

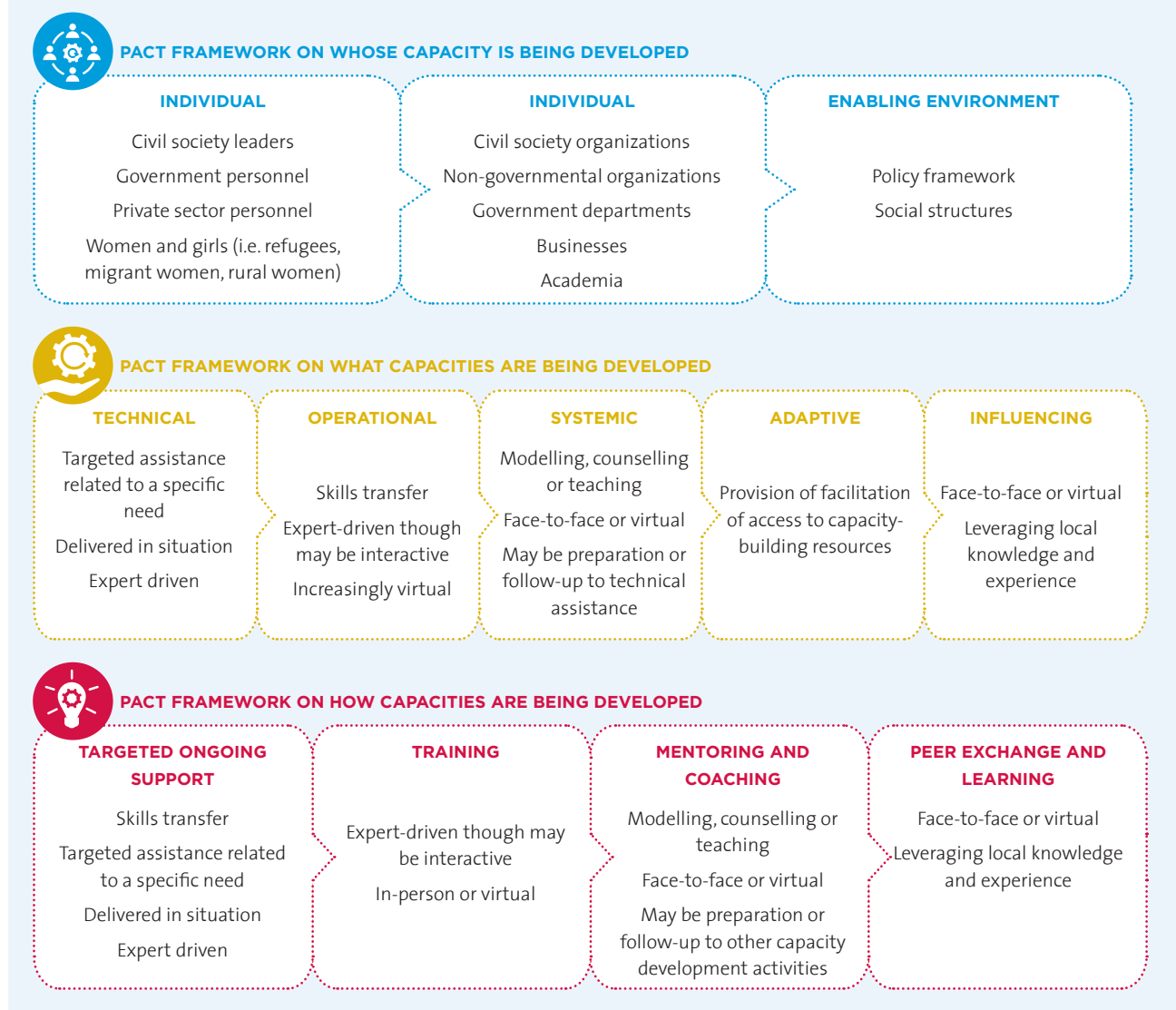
2.3 Evaluation approach and the theory of change

To understand and assess UN Women’s capacity development to partners, this evaluation brought together models and methodologies, including a capacity development framework, theory-based evaluation approach and contribution analysis. The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the UN Women Evaluation Policy,²¹ United Nations Evaluation Group’s Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System.²² All members of the team signed and submitted an Evaluation Consultants

Agreement Form indicating their individual commitment to these standards. The evaluation also applied gender-responsive evaluation principles and incorporated a “no one left behind” perspective, including disability inclusion.

In line with the corporate evaluation, in the development of the evaluation approach, the PACT²³ ‘Capacity Development Framework’ was taken into consideration.

Figure 2. PACT framework on whose capacity is being developed



²¹ UN Women, Evaluation Policy of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNW/2012/12)

²² United Nations Evaluation Group Ethical Guidelines, accessible at: http://www.uneval.org/papersandpubs/documentdetail.jsp?doc_id=102 and Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN system, accessible at: http://www.uneval.org/papersandpubs/documentdetail.jsp?doc_id=100

²³ <https://www.pactworld.org/>

The corporate evaluation identified that UN Women did not have a theory of change that elaborates on how its support for capacity development contributes to the wider outcomes and impact the Entity seeks to achieve. The corporate evaluation team developed a theory of change for the purposes of that evaluation, which also works for the regional evaluation. This does not aim to be the theory of change for UN Women's work on capacity development, but rather was a tool that helped both evaluation teams assess when and where, to what extent, and in what ways, support for the capacity development of partners has contributed to gender equality and women's empowerment outcomes.

Beginning on the left, the theory of change identifies a range of inputs that relate to the three stages of capacity development: planning and design, delivery and follow-up. It then identifies a range of capacity development outputs that result from these inputs. The theory of change articulates how these outputs lead to a set of lower-level outcomes related to increased knowledge, skills and capabilities within individuals, groups/organizations and the environment. It then articulates how these lower-level outcomes contribute to higher-level outcomes in the form of actions and changes that actively advance gender equality and women's empowerment. Finally, it illustrates how these higher-level outcome

The evaluation criteria and eight key evaluation questions followed the capacity development theory of change and were developed based on the evaluation objectives, inception interviews and analytical frameworks used.

While the regional evaluation still responds to the questions set by the corporate evaluation,²⁴ it is organized around the phases of the capacity development cycle and explores UN Women's performance in each phase.

The evaluation used a mixed-data collection method, combining qualitative methods (including key informant interviews and document review), and quantitative methods through analysis of quantitative data from documentation and surveys. Triangulation of different sources of information, e.g. quantitative and qualitative data collected through different data collection tools was applied to ensure the objectivity of findings and conclusions on each evaluation question (see the Evaluation Matrix in Annex 6).

Three country case studies were developed (Georgia, Ukraine and Türkiye) and the case study on capacity development from UN Women Country Office Moldova Country Portfolio Evaluation was used to provide in-depth understanding of how capacity development works in the region.²⁵ The criteria by which the case studies were selected included: a high level of budget allocated to capacity development; potential good practices/lessons learned at different stages of the capacity development continuum identified within inception interviews; potential good practices in capacity development in crisis situations; and lessons learned identified in the inception interviews.

Qualitative content analysis, descriptive statistics, theories of change mapping and contribution analysis were used in the analysis and presentation of collected data.

Table 4. Evaluation questions

<p>DIAGNOSIS (Relevance)</p> <p>How does UN Women assess its partners' capacity needs to ensure the relevance of its capacity development interventions?</p>	<p>DESIGN (Relevance, effectiveness)</p> <p>To what extent is the design of UN Women's capacity development interventions aligned with the needs identified and objectives set at the diagnosis stage?</p>	<p>DELIVERY (Relevance, effectiveness)</p> <p>To what extent did the delivery of these capacity development interventions provide an adequate learning environment/environment for change?</p>	<p>SYNERGIES AND FOLLOW-UP (Effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability)</p> <p>To what extent did the capacity-building intervention provide continuous follow-up support and link with other relevant UN Women or external interventions?</p>
<p>HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY (Relevance, effectiveness)</p> <p>To what extent did the capacity development intervention address underlying causes of gender inequality and the needs of vulnerable groups?</p>	<p>EFFICIENCY</p> <p>To what extent are UN Women's organizational processes and structures, and its human, financial and technical resources adequate to provide capacity development support to partners?</p>	<p>CHANGE AT INDIVIDUAL, ORGANIZATIONAL AND SYSTEMIC LEVEL (Effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability)</p> <p>To what extent did the capacity development support bring change at individual, organizational and systemic level?</p>	<p>SUSTAINABILITY</p> <p>How sustainable are the results from UN Women's support for capacity development?</p>

²⁴ The corporate evaluation explored five key questions: (i) To what extent is UN Women's support for capacity development effective in delivering impact for women and girls?; (ii) To what extent is UN Women's support for capacity development coherent in approach and coordinated across the organization and with external stakeholders?; (iii) How are human rights, gender equality and inclusion incorporated into UN Women's support for capacity development?; (iv) To what extent are UN Women's organizational processes and structures, and its human, financial and technical resources, adequate to provide capacity development support to partners?; and (v) How sustainable are the results from UN Women's support for capacity development?

²⁵ The Moldova Case Study was developed as part of the UN Women Moldova Country Portfolio Evaluation 2018-2022, conducted in 2022 and the findings, conclusions and recommendations were extensively used in the Regional Evaluation of UN Women's Support for Capacity Development of Partners to Respond to the needs of Women and Girls in Europe and Central Asia.

Figure 3. Reconstructed theory of change developed by the evaluation team based on interviews and document analysis

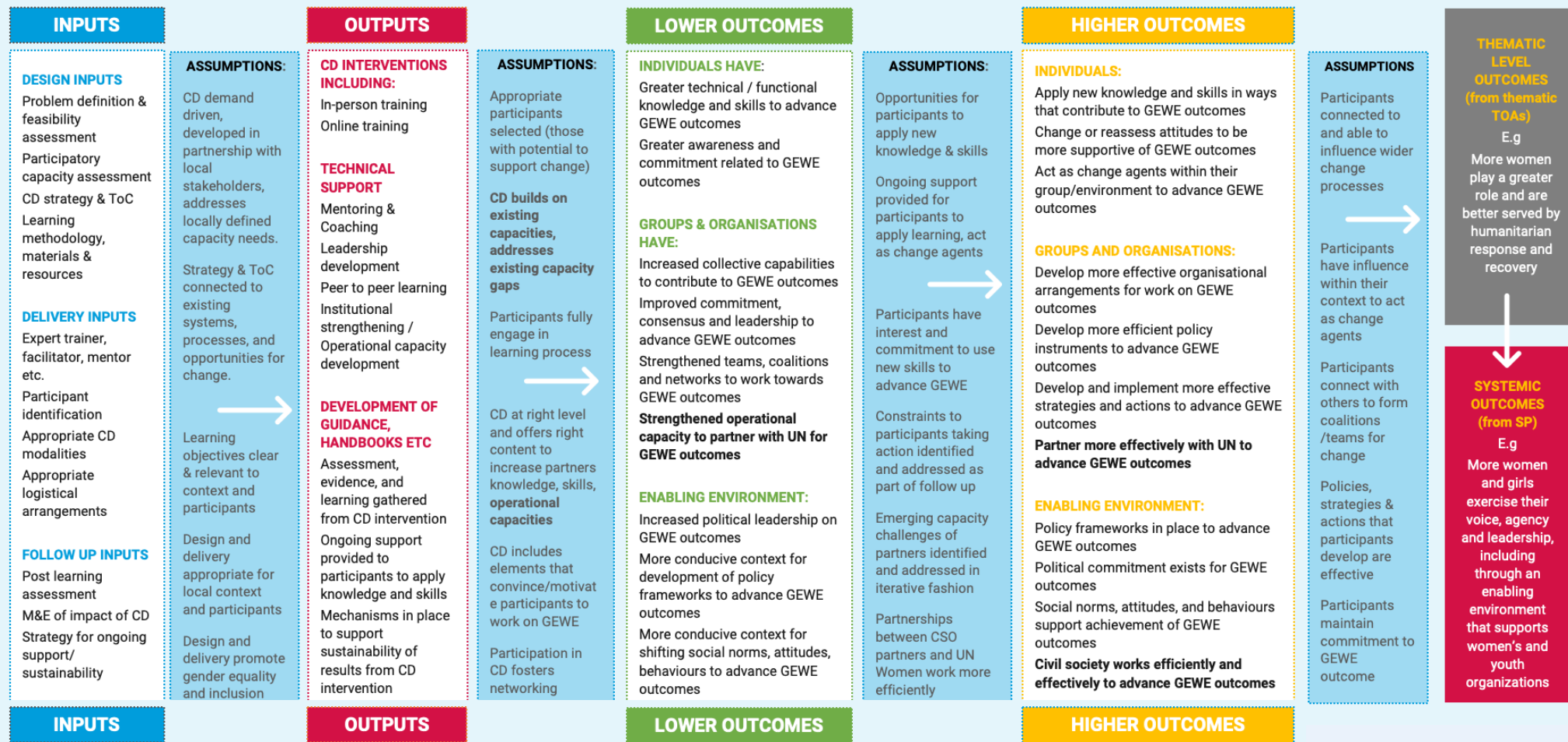


Figure 4 .Evaluation Methodology

- Qualitative content analysis
- Descriptive statistics
- Theories of change mapping
- Contribution analysis



Evaluation criteria: diagnosis; design and delivery; synergies and follow-up; human Rights and gender equality, effectiveness ; efficiency and, sustainability

**interviews:**

with 109 key informants (97 women & 12 men) from UN Women Country offices and ROs, government and CSO representatives, development partners, end beneficiaries

**country case studies:**

Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Türkiye

**documents reviewed:**

annual plans and reports, budgets, project documents, analyses and knowledge products, evaluation reports, capacity development monitoring reports and records

**Surveys**

2 surveys involving 72 respondents (62 women, 9 men 1 preferred not to say)

2.4 Challenges and limitations

The evaluation team collected a wide range of documentation, such as Strategic Notes, annual workplans and Regional and Country Office reports, as well as 24 evaluation reports on UN Women's work in the region for the period 2018–2022. The regional evaluation team closely cooperated with the corporate evaluation capacity development team, who provided additional insights.

The evaluation team assessed there was sufficient documentation to provide a clear sense of how capacity development interventions are planned, designed and delivered and to what extent their results are being followed-up and captured. Less information was available on the long-term impact and sustainability of capacity development interventions and the effects of capacity development in the online space.

In Ukraine, due to conflict, access to some partners was not possible, and the evaluation interviews were reduced to collecting only crucial information from a limited number of informants. The evaluation mostly relied on existing documentation. In some cases, access to end beneficiaries was not possible due to personal data protection limitations; however, the evaluation organized five focus groups with end beneficiaries. Any possible positive bias in the interviews and surveys (as the respondents were suggested by the Country Offices) was addressed by triangulation with information from other sources.



Photo: ©UN Women/Stela Donju

3. FINDINGS

FINDING 1

The capacity development support provided by UN Women is highly relevant to context and needs. However, there are differences in the extent to which Country Offices use needs assessments to inform capacity development interventions, and to which such needs assessments are participatory and inclusive. While some Country Offices have a systematic and structured approach to diagnosis, in others the approach varies between projects and activities.

The overall focus and specific content of UN Women's capacity development support in the ECA region is strongly relevant to the local context, priorities and needs. This mirrors findings from the corporate evaluation of capacity development support, which demonstrated that UN Women's capacity development support across regions is highly relevant to national contexts; aligned with government policies on gender equality; and based on a strong understanding of national gender equality challenges and priorities.

According to the survey conducted by the evaluation team among UN Women partners in the ECA region, 45.8 per cent 'strongly agree' that UN Women conducts research and capacity needs assessments to ensure the relevance of its programmes; 50 per cent 'agree'; and 4.2 per cent 'don't know'. However, practice across the ECA region varies in terms of diagnosing capacity development priorities and needs to inform the development of interventions. Some Country Offices demonstrated a particularly rigorous approach to diagnosis through the systematic use of needs assessments. For example, the Georgia Country Office developed a standardized capacity needs assessment methodology based on a participatory approach with national partners. Under this methodology, diagnosis is undertaken through participatory gender audits;²⁶ regulatory and programme gender-impact assessments; and gap assessments related to the Women's Empowerment Principles. Similarly, the Ukraine Country Office was in the process of standardizing its approach to capacity development and developing systematic participatory gender audits and needs assessments, but this was put on hold due to the conflict.

Needs assessments were used for some projects but not for others within a given Country Office or were used for some capacity development activities but not for others within a given project. The evaluation also found differences in the extent to which needs assessments were participatory and adopted a leave no one behind approach. For example, in Moldova, unless capacity development was explicitly aimed at marginalized groups, their perspectives were not included in diagnosis processes.

Where needs assessments were not used, Country Office personnel relied on other sources of information to inform the design of capacity development. In some cases, Country Offices commissioned research to inform capacity development work, as can be seen in the ethnographic research now informing implementation of Gender Action Learning System programming in Kyrgyzstan; the research on safe houses that was commissioned to inform EAW work in Serbia; or the review of barriers to HIV treatment for women undertaken in Tajikistan. In other cases, Country Offices used research undertaken by other actors to inform capacity development interventions. For example, the design of the Refugee Response Programme in Türkiye was informed both by UN Women's own research and research by other agencies, notably ILO. In addition, a number of Country Offices reported using evaluations and lessons from existing programmes to inform future programmes. For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina a wide range of evaluation data was collected from existing mentoring activities to strengthen the development of future mentoring programmes. In Albania, lessons learned from previous programmatic interventions were critical to inform development of a new phase of the Joint Programme on Ending Violence Against Women. This was also the case for the gender-responsive budgeting project, where the lessons learned and recommendations from the evaluation informed the next phase of the project. Moreover, the results of the Rapid Gender Assessment conducted in 2020 informed and radically changed the activities planned in the context of the regional EAW programme to better respond to the needs expressed by CSOs.

Regional programmes²⁷ mostly focus on capacity development related to implementation of international norms and standards, aligning their capacity development support to national policy reforms (harmonization of laws with the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW or mainstreaming gender-responsive budgeting in fiscal systems reforms). Relations with national counterparts, primarily government stakeholders and, to some extent, civil society play an important role in identification of needs.

²⁶ [Participatory gender audit methodology](#) developed by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has been used.

²⁷ Promoting Gender Responsive Policies in South East Europe Regional Programme (focused on gender responsive budgeting) and Ending Violence Against Women "Implementing Norms, Changing Minds").

However, in many cases, decisions about capacity development support were not based on a formal evidence base but on more informal sources of information, including experiences from previous programming; discussions with stakeholders about priorities and needs; and Country Office personnel's own knowledge of the context. This more informal approach can be seen in the diagnosis process for the Türkiye CSO strengthening project, which drew on Country Office personnel's understanding of context and discussions with CSOs and partners to identify how capacity development support could respond to

current challenges faced by CSOs in Türkiye. It is important to note that, in some cases, decisions about capacity development interventions were not based on demand or interest from local stakeholders, but on UN Women's assessment that a topic was important and should be addressed. For example, in Serbia this was the case for capacity development and advocacy work on gender and climate change, energy resources and energy poverty, the economy of care and the fiscal risks of disasters to women.

BOX 1.

Standardization of capacity needs assessment in Georgia (excerpt from the case study on UN Women's support to capacity development in Georgia, developed by the evaluation team, see Appendix)

Participatory gender audits are an assessment of internal practices and related support systems within government partner institutions that identify gaps and challenges, setting up a baseline for future UN Women support. It is a voluntary and confidential process, which is important to ensure institutional and senior management buy-in to the process and support for action planning to address identified challenges. The participatory gender audit includes an extensive desk review, interviews, and qualitative and quantitative surveys. The process takes between six and eight months until findings are endorsed, and a multi-year action plan is developed. The participatory gender audit forms a basis for long-term and holistic support to government partners. Partly, capacity development support to institutions is also based on regulatory or gender-impact assessments; lessons learned from programmes or global and regional trends; and standards in gender mainstreaming in policy work. Work with business entities is aligned with the Women's Empowerment Principles as a guide. After the principles are endorsed by the management of the company, UN Women provides a gap assessment followed by capacity development and advisory support to address the identified gaps.

FINDING 2

UN Women's approach to capacity development in the Europe and Central Asia region is responsive to changing contexts, with capacity development initiatives developed and adapted to address new crises and challenges, and to take advantage of emerging opportunities. This responsiveness is made possible by Country Office personnel's strong knowledge of context and good relationships with local stakeholders.

The evaluation found numerous examples of capacity development initiatives developed in response to changing contexts. The ability of Country Offices to recognize and diagnose new needs and opportunities was in large part due to personnel's strong knowledge of context and their close relationships and constant communication with partners.

Critically, in several contexts, capacity development work was significantly and rapidly refocused in response to crises. The war in Ukraine created new needs, in particular the mainstreaming of gender in humanitarian response, and in responding to conflict-related sexual violence. The Ukraine Country Office developed a range of training courses and resource materials for government ministries, police, service providers, CSOs and humanitarian actors to respond to these needs.

As these interventions were recent and due to their limited reach to partners, the evaluation team could not identify any information on the effectiveness of these efforts. The Ukraine Country Office also commissioned research to help inform the diagnosis and design of interventions, including a Rapid Gender Analysis undertaken in partnership with Care International that identified how to improve humanitarian responses, and a study on young women affected by war undertaken in partnership with a Ukrainian non-governmental organization.

Similarly, capacity development programming by the Türkiye Country Office has responded both to the humanitarian crisis and political challenges in the country. The Refugee Response Programme was developed in response to the arrival of almost 4 million Syrian refugees since 2014, and the proliferation of actors and interventions focused on responding to the refugee situation, many in ways that were not gender sensitive. The Refugee Response Programme addressed this emerging context by providing capacity development

on gender-sensitive refugee responses at national and local levels for a range of stakeholders including government, international partners and civil society. Meanwhile the Türkiye CSO strengthening project, which supports women's organizations and other rights-based CSOs to improve their capacity to influence national and local women's rights and gender equality agendas, is a response to the recent roll back on gender equality commitments and the closing of civil society space in Türkiye, as well as

the current challenging economic environment for CSOs. In this context, CSOs require increased flexible and core support to continue their work on gender issues. Similarly, the Gender Action Learning System work on attitude change in Kyrgyzstan is a response to the growing recognition that while Kyrgyzstan has seen significant progress in formal gender equality provisions over recent years, there is a growing backlash that requires a more focused response on norms and attitudes to gender equality.

FINDING 3

The design of capacity development initiatives in the region is appropriate and well aligned with participants' needs. This is due in large part to participatory design processes, as well as adaptation based on feedback. Particular challenges include integrating sustainability into capacity development design and designing capacity development that is relevant for a diverse group of participants.

The evaluation found that capacity development initiatives were largely suited to stakeholder needs; that learning objectives were clear; and content was relevant. Participatory design processes were widely used, with multiple stakeholders reporting that UN Women is particularly strong on participatory approaches to capacity development design, as compared with other agencies. 52.2 per cent of the partners strongly agreed and 43.8 per cent agreed that UN Women's capacity development support is well coordinated and responds to the needs of women and girls. However, the appropriateness of the capacity development activities (purpose and context) for participants and taking into account capacity needs of vulnerable groups (2.1 per cent) were the two elements where some partner survey respondents disagreed.

In Georgia, participatory action planning involving partner personnel at multiple levels, including senior management, is systematically used to design capacity development interventions to address the gender equality gaps identified through the diagnosis process. Government partners in Georgia particularly value the ability of UN Women to design capacity development support that is contextually relevant and well connected to national policies and legislative reform processes and integrates a combination of international standards and practical tools. The Refugee Response Programme in Türkiye also demonstrated some strong examples of participatory design; for example, the training provided to CSOs by UN Women's partners involved surveys and interviews to understand participants' needs, expectations and priorities, as well as sharing training plans and curricula with participants for feedback.

The Promoting Gender Responsive Policies in Southeast Europe Regional Programme fully involved key ministries in the design, planning and implementation of the programme.²⁸

In addition to participatory design, the evaluation found examples of capacity development interventions being adapted in response to feedback from participants. For example, in the Türkiye CSO project, based on monitoring and feedback the project contracted mentors and developed joint training sessions for the CSO small grantees, actions which were not originally planned. Similarly, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the IT Girls Mentorship Programme was adapted and improved based on feedback on the need for more individual support. In Ukraine, the Country Office significantly adapted the design of its capacity development interventions to respond to the conflict situation. More traditional, longer training courses have been replaced by small workshops, advisory support and short online training sessions that can be easily interrupted to respond to the security situation.

The evaluation found limited evidence of sustainability being taken into account in the design process, with a number of stakeholders noting that this was a weak area. Some stakeholders reflected that capacity development interventions were designed based on an underlying assumption that transferring knowledge is innately sustainable, and people will continue to use the knowledge after the end of the intervention, although this was frequently not the case. This mirrors the findings in the corporate evaluation on capacity development support which found that, in general, a clear vision or planned sustainability strategies for capacity development activities were lacking.

²⁸ Final Evaluation of the Phase III of the Regional Programme Promoting Gender Responsive Policies in South East Europe 2017-2019, UN Women

One common way in which issues of sustainability and scale are to some extent addressed within capacity development design is by including training of trainers and other modalities to cascade learning beyond immediate participants, and through the development of capacity development materials that can be used beyond the life of a given project. For example, in Albania, UN Women's capacity development support to the school of public administration was designed to include an emphasis on training of trainers to facilitate the wider transfer of knowledge; while in Kyrgyzstan, guidance for the Gender Action Learning System methodology was developed by UN Women in Kyrgyz to facilitate the wider use of this approach across the country. The Georgia Country Office stood out as having the most systematic approach to integrating sustainability into capacity development design, including through the development of an organizational action plan to address gender equality gaps that ensures written organizational commitment by partners to sustainability; providing policy support alongside capacity development to help create an environment where capacities can be applied; and maintaining a continuous link with senior management in partner organizations to facilitate of the knowledge acquired.

In addition to designing for sustainability, another challenge that emerged was the difficulty of designing training that is relevant for different types of participants with different levels of knowledge. In particular, managing the trade-off between tailored training designed to respond to the needs of a niche group, and training that brings together a more diverse group that is not always so relevant for everyone yet provides a significant benefit in terms of exposing participants to different perspectives and building wider networks. This challenge was raised by multiple stakeholders involved in the Türkiye Refugee Response Programme.

The evaluation focus groups and interviews also revealed common themes thought to be currently missing in UN Women's capacity development efforts, e.g. novel and emerging topics such as data protection and online privacy risks. These issues can be addressed as they relate to all partners working in the same area, and to which UN Women can contribute. At a minimum, their importance can be highlighted and participants' awareness raised, particularly in relevant training programmes, such as in the context of humanitarian action and migration.

FINDING 4

A combination of different modalities within capacity development interventions is highly valued, especially combining modalities that transfer knowledge and skills with modalities that provide ongoing support to apply new knowledge. Participants particularly appreciate the use of capacity development methodologies that are innovative, interactive and facilitate experience sharing.

According to Country Office annual reports in the ECA region, RMS data and evaluation interviews, the most frequent type of capacity development support provided by UN Women is training, followed by mentoring, coaching, study visits, reflections and exchanges among practitioners – development of guides and manuals are also mentioned. Capacity development is provided to national partners – governments, civil society and businesses – as well as to women and girl end beneficiaries, particularly in areas such as women in leadership and governance (political candidates) and women's economic empowerment initiatives (vulnerable women and girls).

The evaluation found widespread agreement among stakeholders that a combination of different capacity development modalities is most effective. In particular, combining modalities such as training and workshops that provide new knowledge and skills with modalities such as mentoring, coaching or pilot activities that support participants to apply these skills in practice.

For example, the evaluation of the Promoting Gender Responsive Policies in South East Europe Regional Programme found that combining training, coaching and technical assistance ensured that best practices in budgeting were imbued with gender equality principles and individuals were supported and empowered.²⁹

Similarly, the 2021 evaluation of UN Women's work under the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) found that capacity development took place not just through formal training, "but also through less visible but equally important day-to-day guidance, support and capacity-building taking place during the interactions with national and local partners as part of the ongoing implementation of the programme".³⁰ This finding is aligned with that of the corporate evaluation on capacity development support, which found that the most effective approach to capacity-building is a combination of modalities, with accompaniment of UN Women being particularly critical to support beneficiaries to apply new learning.

²⁹ Final Evaluation of the Phase III of the Regional Programme Promoting Gender Responsive Policies in South East Europe 2017-2019

³⁰ Strengthening the Resilience of Syrian Women and Girls and Host Communities programme: Final Evaluation

Stakeholders particularly valued the use of more interactive or innovative learning methodologies, such as case studies, scenarios and simulations to complement more traditional approaches to knowledge and skills transfer. For example, in Moldova, UN Women's support in using videos, case studies, scenarios and the discussion of specific examples were reported to be useful learning methodologies. Similarly, in Georgia, stakeholders emphasized the value of UN Women supported capacity development that provided responses to practical questions and dilemmas, offering practical tools that could be applied in the real context. According to the partner survey (48 respondents), the following capacity development initiatives were reported as being effective: study visits were found to be very effective (64.6 per cent) and quite effective by 20.8 per cent of respondents; training courses were found to be very effective (62.5 per cent) and quite effective by 35.4 per cent of respondents; technical support (very effective 52.1 per cent and quite effective 45.8 per cent); mentoring and coaching (very effective 50 per cent and quite effective 41.7 per cent).

Across a number of countries, stakeholders reported that they strongly valued participatory approaches that enabled them to share their own knowledge, learn from each other and strengthen their networks. For example, the CSO strengthening project in Türkiye had a strong emphasis on methods that promote experience sharing and network building; supporting CSOs to come together and strengthen existing alliances; and overcome the challenges of scattered and isolated working among the women's movement in Türkiye.

While delivering training, regional programmes also put strong emphasis on long-term advisory support to partners to enhance implementation. Both evaluation interviews and regional programme evaluations³¹ confirmed the solid design of the capacity development cycle when supporting government partners. There is a need for more strategic support to CSOs, beyond capacity development for monitoring and alternative reporting on implementation of policies and international commitments to support sustainability. An additional aspect of regional capacity development support is networks of practitioners; however, rather than being strategically planned, they seem to naturally arise through programme implementation and later became recognized and strengthened as a useful strategic capacity development tool.

The position of regional programme managers/thematic advisers with regards to country-level capacity development and regional exchange and knowledge generation needs further strengthening. While the countries involved in the regional projects benefitted from their support, the benefits to Country Offices not involved in the projects were limited and knowledge generated beyond the project countries on the same thematic area has not yet been systematically disseminated. However, a good practice example was identified in the role of the gender-responsive budgeting programme manager, who has been recognized by UN Women's partners and who provided advisory support, technical assistance and generated knowledge throughout the region even beyond the programme countries.

Additionally, the design of capacity development initiatives related to gender-responsive budgeting in the region has improved over the evaluation period. This process started with the engagement of sectoral ministries and gender mainstreaming in selected programmes, and now strongly engages and develops capacities in the Ministries of Finance and supreme audit institutions. While initially diverse knowledge products and tools were developed and used across the region, UN Women has now systematized the knowledge generated and has a standardized manual on gender-responsive budgeting with some adjustments made at the country level.

Similarly, where training was previously delivered by UN Women, stronger connections now exist with civil servant training agencies, which strengthen sustainability perspectives and support the building of an enabling environment for gender-responsive budgeting.

In terms of innovation supported by the regional level, the evaluation interviews and regional evaluation of the EAW programme³² identified that capacity-building on the communication for behavioural impact methodology (COMBI) was integrated in the capacity development approach. Some key informants and the documentation reviewed mentioned the Innovation Facility, comprising an Innovation Conversations series, Innovation Bootcamps and the establishment of Innovation Labs for Gender Equality to strengthen capacities, practices and services. While some information on capacity strengthening of the individuals involved in these initiatives exists in UN Women reports,³³ there is a lack of information on the systemic effect of the initiatives on UN Women and their partners' performance and coherence with their programmes.

³¹ Final Evaluation of the Phase III of the Regional Programme Promoting Gender Responsive Policies in South East Europe 2017-2019 and Evaluation of the UN Women's regional programme "Ending Violence against Women in the Western Balkans and Turkey: Implementing Norms, Changing Minds" (2020).

³² Evaluation of the UN Women's regional programme "Ending Violence against Women in the Western Balkans and Turkey: Implementing Norms, Changing Minds" (2020).

³³ UN Women Innovation Facility 2020-2021: Co-Creating for a Better Future (2021)

FINDING 5

In-person capacity development is widely preferred to online capacity development. While there are some advantages to online capacity development – for example, in expanding outreach or delivering capacity development in a crisis context – these are suggested to be outweighed by the risk of less active participation, reduced networking opportunities and that they are inappropriate for addressing sensitive issues.

All Country Offices in the region had experience of conducting both in-person and online capacity development, with most capacity development activities moving online during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as after the start of the war in Ukraine. A number of stakeholders noted that to be successful online capacity development requires a different design to traditional capacity development, with shorter sessions to ensure participants do not lose focus, and content as interactive and practical as possible. Both evaluation interviews/focus groups and surveys noted advantages to in-person capacity development over online interventions. Overall, according to the partner survey, online capacity development was seen as 'less appropriate' (N=19); 'equally appropriate' (N=12); 'more appropriate' (N=4); 'haven't received online capacity development support' (N=13).

The evaluation identified a number of positive benefits of online capacity development. First, online capacity development reached those who would otherwise not have been able to travel to participate; for example, those living in remote regions, or those who face constraints in travelling related to family or work responsibilities or cultural norms. This was the case for CSO personnel from around Türkiye who participated in online training under the CSO strengthening programme. In addition, online capacity development was reported to reach more people and with less of a logistical burden for UN Women personnel and partners. For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, UN Women supported girls from 20 different cities and communities with online mentoring during the pandemic; while in Ukraine, UN Women's support in moving capacity development activities online during the pandemic provided an opportunity to expand the number of regional and local administrations who could participate. Moreover, a number of stakeholders from small CSOs reported that the move to online engagement that

resulted from the pandemic gave them more equal entry and participation in meetings and networking spaces, which, when conducted in person, had been dominated by larger non-governmental organizations. It also prompted these CSOs to become more tech-savvy in their work, which has been beneficial to their organizations more broadly. In Ukraine, online capacity development has now become essential in the context of the conflict, where traditional in-person training is no longer an option. Online capacity development and exchange is widely used by the Regional Office as it significantly reduces the cost of interventions.

However, the majority of stakeholders suggested that these benefits were outweighed by the disadvantages of online capacity development and that given the choice they would prefer in-person capacity development initiatives. It was reported that online capacity development resulted in participants being less engaged, more easily distracted and participating less. In addition, while online capacity development can work for providing information, it is not a good format for discussion. Critically, the relationship building and networking that takes place in face-to-face training courses cannot be replicated online. It was also reported that when capacity development was addressing sensitive issues such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, or gender-based violence, participants attending online from their homes had no privacy to speak without the risk of family members overhearing. Some grassroots actors lack the skills, technology or stable internet connection to participate online, something that was a big problem at the beginning of the pandemic but has somewhat lessened over time. Some Country Office personnel reflected that given these challenges, whenever there was a budget for in-person training, they would always prioritize that over online capacity development.

FINDING 6

In general, stakeholders were satisfied with the quality of capacity development delivery that was supported by UN Women. However, there were some challenges related to the trainers that deliver capacity development, both in terms of ensuring trainers have the required knowledge and skills and in recruiting suitable trainers.

Overall, stakeholders expressed satisfaction with the quality of delivery in both country-level and regional programmes, noting in particular that UN Women's capacity development support was well organized; communication was very smooth; and UN Women's collaboration with partners was excellent. This reflects the finding from the corporate evaluation that delivery of capacity development has largely been well planned and organized. For example, in Moldova, end-of-training evaluation questionnaires demonstrated a high level of satisfaction with the delivery of capacity development; while in a survey for the Moldova Country Portfolio Evaluation, 97 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that experts provided clear instructions on how new concepts, knowledge and skills could be applied.

The evaluation identified some issues related to the suitability of trainers who provide capacity development. In both Türkiye and Georgia stakeholders stressed it was important to select trainers who combine theoretical and practical knowledge of the subject matter and are able to give sector and context-relevant examples.

However, a number of stakeholders involved in the Refugee Response Programme in Türkiye reflected that international experts brought in to provide training did not always sufficiently understand local context, and while they were well suited to engaging with the UN and international non-governmental organization actors, they were not able to engage so effectively with the government. In Georgia, it was reported that national trainers were prioritized and generally international consultants were only used when new tools from other countries were being applied.

There were also issues related to recruiting trainers. In Georgia, Country Office personnel reported a limited number of suitable consultants in the market, particularly in areas such as economic empowerment and sexual harassment. In Türkiye, UN Women personnel reflected on the inefficiency of continually recruiting new consultants for capacity development work and suggested it would be useful for UN Women to build a team of trainers that could be drawn on by all Country Offices to ensure consistency in quality and approach and reduce the burden of undertaking constant recruitments.

FINDING 7

The extent to which capacity development supported by UN Women includes follow-up support is mixed. While there are strong examples of participants being supported to apply their learning over time, there are also examples of very limited or non-existent follow-up. UN Women's emphasis on providing follow-up support within capacity development programming has increased over time, based on growing recognition of its importance.

All stakeholders recognized the importance of follow-up support to help participants apply new skills and knowledge gained from capacity development interventions. However, the extent to which such support was systematically provided was mixed. UN Women personnel across a number of Country Offices stated they faced significant barriers to providing meaningful follow-up due to short-term projects, short-term and limited funding, and limited human resources. The evaluation found a variety of modalities used to provide follow-up. The most common form of follow-up was mentoring and coaching, which was found across many capacity development interventions, although with different levels of intensity and duration.

For example, in Moldova, the training supported by UN Women on application of the legal framework on violence against women was followed by mentoring and support to multidisciplinary teams at the local level; while gender-responsive budgeting programming by UN Women in North Macedonia involved training, followed by coaching and mentoring. Other forms of follow-up included ongoing technical assistance, supporting the cascading of learning, providing exchange and networking opportunities, and refresher sessions.

The Georgia Country Office stood out as an example of where support to applying learning was well integrated into capacity development interventions. Under an overall strategic approach where capacity development support is aligned to national policies and integrated into a partner's wider institutional gender action plan, UN Women provides continuous follow-up to support implementation of the action plans. Initial knowledge and skills transfer is supplemented by mentoring and advisory support, as well as internal policy development support to create an enabling environment for the application of knowledge and skills. In some cases, follow-up support was also provided through UN Women consultants working part-time within partner institutions to support the application of learning.

The evaluation found some examples where follow-up included creating opportunities for capacity development participants to apply learning in practice. In Moldova, some capacity development interventions supported by UN Women go beyond providing knowledge, skills and follow-up guidance, to also financing small community initiatives on women's leadership or economic empowerment, thereby providing women with a practical opportunity to apply their learning. For example, political

leadership training for female councillors and mayors was followed up with grants to support small scale interventions in the communities related to improvement of services and infrastructure. In Serbia, after councillors were provided with capacity development and technical assistance, grants were then given to 20 municipal gender equality mechanisms to implement measures from their local gender equality plans, such as assessment of women's needs in rural areas or support to rural women to register businesses.

In a number of Country Offices, in more recent capacity development initiatives, the evaluation found an increased focus on providing follow-up due to the growing understanding of its importance for achieving and sustaining results. This can be seen in the progression of the Refugee Response Programme in Türkiye. In the early stages of the programme, limited follow-up was provided to support participants in implementing the new knowledge and skills they had acquired. However, more recent capacity development activities have included substantial follow-up, e.g. mentoring provided to CSOs by a consultant contracted for this purpose; and UN Women's programme partner supporting participants to both apply and cascade training, thereby reaching a much larger group of people.

FINDING 8

There are strong synergies between UN Women's capacity development work and the priorities and activities of national governments, civil society, UN partners and other international partners. However, examples of internal synergies – either across thematic areas, or between Country Offices and the Regional Office – are mixed, with both effective synergy building in some cases but also weak interconnections and opportunities missed.

The evaluation found numerous examples of strong synergies between UN Women's capacity development support and the priorities and activities of a range of partners at national level. Country Office personnel report dedicating significant time and focus to building such synergies and recognize the potential value in contributing to impact, scale and sustainability.

UN Women's capacity development work in Georgia provided a strong example of synergy with the government. Capacity development interventions were aligned with key national action plans such as the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security; and on the Measures to be Implemented for Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims/Survivors; and the gender equality chapter of the broader Human Rights National Action Plan. UN Women actively provided technical support for the development of these various policy frameworks.

There were also examples of UN Women's capacity development support having strong synergies with the agendas of civil society and women's movements. Critically, the CSO strengthening project is developing synergies with the wider women's civil society movement by engaging with their agenda and seeking different ways to support them. This has been an agile response by UN Women to align with CSO priorities in the face of backlash against gender equality agendas. An example of this is UN Women's support for an annual gathering that includes around 100 women's CSOs. In Albania, synergies were created with partner CSOs and academia as part of capacity development work, with both partners and Country Office personnel gaining new insights from these synergies.

There were multiple examples of synergies with UN partners and other international actors. The Georgia Country Office cooperates with other UN agencies on capacity development, including ILO, FAO, UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA. In Moldova, the Country Office collaborates with UNAIDS, ILO, OHCHR, UNFPA and UNICEF on capacity development efforts on human rights and gender equality, shadow reporting, gender and the environment; and with UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA on building the capacities of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe on a confidence building programme in Transnistrian region. In Kosovo, the Youth Assembly was established in cooperation with UNMIK, UNICEF and UNDP and was reported by the Kosovo Peace Building Fund Evaluation to have involved successful cooperation between these entities. In Türkiye, the Refugee Response Programme engaged strongly and built on synergies with other UN agencies, notably UNHCR, UNDP and ILO; while the Türkiye CSO strengthening project has developed strong synergies and connections with other EU-funded initiatives supporting civil society. In Albania, strong synergies were formed between the regional EAW programme "Implementing Norms, Changing Minds" and the UN Joint Programme on Ending Violence Against Women in Albania.

Regional programmes reported synergies with the World Bank across the region on Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability Assessments which served to promote capacity development related to fiscal reforms and gender-responsive budgeting and led to stronger results; while the EAW programme reported capacity development of the Council of Europe, European Institute for Gender Equality and European Commission at the regional level. Cooperation was initiated with the Regional Cooperation Council for the Western Balkans. However, synergies at the regional level are still ad hoc and demand driven, and their potential needs to be strategically explored.

There was more limited evidence of synergies within UN Women, either between thematic areas, or between the Regional and Country Offices. In terms of thematic synergies, in Moldova it was reported that synergies are ensured across UN Women's impact areas and results. For example, results achieved in the Women in Leadership

and Governance thematic area (stronger networks and increased capacity of female politicians) synergistically work alongside the Women's Economic Empowerment and EAW thematic areas through support to normative and systemic changes. In Türkiye, UN Women's CSO strengthening project is building on synergies within the Country Office, notably by drawing on the well-established gender-responsive budgeting workstream to deliver training to project beneficiaries. However, some interviewees were disappointed that the Refugee Response Programme in Türkiye had not been able to engage more with other thematic work within the Country Office, notably EAW, citing this as a missed opportunity.

In terms of synergies and collaboration between the Regional and Country Offices, the Georgia Country Office reported useful conceptual and methodological inputs by the Regional Office and headquarters. For example, facilitated by the Regional Office, the Country Office benefitted from knowledge resources on gender-responsive budgeting and the Global Programme "Making Every Woman and Girl Count." In Türkiye, the Regional Office was strongly involved in the Refugee Response Programme from the start, and there has also been significant engagement with UN Women's humanitarian team in Geneva. However, the CSO strengthening project does not have much engagement from the Regional Office, although personnel believe it could enrich the project. This is in part because of limited personnel time and intense delivery pressure, which limits the possibilities for interaction with either the Regional Office or other Country Offices to identify and build on synergies.

Some Country Offices reflected that there would be value in a stronger and more systematized sharing of experience and knowledge on capacity development among Country Offices in the region, and that the Regional Office could play a more proactive role in facilitating this. However, some regional programmes have produced substantial and efficient cross-country learning. The Promoting Gender Responsive Policies in South East Europe Regional Programme involved combined training, the sharing of best practices and access to experts across borders, which created a supportive network between the target countries.³⁴

³⁴ Final Evaluation of the Phase III of the Regional Programme Promoting Gender Responsive Policies in South East Europe 2017-2019, UN Women

FINDING 9

The results of capacity development support in the region are largely measured at output or lower outcome level, with insufficient focus on monitoring longer-term impacts. This is due in large part to limited financial and human resources for longer-term impact assessment, as well as limited knowledge on how to conduct this. As a result, there is little evidence regarding when and how UN Women’s capacity development support contributes to meaningful change for women and girls, which is a major gap both for understanding the value of existing capacity development programming and to inform future programming.

The capacity development results that are tracked and reported are mostly either outputs (e.g. workshops held, people trained, capacity development materials developed), or lower-level outcomes (participants reporting improved knowledge, organizations developing action plans). Critically, the monitoring of results tends to end when a project finishes, meaning that longer-term impacts of capacity development support are not captured. Therefore, there is limited evidence on whether and how capacity development work has contributed to advancing gender equality or improving the lives of women and girls. In all RMS narrative reports, general changes and higher-level results for the country or region are presented, but links between capacity development outputs and organizational outcomes or systemic changes are rarely analysed (with the exception of capacity development for policy changes, monitoring and reporting on international commitments and some economic empowerment programmes).

Country Offices in the region recognize this weakness in tracking and reporting longer-term impact, with personnel suggesting it is due to limited time and resources, as well as lack of guidance within the organization on how more meaningful monitoring of results could be undertaken. This appears to be part of a broader challenge across UN Women, as the corporate evaluation on capacity development support also found very limited evidence on impact from such support; and an over-focus on monitoring and reporting of outputs or lower-level outcomes. For example, monitoring of capacity development activities under the Refugee Response Programme in Türkiye primarily takes the form of pre and post-tests and satisfaction surveys. This provides useful information regarding new knowledge or skills participants have gained and their perspectives on the quality of the capacity development provided; however, there was little evidence of monitoring that seeks to capture how participants have used the knowledge and skills they acquired over time to create impact for refugee women and girls, a gap which reportedly results from limited human and financial resources for such impact monitoring. The Moldova Country Office monitors the progress of participants in capacity development programmes for the duration of the programmatic intervention and, in some cases, up to one year after the completion of the intervention.

While this enables the Country Office to collect data on the delivery of capacity development support, the number and type of interventions and the key immediate effects of the programmes, it provides little understanding of the longer-term impact.

The Georgia Country Office stood out for its more comprehensive approach to monitoring results from capacity development support. For example, the use of wider outcome indicators to identify how capacity development contributed to policy reforms; to the performance of prosecutors in addressing domestic violence; or to the performance of companies adhering to the Women’s Empowerment Principles. In addition to measuring results for end beneficiaries over the duration of the capacity development intervention, in Georgia there were some examples of reaching out to beneficiaries beyond the life of the project to identify longer-term results.

Impact for women and girls was most visible in capacity development support provided at grassroots level. At this level, participants in capacity development activities are often also the intended end beneficiaries of an intervention and therefore it is easier to see how the intervention has a direct impact on their lives. For example, in UN Women’s Gender Action Learning System work in Kyrgyzstan participants were community members and local leaders. Changed attitudes among this group can clearly be identified as contributing to shifting community norms and new roles and opportunities for women and girls. Similarly, the support provided directly to women refugees under the Refugee Response Programme could be clearly identified as contributing to these women’s social empowerment.

Interviews and regional evaluations confirmed that regional programmes used pre and post-testing to measure changes in knowledge and attitudes following training courses. The long-term nature of these programmes also enabled monitoring and capturing the contribution of capacity development to policy changes and anecdotal stories of improved EAW services in some CSOs and sustained communications and cooperation among practitioners taking part in the training. Overall, there is a strong demand from Country Offices and the Regional Office that UN Women develops a standardized approach to the monitoring and evaluation of capacity development results and strengthens its capacities in monitoring and evaluation across the region.

FINDING 10

UN Women’s capacity development support is clearly situated within human rights and women’s rights frameworks and includes a strong focus on addressing underlying drivers of gender inequality. While there are some good examples of capacity development work integrating a leave no one behind focus and including the most vulnerable populations, in other cases UN Women’s capacity development support has been inaccessible to more marginalized groups.

Advancing women’s rights and human rights was a central element of UN Women’s capacity development support across all offices. For example, in Türkiye, protecting women’s rights in the face of pushback by the state is a focus of UN Women’s capacity development support. Stakeholders involved in the CSO strengthening project reported that the project had its roots in CEDAW and international norms related to advancing women’s rights, voice and participation, and that given the current situation this strong women’s rights focus was both very important and challenging. In Georgia, Ukraine and Albania, UN Women’s capacity development support is strongly aligned with international human rights and gender equality frameworks and supports harmonization of national legislation or programmes with international standards.

The evaluation found examples of capacity development interventions with a strong focus on the underlying causes of gender inequality. For example, capacity development work using the Gender Action Learning System methodology at community level in Kyrgyzstan supports individuals to question norms, attitudes and power relationships that drive gender inequalities and to reassess gender roles and responsibilities. Within the Refugee Response Programme in Türkiye there was a consistent focus on understanding and addressing the structural causes of gender inequality within the local context, including issues of masculinity and the role of Islam in shaping gender relations. The Türkiye Country Office ensures that CSOs selected to participate in the CSO strengthening project have a good understanding of the structural aspects of gender inequalities and are working to support transformation. The evaluation also found a number of examples of capacity development activities with community leaders and members to create a more enabling environment for women and girls’ empowerment.

With Ukraine affected by conflict since 2014, the Country Office integrated capacity development support to displaced persons in all its interventions.

Integration of other vulnerable groups’ needs and perspectives was also ensured and mentioned in the results-based frameworks, including support to women living with HIV, women veterans, survivors of gender-based violence, women with disabilities and women single heads of households. Issue of conflict-related sexual violence was highly prioritized by both the UN Women Country Office and national partners, particularly since the onset of the Russian invasion in 2022. Results of the latest interventions are yet to be identified.

There are some strong examples of capacity development support that integrates a leave no one behind focus and includes marginalized populations. In Georgia, the integration of vulnerable groups is planned at the Strategic Note development stage and integrated throughout project planning. Examples of capacity development support to vulnerable groups in Georgia include work with women with disabilities and activists working on disability and gender equality on policy advocacy, economic empowerment and countering challenges related to COVID-19; capacity development for women living in rural or conflict-affected areas; and capacity development for internally displaced women. Affirmative measures were introduced in Enterprise Georgia programmes (Small and Medium Enterprise Agency) and the Rural Development Agency, supporting female applicants, women living in rural areas, youth and persons with disabilities. The interventions in Georgia usually reach between 50 and 500 women from vulnerable groups per year, with economic empowerment programmes having the biggest coverage.³⁵

In Türkiye, the capacity development work in response to the refugee situation stands out as having a strong leave no one behind lens. Not only does the Refugee Response Programme directly address a particularly marginalized group – Syrian women refugees – but it also includes a focus on reaching the most vulnerable among this marginalized population. A 2021 evaluation of this work found that its women-only centres successfully reached and supported the most vulnerable women.³⁶

³⁵ Evidenced by RMS reports, evaluation interviews and focus groups with UN Women Country Office personnel, partners and end beneficiaries.

³⁶ Strengthening the Resilience of Syrian Women and Girls and Host Communities programme: Final Evaluation

In Serbia, the Country Office and its partners identified UN Women's comparative advantage in providing capacity development support to small, grassroots, self-help organizations and women from remote areas, and to reaching marginalized groups via these organizations. In Kosovo, UN Women's capacity development to support women's economic empowerment and access to the digital labour market included women with disabilities, Roma women and other marginalized groups. In Tajikistan, UN Women's capacity development work has a strong focus on advancing the rights of women living with HIV and capacity development support has also been provided to strengthen services for women and girls with disabilities who experience violence.³⁷

In Albania, UN Women supported the development and strengthening of the Monitoring Network Against Gender-Based Violence, a platform of some 50 CSOs including those representing women and girls most left behind, e.g. women with disabilities, Roma and Egyptian women, and LGBTQI+ women. Similarly, the programme "Ending violence against women in Western Balkans and Türkiye: Implementing norms, changing minds" contributed to the strengthening or establishment of networks and platforms representing marginalized groups of women, including Roma, women with disabilities, survivors of armed conflict and refugees in a number of countries.³⁸ As part of this regional programme, the Albania Country Office strengthened the capacities of organizations representing women with disabilities, Roma women and women from LGBTQI+ community, and supported the development of an assessment and accessibility report of gender-based violence shelters for women with disabilities.

However, the evaluation also found examples where UN Women's capacity development support was inaccessible to more marginalized populations. In a number of cases, a major barrier to reaching the most marginalized was potentially within UN Women's control. For

example, in the Türkiye CSO strengthening programme small grant applications must be made in English and require a significant level of capacity to complete, which inevitably excludes some of the most grassroots organizations working with marginalized women. In Ukraine, rules and procedures requiring strong organizational capacities in partners also hindered support for grassroots CSOs; however, the situation has improved with the new Small Grants Policy. This seems to be a wider organizational challenge, as the corporate evaluation on capacity development support also found that some UN Women policies and rules could be a barrier to working with grassroots groups that often represent the most marginalized, both because smaller organizations do not always meet the criteria for funding, and because they lack the administrative capacities required to partner with UN Women and manage UN Women's processes and requirements.

In both Georgia and Türkiye, Country Office personnel and other stakeholders reflected that more could be done to provide capacity development related to LGBTQI+ issues and organizations. For example, in the Türkiye CSO strengthening project, while LGBTQI+ organizations are eligible for small grants, none have applied as the grants' relevance to their work was not made sufficiently clear. Overcoming this gap and explicitly engaging LGBTQI+ organizations is challenging given closing civil society space and current anti-LGBTQI+ and gender equality narratives. In Georgia, UN Women has supported the Public Defender's Office to develop the first-ever special report on the human rights situation of the LGBTIQ community and conducted a national study on perceptions and attitudes towards LGBTIQ+.³⁹ Together with its CSO partners, UN Women integrated sexual orientation and gender identity perspectives in the training courses provided to the public sector (police, prosecutors, judges and lawyers) as part of their continuous professional training. This work remains challenging as it is not a government priority.

³⁷ Evidenced by RMS reports, evaluation interviews and focus groups with UN Women Country Office personnel, partners and end beneficiaries.

³⁸ Final evaluation of the programme "Ending violence against women in Western Balkans and Turkey: Implementing norms, changing minds"

³⁹ <https://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/05/the-human-rights-situation-of-the-lgbtqi-communities-in-georgia>

FINDING 11

Most change resulting from capacity development support in the region is found at the individual and organizational level. At individual level, change primarily takes the form of individuals having increased knowledge, skills, awareness and self-confidence. At organizational level, change primarily takes the form of more gender-responsive organizational policies, processes and budgets.

The evaluation found numerous examples of change at the individual level in terms of increased knowledge, skills and confidence, as well as changed attitudes. This was the level most commonly addressed within capacity development support and was also the easiest level at which to identify and attribute change through post-testing and other forms of follow-up with individual participants in capacity development interventions. Individual change as a result of capacity development was found across thematic areas and among a variety of different types of stakeholders, including personnel in different levels of government; personnel in national and local CSOs, the private sector and international agencies; and women and men in target communities. These strong results in terms of increased knowledge and skills are reflected in the survey of UN Women's partners (48 respondents), in which 50 per cent reported 'good results' and 39.6 per cent reported 'strong results' for the application of new knowledge and skills in ways that contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment outcomes.

As evidenced by desk review and interviews with UN Women, their partners and end beneficiaries, in Georgia, social mobilization strategies and capacity development supported by UN Women at grassroots level have resulted in women having increased self-confidence, agency and leadership skills, and improved their potential for candidature in elections, employment and advocacy for solution of community problems. In Serbia, as reported by UN Women, support for women's economic empowerment through advancing the position of women in the labour market, supporting women's entrepreneurship and enhancing economic empowerment opportunities resulted in more than 2 550 women having increased knowledge on women's rights, increased capacities for employment and new equipment to start or improve their businesses. In Kyrgyzstan, the use of the Gender Action Learning System methodologies in communities resulted in men and women re-evaluating their attitudes to gender equality issues and gender-responsive budgeting activities in their sector.⁴⁰

However, the evaluation also found evidence that expected individual-level results from capacity development were not always achieved. For example, in Türkiye it was reported that UN Women's support to livelihoods training for refugee women generally did not result in women entering the labour market. Reportedly, this was because of women's skill levels, and the training had not been well matched to their existing skills and experience; the labour market was highly competitive; and the women faced constraints in terms of childcare, domestic responsibilities and permission from male family members to work outside the home. Stakeholders stressed that to have the desired impact the training should have been based on a stronger assessment of both the women's skills and labour market opportunities.

There were numerous examples of capacity development contributing to change at organizational level in terms of more gender-sensitive policies, practices, processes and budgets. These results were found across a range of thematic areas and types of organizations. For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as reported by UN Women, support for the use of the Communications for Behavioural Impact methodology with police officers in Tuzla Canton contributed to the police significantly improving their response to cases of domestic violence.⁴¹ In North Macedonia, UN Women's capacity development support contributed to the State Audit Office having stronger capacities for gender mainstreaming within audit processes and conducting the first performance audit on gender equality in the country. In Moldova, government representatives and police officers reported to the Country Portfolio Evaluation that capacity development support from UN Women had improved their organization's work on policy planning, addressing domestic violence cases and recognition of opportunities for advancing women's positions in the police and security forces. In Ukraine, as reported by the Emergency Service of Ukraine and the Ministry of Interior, UN Women's capacity development work with these institutions contributed to the development of a workplan on gender; gender-related amendments to normative acts; more gender-sensitive recruitment procedures; and a growing number of women working within the service.

⁴⁰ Final Evaluation of the Phase III of the Regional Programme Promoting Gender Responsive Policies in South East Europe 2017-2019, UN Women

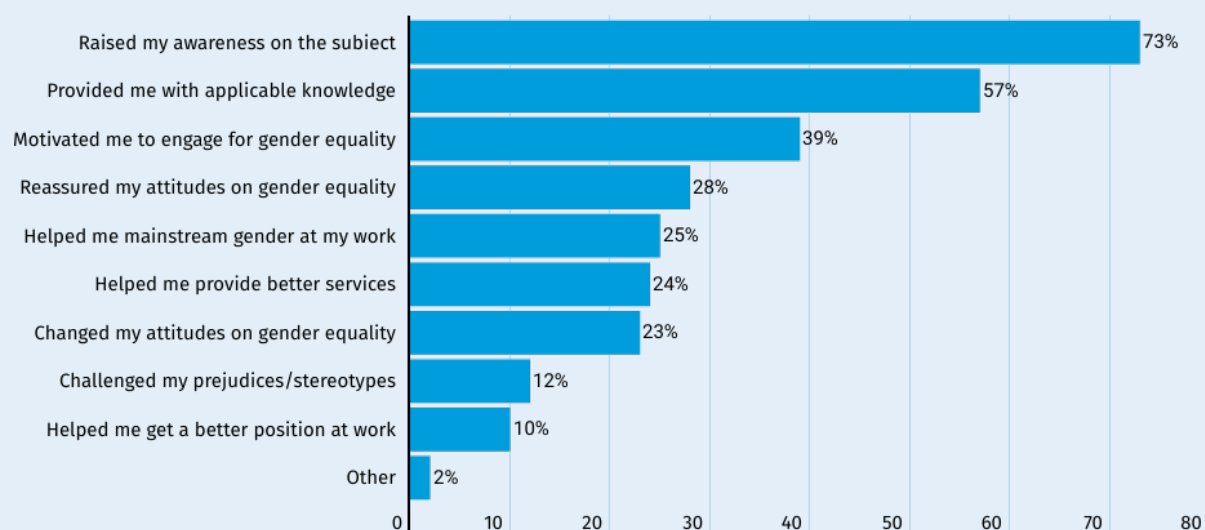
⁴¹ The first three months of 2021 saw a 60 per cent rate of proposed measures being applied by police offices, compared with a rate of 20 per cent in 2018/2019.

BOX 2.

Capacity Development Results in Moldova and Ukraine as reported by End-Beneficiaries

During 2018–2022, two extensive surveys were conducted within other evaluations in Moldova and Ukraine reaching in total 370 end beneficiaries of UN Women training, including public officials, CSO employees, businesses, academia, media and others (150 in Moldova and 220 in Ukraine). In both countries more than 70 per cent of individuals reported an increase of awareness and change of attitudes on gender equality and women's rights. In Moldova, the survey went beyond awareness and attitudes and identified other types of results such as increased motivation; mainstreaming of gender equality at work; and obtaining a better position at work. Ten surveyed beneficiaries of economic empowerment programmes reported starting a new job or consolidating an existing one.

Figure 5: Key results of UN Women's capacity development interventions at individual level



In both countries, more than 60 per cent of respondents reported having applied learned knowledge and skills often and regularly in their work; while between 10 and 15 per cent did not apply them at all or were not sure about their application. Results and application of knowledge and skills were reported by more women than men.

Source: UN Women Moldova [Country Portfolio Evaluation 2018–2022; Final Evaluation of the Project](#) “Enhancing Accountability for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in National Reforms, Peace and Security in Ukraine” (2021)

In Albania, UN Women's work on capacity development support increased the capacities of CSOs to act as budget watchdogs at local level, strengthening their monitoring role regarding gender equality in local public policies. In Albania, UN Women supported the Albania state police to monitor implementation of the sexual harassment policy within the police force. As a result, the policy has been updated and is now accompanied by an online course developed by UN Women which is mandatory for the entire police force. In Georgia, capacity development on sexual harassment issues (training and continuous follow-up advisory support, combined with advocacy) has contributed to 17 institutions and 46 private entities adopting anti-sexual harassment procedures and mechanisms since 2019; requests from other government institutions for similar capacity development support; and plans to conduct a study on sexual harassment in the civil service. While data on the effectiveness of the mechanisms are still lacking, several respondents

mentioned close follow-up needs to be provided to ensure a supportive environment for prevention and protection from sexual harassment is established. In Türkiye, capacity development support to CSOs resulted in a variety of CSOs having improved technical and operational capacity and stronger networks, and to becoming more professional organizations that are better equipped to advance gender equality.

Despite these extensive results reported in terms of UN Women's capacity development support contributing to improved organizational capacity and performance, the evaluation found very limited evidence of how such improved organizational capacity and performance may have contributed to impact for women and girls over time. Such tracking of the longer-term and wider impact of both individual and organizational-level capacity development support is an important missing element of UN Women's efforts to capture and document results.

FINDING 12

There is limited evidence of UN Women’s capacity development support contributing to change at the systemic level. Where it has done so, it is mostly in relation to the development of formal legal and policy frameworks, although contribution to this aspect can be challenging. There has been little focus on addressing informal systemic aspects of gender inequality, although there are some promising examples of this.

The evaluation found much more limited evidence of results from UN Women’s capacity development support at a systemic level. This appears to be partly because the systemic level is less commonly addressed within capacity development interventions and because such results may take longer to emerge and are harder to track, identify and attribute. This was recognized as a problem by Country Office personnel, who reported that it is difficult to assess the results of their capacity development interventions in terms of higher-level outcomes such as increased social cohesion. There also appears to be a gap in conceptualizing and tracking how results at individual, organizational and systemic levels feed into each other. This finding reflects one of the key limitations identified in the corporate level evaluation of capacity development support, which found that most results from capacity development work were at individual level, with a substantial amount also at institutional level, and few at the enabling environment level. Critically, the corporate evaluation also found insufficient focus on working in a holistic way across these three levels for greater impact.

Most of the results at systemic level involved contribution to the development of gender-sensitive legal and policy frameworks. For example, across the region through regional and country programmes, capacity development interventions in synergy with policy advocacy resulted in alignment of national policies with the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW. In Kazakhstan, UN Women provided capacity development over a number of years to enhance political will and capacity for the development of the Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan. In Georgia, capacity development support contributed to the development of a National Action Plan for gender equality; a national and internal Geostat strategy for the advancement of gender statistics; and a National Guideline for Development of Municipal Gender Action Plans that has been implemented in all 64 Georgian municipalities.

In Albania, UN Women has supported the constant monitoring of EAW components of the National Strategy for Gender Equality: the findings from this monitoring and evaluation were used to develop a new strategy

(2021–2030) which was a significant improvement on the previous strategy. In Türkiye, there is evidence that capacity development support is contributing to the development of a stronger, better networked, more diverse and nationally representative women’s movement that can contribute to advancing systemic-level change on gender equality across multiple spaces.

The final evaluation of the Regional Programme Promoting Gender Responsive Policies in South East Europe 2017–2019 identified that capacity development in synergy with policy advocacy contributed to allocation of approximately US\$ 326,007,550 of budget funds using a gender lens for the improvement of the position of women and girls in Albania, North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Further progress was identified in Albania where the Ministry of Finance now delivers training for all budget users on how to prepare general budget documents with gender perspectives and UN Women closely supports the ministry in ensuring gender allocations and monitoring. In Bosnia and Herzegovina gender-responsive budgeting has continued to be applied in the Ministry of Agriculture of Republika Srpska, i.e. results have been sustained after project closure; while in North Macedonia there are examples of systematic gender-responsive budgeting at the local level.

The evaluation found more limited results in terms of how capacity development support may have addressed informal systemic aspects of gender inequality, such as informal norms and exclusionary practices within society. However, some capacity development support focused on attitude and behaviour change such as the Gender Action Learning System methodology used in Kyrgyzstan, which appears promising in this regard. Similarly, the programme “Ending violence against women in Western Balkans and Türkiye: Implementing norms, changing minds” was found to have contributed to promoting favourable social norms and attitudes to ending violence against women and girls and discrimination at multiple levels, although achieving this objective requires more intense efforts over a longer period of time.⁴²

⁴² Final evaluation of the programme “Ending violence against women in Western Balkans and Turkey: Implementing norms, changing minds”

FINDING 13

Key factors that have reportedly enabled capacity development work to be effective in supporting change in the region include UN Women’s credibility and convening power; UN Women’s strong partnerships and collaborative working style; UN Women personnel’s strong knowledge of context and the clear context relevance of interventions; and a focus both on building ownership of change among capacity development participants and on developing champions who can act as change makers within organizations and communities.

A number of factors emerged as supporting or hindering the impact of UN Women’s capacity development interventions. Key among supporting factors was the strong understanding of context among UN Women personnel that enabled them to develop relevant interventions and to identify and work with key partners. The capacity development support that was well connected to key national priorities and goals (e.g. reform processes, new policies and laws, or aspirations for EU integration) appeared to be best placed to generate buy in and results. The quality of relationships that UN Women developed with partners and the nature of partnerships was reported to be critical to success, resulting in high levels of trust, collaborative working and continuous dialogue. In addition, the credibility and convening power of UN Women was a key factor in bringing together partners, gaining access and supporting impact. These strengths exhibited by UN Women in the ECA region are similar to the strengths found across the organization’s wider work in capacity development, which the corporate evaluation identified as including strong relationships with gender equality and women’s empowerment actors; the ability to convene across different stakeholders; and a collaborative approach to partnerships.

A number of internal and external factors emerged as hindering the achievement of results from capacity development support. Chief among the internal factors was UN Women’s own internal policy framework that stakeholders believed slowed down or complicated partnerships and implementation in some cases. Similarly, weak monitoring of higher-level outcomes and impact means that, not only is it not possible to assess the impact of specific capacity development interventions, but the evidence about what works to develop capacity to advance gender equality is not captured and used to strengthen future programming.

Among the external challenges to achieving results, personnel turnover within partner organizations was a major obstacle across different countries, as it results in ‘champions’ that UN Women has fostered moving on; knowledge and skills within teams being lost; and capacity development initiatives needing to be repeated or being stalled until the new management is on board with the work. Lack of political will and lack of a conducive political environment emerged as other external challenges to the effectiveness of capacity development support. While the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted capacity development work across all countries, there was little evidence that it significantly hampered the achievement of results.

FINDING 14

Stakeholders are largely satisfied with the efficiency of capacity development support, and particularly with the high-quality communication and responsiveness of UN Women personnel. However, in some cases, efficiency was hampered by inadequate human resources and short-term financing; and what was reported to be slow and inflexible organizational procedures that created extra work for partners and prevented Country Offices from providing the most relevant capacity development support or reaching grassroots partners.

All categories of stakeholders expressed satisfaction with the efficiency of UN Women’s capacity development support. In both Türkiye and Georgia, partners and beneficiaries reported that communication with the Country Office team was excellent, and that UN Women personnel were professional, expert, helpful and available to respond to questions or concerns. In both Türkiye and Georgia, institutional partners and funders stated that UN Women was more efficient and easier to work with than many other

agencies; that UN Women Country Offices showed flexibility to adjust capacity development work to changing needs and requirements; and that they were highly satisfied with programme implementation and reporting. In Türkiye, EU delegation personnel noted it was very helpful that UN Women Country Office personnel were familiar with EU procedures as it meant interventions were in line with EU rules and reporting to EU standards went smoothly.

There is a mixed picture regarding the adequacy of human and financial resources for capacity development support. The Georgia Country Office was notable in reporting that human and financial capacities were adequate for systemic support to the capacity development of partners. In contrast, other Country Offices, including Serbia, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina all reported limited financial resources, short-term project-based funding, and lack of funds to recruit sufficient personnel as significant constraints to sustained capacity development work. In Türkiye, while funds for capacity development interventions were largely sufficient, inadequate human resource levels impeded the delivery of capacity development interventions. For example, due to limited personnel numbers and personnel turnover, it was not always possible for Country Office personnel to effectively accompany and oversee implementation of capacity development activities or monitor results, and there has been an overdependence on consultants to undertake such work. In this regard, the situation in the ECA region is similar to that found more widely in the organization. The corporate evaluation of capacity development support found heavy reliance on consultants and short-term posts to address insufficient human capacity for capacity development work, and that this reliance acts to limit any follow-up and monitoring activities; does not allow for planning beyond the short-term project level; and does not assure continuity of work. In Ukraine, the need to expand field offices with additional specialist staff to provide sufficient and stronger technical assistance to partners was raised. At the onset of the conflict that started in 2022, the UN Women Ukraine Country Office also lacked technical expertise on gender in humanitarian action. Support from UN Women Country Offices in Jordan, Afghanistan and Myanmar was provided, as well as lessons from headquarters.

The partners survey (48 respondents) conducted by the evaluation team also showed that insufficient and short-term funding was the most reported challenge (23 respondents) for UN Women in support of capacity development for external partners at the national level to respond to the needs of women and girls.

Across the case study countries, a significant challenge to efficiency was reported to be UN Women's own slow, centralized and inflexible organizational procedures; or, in the case of capacity development support to civil society, a lack of strategy. This reflects a significant challenge which emerged in the corporate evaluation: that organizational rules and procedures create a heavy administrative burden for both UN Women personnel, especially at country level, and partners – often to the extent that it is perceived as out of proportion compared to the small size of funds and programmes being administered.

Across the region, Country Offices reported the lack of clear strategy at UN Women for capacity development of CSOs – beyond the capacity development related to compliance with UN Women procedures in implementing projects and results-based management training, and in some countries capacity development related to shadow reporting on international commitments on human rights and gender equality. Country Offices raised the issue of lack of a UN Women corporate strategy for capacity development of CSOs, which instead prioritizes capacity development support to governments. Country Strategic Notes are shaped based on UN Women's Strategic Plan, UN Development Assistance Frameworks, CEDAW and Universal Periodic Review Recommendations and by specific programmes, further influenced by donor priorities; therefore, the space to meet CSO capacity development needs largely shrinks. In Georgia, to reduce tensions and create meaningful space to support CSOs within the given policy framework, the Country Office has outlined its strategic approach⁴³ that, inter alia, focuses on capacity development for policy advocacy and related partnerships. The Country Office discontinued work with the Civil Society Advisory Group and engaged more with national CSO networks and organizations directly in identifying efficient ways to support CSOs. Similar orientation towards national networks was seen in Moldova, which resulted in a gradual increase in trust between CSOs and UN Women.

In Ukraine, Georgia and Türkiye the evaluation found that bureaucratic rules were also a barrier to support for grassroots organizations, although these issues usually related to UN Women's accountability in grant management and risk prevention in cases of low partner capacity. For example, in Georgia difficulties in combining CSOs' own capacity development with other interventions (policy advocacy or campaigns) in the same project was seen as a huge limitation. Recently, the Country Office has encouraged CSOs to integrate their capacity needs in the programmes, thanks to the new Small Grants Policy which for the first time allows 8 per cent of the budget to CSOs to be allocated for organizational capacity development. Similarly, in Ukraine, this challenge was raised in relation to grassroots CSOs. While the Country Office was able to provide capacity development to grassroots CSOs, there was no option to provide funds to these organizations to carry out activities and implement lessons learned. However, the Country Office found creative ways to do this, including drawing on the Women, Peace and Humanitarian Fund and through sub-partnerships. In Türkiye, it was reported that the Small Grants Policy (through which funds are provided to CSO partners within the CSO strengthening project) is not well suited to countries facing political and economic instability.

⁴³ UN Women Georgia Country Office: Strategic Engagement with the Civil Society Organizations, 2020.

In particular, the policy restricts eligibility to CSOs that have been registered for at least three years, which could be an impediment as CSOs may close down and open under a different name due to both political and economic challenges. The Small Grants Policy also stipulates that each grant must be paid in two parts with less than 50 per cent for the first payment, which sometimes can present difficulties if the grant is needed to buy equipment such

as a computer (which some CSOs had identified as a priority for their capacity development), and payment for such equipment cannot be divided. Critically, applications and reporting under the Small Grants Policy must be conducted in English, which not only excludes some of the most grassroots organizations, but also results in grantees using their funding to hire translators to work on reporting, which is clearly inefficient.

FINDING 15

Sustaining results is a significant challenge for all capacity development support and a major weakness within many interventions. Sustainability was greater where participatory approaches resulted in strong ownership of results; the provision of capacity development support was embedded within established local institutions; capacity development support was connected to national processes and agendas; and follow-up was provided to support participants in applying or cascading learning. Sustainability was undermined where capacity development involved short-term support without a realistic exit strategy, or where there was high personnel turnover or changing priorities within partner organizations.

The evaluation found a strong focus on sustainability within some capacity development interventions, which was addressed in a number of different ways. In some cases, sustainability was ensured by strongly connecting capacity development support to wider national priorities and change processes, such as policy or institutional reform. For example, interviews with national partners in Georgia identified a strong commitment within partner institutions to sustain results – which have been embedded within laws, regulations and programmes – after the end of project implementation. A strong focus on developing ownership, either at institutional or individual level, was also used to ensure sustainability of results from capacity development support. For example, in Georgia the 2019 evaluation of the programme *Unite to Fight Violence Against Women*⁴⁴ identified high levels of national ownership as contributing to budgetary commitments to address violence against women, as well as to the maintenance of inter-agency coordination mechanisms and support services to survivors beyond the life of the project. The final evaluation of the Joint UN Women, UNDP and UNFPA Project “A Joint Action for Women’s Economic Empowerment in Georgia”⁴⁵ found UN Women and the project partners were able to ensure national ownership of most project results, with the need for strong further support to promote the Women’s Empowerment Principles in the private sector. According to the evaluation report, this was thanks to a participatory approach and successful identification of partners and stakeholders who are able to leverage the results achieved by the project.

The Women’s Empowerment Principles were further supported by the 2018–2020 National Human Rights Action Plan to which UN Women contributed by participating in drafting the business and human rights chapter: 4 of the 28 objectives made direct reference to the Women’s Empowerment Principles and women’s economic empowerment. By signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Legal Entity of Public Law Enterprise Georgia, UN Women secured the agency’s commitment to mainstreaming gender into all Enterprise Georgia’s relevant programmes, including grant schemes. This reportedly led to an increase in the share of female recipients of grants from 30 to 50 per cent. Similar support has been initiated with the Rural Development Agency, the results of which are yet to be measured. The National Statistic Office – Geostat – continuously strengthens capacities for gender mainstreaming in its research; however, taking over of more costly processes such as extensive thematic gender-sensitive research at national level (e.g. time use survey, prevalence of violence) might be challenging.

In Tajikistan, the Joint SDG Financing Programme (UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women) enabled UN Women to build government ownership on gender-responsive budgeting, resulting in a gender-responsive budgeting module being institutionalized by the Academy of Public Administration under the President and being taught to all students. In Kyrgyzstan, the use of the Gender Action Learning System methodology in communities and institutions has resulted in individual beneficiaries developing strong personal ownership of the gender equality changes that they have identified and committed to, as was observed by UN Women staff.

⁴⁴ UN Women: *Unite to Fight Violence against Women Final Evaluation report* (2019), p. 41, 42

⁴⁵ UN Women: *A Joint Action for Women’s Economic Empowerment in Georgia* (2018)

This has resulted in the development of champions who continue to apply and spread the Gender Action Learning System methodology beyond the scope of UN Women projects.

In Türkiye, there was emphasis on building the sustainability of the women's movement through capacity development support. In particular, the CSO strengthening programme included a strong focus on networking CSOs for collaborative working; strengthening CSO capacity to access future funding from a variety of sources; building CSO knowledge and skills in emerging areas; and putting in place organizational systems and procedures within CSOs that will help them to be sustainable over time. Both Serbia and Türkiye provide examples of where UN Women embedded provision of capacity development on gender equality within local institutions to ensure sustainability.

In Serbia, the National Academy for Public Administration took over training programmes on gender equality and women's empowerment, resulting in gender training being continuously available and accessible to civil servants. In Türkiye, the Country Office plans to set up a Gender Academy, embedded within a well-established university, that can provide training on gender equality in the long term. In addition to these strategies, across a number of Country Offices sustainability was also strengthened through the development of capacity development materials and training products that can be used beyond the life of a given project, as well as through "training of trainers" and support for cascading learning to a wider group of beneficiaries.

The Country Portfolio Evaluation of UN Women Country Office Moldova (2022) identified the attempts to strengthen the sustainability of capacity development results through the creation of enabling policy frameworks, follow-up support in implementation and creation of a supportive environment in institutions and society. However, ownership in the majority of key partner national institutions is still at the initial stage and UN Women is still perceived as "an engine". Although the majority of capacity development beneficiaries reported they frequently apply the knowledge and skills learned in their work, it is mostly in further replication of the training they received and, in some cases, in mainstreaming gender when drafting new legal documents and policies. In the justice sector there are trends of increased application of protection measures in cases of domestic violence; in women's economic empowerment cases of sustainable businesses developed; while some media outlets strengthened gender-sensitive reporting practices – all of which was contributed to by UN Women's capacity development support.

A large number of informants to the evaluation discussed obstacles which discouraged them from applying the knowledge and skills they had acquired, and further work on changing the environment is necessary to strengthen the sustainability of capacity development interventions.

Ukraine demonstrated that results which are not initially visible can in fact be sustainable, i.e. the Country Office had applied a community mobilization methodology to build leadership skills among grassroots women before the start of the war. Although the cluster evaluation commissioned by the Country Office⁴⁶ identified some initial results from this work in individual women's empowerment and political participation, but not necessarily in decision makers accepting their suggestions for gender-responsive policies or in creating tangible benefits for women and girls, the women who received this capacity development support went on to be extremely active local leaders in the humanitarian response to the current conflict and successfully addressed the needs of women and girls in a crisis situation. This demonstrates that the leadership and agency that was built through the initiative was sustainable and is now being used to respond to a crisis. However, the evaluation report's recommendation to support sustainability through changing social norms and the environment remains relevant for all countries in the region.

Despite these positive examples, the evaluation found that, in general, the sustainability of capacity development support is a major challenge and is frequently undermined by a number of factors. Central among these is short-term project funding, which limits UN Women's ability to develop capacities over time. Other important factors include the failure to provide the right level of theoretical and practical knowledge required for participants to take meaningful and sustained action to advance gender equality; and failure to provide ongoing follow-up to support participants in applying what they have learned. Notably, according to respondents of the UN Women partners survey (48), short-term applications of knowledge were considered to be the weakest aspect of capacity development for partners and end beneficiaries. These weaknesses are also reflected in the corporate evaluation, which found that sustaining the results of capacity development interventions is a key challenge across the different thematic areas and regions.

⁴⁶ UN Women: Gender-Responsive Cluster Evaluation for the Projects "Building Democratic, Peaceful and Gender Equal Society in Ukraine" (2017–2021) and "Decentralization and Law Enforcement Reforms: Transformative Approaches to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Ukraine" (2018–2022), (2021), p. 36, 54, 55.

A critical barrier to sustainability can be partners' human and financial resources. For example, an evaluation of the programme "Ending violence against women in Western Balkans and Türkiye: Implementing norms, changing minds" found that "Although there are early signs of national ownership of results in legislative reform and service provision, institutional gender equality mechanisms that could sustain broader EAW reforms and replicate successful practices from the Programme are not sufficiently equipped with human and material resources."⁴⁷ This issue can be particularly acute in relation to CSOs, with capacity development to CSO partners often overlooking the need to address long-term funding and the viability of these partner organizations, e.g. through building capacity to access funding, or providing connections to funding opportunities. This creates the risk that partner organizations which have received capacity development support from UN Women will be unable to continue working and therefore any impact from the support will be lost. For example, CSOs trained under the Refugee Response Programme in Türkiye were highly dependent on one donor and lacked the capacity to raise funds elsewhere, with some ceasing to exist.

The SADA women's centre in Gaziantep, supported by the Türkiye Refugee Response Programme, provides an example of the dilemmas related to sustainability. While some stakeholders expressed disappointment that this is an unsustainable model, as the centre will close when funding ends, others pointed out that the centre has been a best practice that can inform future work with women

refugees. Others stressed that the sustainability of the centre should be assessed in terms of the long-lasting impact for beneficiaries and communities rather than the continued existence of the centre itself, which was always going to be limited by funding.

Personnel turnover was repeatedly mentioned across multiple country contexts as a serious challenge to the sustainability of capacity development efforts both in terms of UN Women personnel moving on and institutional memory and relationships being lost, but more critically in terms of partners' personnel leaving the organizations, resulting in commitment and capacity that has been built within partner organizations being lost. For example, the Serbia Country Office reported that progress often depends on gender champions within national institutions, particularly those in senior positions, and when these people move on the work to develop commitment and capacity must begin again from scratch.

Similarly, the North Macedonia Country Office reported that due to widespread turnover in the public administration and officials after every election, the Country Office has had to provide training to the same ministries multiple times. In Georgia, it was reported that one of the main obstacles to sustainability is the high turnover of leadership and personnel within partner institutions, meaning that the Country Office must continuously invest in developing commitment and ownership among new leadership and personnel.

⁴⁷ Final evaluation of the programme "Ending violence against women in Western Balkans and Turkey: Implementing norms, changing minds"

4. LESSONS LEARNED

LESSON 1

Capacity development support is most successful when it is clearly relevant to context, is owned by national actors and is based on strong partnerships.

Most UN Women Country Offices across the region are well placed to provide capacity development support as they demonstrate an inclusive and participatory approach to capacity development diagnosis and design, solid partnerships and strong personnel knowledge of country context. These strengths were found at regional level and mirror those identified in the corporate evaluation of support for capacity development. However, both evaluations also revealed that – although there are some strong examples – in general, a more systematic approach to ensuring participation and ownership in all capacity development initiatives and at all stages of the capacity development cycle could further strengthen relevance and ownership.

LESSON 2

Capacity development support that is delivered using multiple modalities, including innovative ones, and that combines knowledge transfer with supporting participants to take action, is particularly effective in supporting change across the region.

Identifying the best delivery modalities for a given capacity development intervention is supported by participatory design processes and adaptation in response to feedback. Modalities that provide knowledge and skills and support participants to apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills; facilitate experience sharing and network building; and are delivered by experts familiar with local context and language, are particularly highly valued by a variety of stakeholders across the region. Online delivery of capacity development has worked more smoothly in the ECA region than in some other regions and has clear benefits in being able to expand outreach and reduce costs. However, these advantages are substantially outweighed by less active participation, reduced networking opportunities and that online courses can be inappropriate when addressing sensitive issues.

LESSON 3

It is critical to provide follow-up with participants after a capacity development intervention to support them in applying new learning and skills.

This lesson reflects the corporate evaluation, which identified that follow-up is a crucial part of the capacity development cycle but is too often weak or absent. Within the ECA region, the importance of follow-up support is widely recognized by UN Women personnel, partners and beneficiaries; however, the extent to which such support is systematically provided is very mixed. Short-term projects, short-term and limited funding, and inadequate human resources are all significant constraints to providing follow-up by Country Offices across the region. Alongside follow-up support to participants, it can also be necessary to address wider challenges in the environment that constrain the ability of participants to apply new knowledge and skills to advance gender equality.

LESSON 4

Weaknesses in capturing higher-level and longer-term results from capacity development initiatives limit understanding of how UN Women's capacity development work in the region contributes to gender equality goals.

Monitoring of results is focused strongly on activity-based indicators and lower-level outcomes. There is very limited emphasis and investment in monitoring how strengthened capacity development contributes to meaningful change for women and girls beyond the life of a given project and for people beyond those who were direct participants in capacity development interventions. This is due to inadequate financial and human resources for longer-term impact assessment, as well as limited expertise. This challenge, found within the ECA region, was also highlighted in the corporate evaluation, which identified consistent failure to monitor longer-term outcomes and impact from capacity development interventions.

LESSON 5

A holistic approach that seeks to develop capacity at individual, organizational and systemic levels is the most effective in advancing change within the region.

Within capacity development support across the region, there is an overly strong focus on individual level capacity development and insufficient emphasis at the systemic level. An approach that develops capacity at individual, organizational and systemic levels in ways that are connected to and support wider change processes could add significant value, as was also identified in the corporate evaluation. Within the ECA region there are some interesting examples of progress towards such holistic approaches that could be shared across the region and more widely within the organization.

LESSON 6

Sustaining results from capacity development support is a major challenge that is not given sufficient focus.

All Country Offices within the region face a range of internal and external factors that have the potential to either enhance or undermine the sustainability of capacity development support. It is necessary to integrate a focus on sustainability into the diagnosis and design of capacity development interventions to understand and address such factors. Support for capacity development across the region would benefit from strengthening local ownership through participatory approaches; embedding capacity development within existing institutions; and clearly connecting capacity development to national processes and agendas, which are particularly valuable strategies to enhance sustainability.

5. CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSION 1:

Capacity development is a central element of UN Women’s work within Europe and Central Asia and is recognized as valuable by multiple stakeholders. The focus of capacity development support is mostly relevant to the context; aligned with national priorities and processes; addresses core drivers of gender inequality; and is situated within women’s rights and human rights frameworks.

Across all Country Offices, UN Women personnel’s strong understanding of country context and high-quality partnerships contributed to context relevance and alignment with national priorities. Some Country Offices also used a systematic and structured approach to diagnosis and design to deepen relevance; ensure that interventions address core gender inequality drivers; and build ownership. For example, in both Georgia and Ukraine (before the conflict) the evaluation found emerging practices in the standardization of demand driven, participatory approaches to capacity development diagnosis and design, and the development of broad institutional action plans to ensure ownership. In other contexts, there is a high level of variation in the approach to diagnosis and design between projects and activities, which needs to be addressed.

CONCLUSION 2:

There are significant differences in the quality of capacity development support both across the region and within Country Offices, highlighting the need for stronger systems to share best practice.

While some interventions were of a high quality; used appropriate (and in some cases innovative) delivery modalities; and brought in experts well matched to the needs of participants, other interventions exhibited much weaker design and delivery. Sharing learning and best practice could be one way to improve the situation and raise standards across the region. However, the evaluation found no systematic sharing of practices or experiences across the region, or attempts to standardize capacity development approaches based on evidence. This is part of a wider weakness across the organization, as the corporate evaluation concluded that there is no systematic approach within UN Women to ensuring quality standards across the various stages of capacity development interventions, resulting in significant differences in quality.

CONCLUSION 3:

Within monitoring and evaluation of UN Women’s capacity development work in Europe and Central Asia there is an overreliance on tracking lower-level results and insufficient monitoring of longer-term outcomes and impact.

Monitoring of capacity development support is generally focused on tracking the delivery of capacity development support; the number and type of interventions; and the knowledge and skills that participants have gained, with far less focus on monitoring how participants use new knowledge and skills over time to create change for women and girls. This is a problem across the organization, as identified in the corporate evaluation.

UN Women personnel in the Europe and Central Asia region recognize the need to strengthen monitoring of capacity development results to identify such longer-term impact. This will require greater investment in time and resources, including investing in tracking results beyond the life of a given project. However, such investment could significantly strengthen UN Women’s understanding of how capacity development support can contribute to impact, resulting in more realistic theories of change and effective interventions

CONCLUSION 4:

UN Women personnel and stakeholders across the region recognize the critical importance of providing sustained follow-up to capacity development to support participants in applying their learning and creating change, and embedding and sustaining results. However, in practice, such follow-up is often not provided.

Follow-up support is provided in some capacity development interventions and is undertaken using a range of modalities. However, in many others such support is limited or entirely absent. This is due to a range of constraints, including short-term projects, short-term and limited funding, and limited human resources. However, there appears to be a growing focus across Country Offices to include follow-up support within capacity development interventions due to increased awareness of its importance for supporting action and generating results. It is important that plans for follow-up are built into capacity development design from the outset and are sufficiently resourced.

CONCLUSION 5:

The current focus of UN Women’s capacity development support across the region is on developing capacity at individual and (to a lesser extent) organizational levels, with limited focus on developing capacity at the systemic level or working across different levels.

Within capacity development support in the region, strong emphasis is given to developing the knowledge, skills, awareness and self-confidence of individuals; and to a slightly lesser extent on developing more gender-responsive organizational policies, processes and budgets. Much less emphasis is given to using capacity development interventions to contribute to change at systemic level: where this does exist, it is focused mostly on formal legal and policy frameworks, with very little focus on informal systemic aspects of gender inequality.

This is part of a wider pattern within capacity development work across UN Women, as the corporate evaluation also concluded that the current focus is on developing capacity at individual and organizational levels, with limited focus on developing capacity at the level of the enabling environment or working across multiple levels. Working in a joined-up way to develop capacities across multiple levels to advance gender equality goals could significantly strengthen the impact of UN Women’s capacity development work.

CONCLUSION 6:

Capacity development initiatives in the region are mostly perceived as efficient, with good organization, strong communication and a high level of responsiveness to the needs of partners, although some internal factors have hampered efficiency.

There is a relatively high level of satisfaction with the efficiency of UN Women’s capacity development support across countries, interventions and categories of stakeholders; in particular with the professionalism, expertise and supportiveness of UN Women personnel. However, in some cases, efficiency was undermined by what some stakeholders expressed as slow, centralized and inflexible organizational procedures, which have also made it difficult for grassroots organizations to access UN Women support. While some Country Offices had adequate financial and human resources for capacity development work, others reported their ability to provide capacity development support was hampered by inadequate personnel or insufficient funds.

CONCLUSION 7:

The sustainability of capacity development results in the region is currently weak and should be given greater priority and addressed from the outset within all capacity development interventions.

Although there are some positive examples where sustainability has been prioritized, overall, the evaluation found that the sustainability of capacity development support is a major challenge that is not given sufficient attention. Sustainability is frequently undermined by a number of factors, notably interventions that are not locally owned and embedded; interventions that involve short-term capacity development support without meaningful follow-up or a realistic exit strategy; and high turnover of personnel or changing priorities within partner organizations. This reflects a key conclusion from the corporate evaluation that, across the organization, the sustainability of capacity development work has been hampered by limited ownership, the short-term nature of initiatives and limited funding.

Where sustainability was achieved it was a result of building ownership of capacity development work; embedding capacity development support in local institutions; connecting capacity development support to national processes and agendas; and by providing follow-up support to participants.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evaluation findings, conclusions and lessons learned a set of recommendations are made to UN Women Country Offices in ECA and the Regional Office; some also require intervention from headquarters. For each recommendation, the level of priority and a timeline is suggested. Recommendations have been validated with the Internal Evaluation Reference Group.

RECOMMENDATION 1.

As the recommendation of the Corporate Evaluation of UN Women's Support to Capacity Development of Partners was confirmed in this ECA Regional Evaluation, the ECA Regional Office should contribute to corporate efforts to build a systematic approach and bring a certain level of standardization to its capacity development support to partners. In consultation with Country Offices, the ECA Regional Office should identify areas in which a certain level of flexibility should be open to the Country Offices to adjust approaches to specific country needs.

Priority

HIGH

Timeframe

MEDIUM

Difficulty

MEDIUM

Suggested steps to be taken

In line with the processes following recommendations arising from the corporate evaluation, the Regional Office and selected Country Offices from the ECA region should expand discussion of the findings and conclusions of this evaluation; further assess the strengths and potential weaknesses of the standardized approaches used by some countries; and provide inputs to corporate-level initiatives.

Based on evidence from the ECA region, a systemic approach and standardization should, at a minimum, take into account:

- The need for a holistic approach which embeds capacity development in wider UN Women support (together with policy advocacy, building an enabling environment and social norms change).
- Strong links to international commitments (international human rights and women's rights conventions, EU integration reforms).
- Strong links to the national reform agenda, including contribution to development and implementation of national policies.
- The need for a participatory approach to needs assessment, planning and design of capacity development interventions and ensuring partners' commitment to application of knowledge and skills and creation of an environment that would enable it.
- Definition of approaches to support capacities for practical implementation of policies and practical application of knowledge and skills by partners.
- Approaches to measurement and reporting of capacity development results, including following long-term results.
- Sustainability strategies to allow for continued and nationally owned capacity development processes.

Some flexibility should remain, related to the variety of contexts and challenges Country Offices can face, including, but not limited to the typology of Country Offices and their capacities. Corporate advice should be provided for small Country Offices, with limited financial or human resources on how to engage in capacity development of national partners, with specific focus on those national governments and development partners which require longer-term support.

RECOMMENDATION 2.

The ECA Regional Office should develop a clearer regional vision for capacity development support followed by a strategy for stakeholders other than governments, primarily civil society stakeholders, business entities and grassroots organizations representing or working with the most vulnerable groups.

While all Country Offices engage these stakeholders, support to civil society, business entities and grassroots organizations is far less developed than support to government entities. There are emerging practices across the region (Georgia, Ukraine, Türkiye, Serbia) which should be taken into account when shaping support to these groups.

Priority

HIGH

Timeframe

MEDIUM TO LONG TERM

Difficulty

HIGH

Suggested steps to be taken:

- The strategy for a capacity development approach to CSOs, business entities and grassroots organizations representing vulnerable groups should be part of a wider review of relationships with those groups of stakeholders at the corporate level.
- The Regional Office and Country Offices from the ECA region should synthesize the challenges of the current approach and propose the level and format of engagement with those groups, including the approach to capacity development.
- Experiences of countries where traditional engagement, such as through a Civil Society Advisory Group, has been discontinued or challenged and new modalities established (Moldova, Georgia) should be taken into account.
- In the longer term, UN Women's grant-making policies to all partners, but in particular to civil society partners should provide more space for strengthening the organizational/institutional sustainability of capacities and other results of capacity development.
- Modalities to support the capacities of grassroots organizations which do not necessarily have organizational and programme management skills should be enhanced.
- UN Women should identify a modality to ensure longer-term follow-up support and monitoring and evaluation of the results of its capacity development support to those groups.
- Capacity development of civil society, business entities and grassroots organizations, including those of vulnerable groups, and related baselines and indicators should be integrated in UN Women's Strategic Plans/Notes. Standardized guidance should be provided to Country Offices.

RECOMMENDATION 3.

The ECA Regional Office should take a stronger lead on knowledge dissemination (including dissemination of any potential corporate guideline on capacity development), knowledge generation from the country level and facilitation of knowledge exchange and communities of practice, both among UN Women personnel and prominent partners.

While some regional exchange and communities of practice have naturally grown within specific projects in the ECA (gender-responsive budgeting, Gender Equality Facility and others), there is a need for systematic and continuous exchange that would be more influential on both intercountry learning and the shaping of corporate capacity development policies and approaches. The ECA Regional Office can also support dissemination of any future corporate guideline on capacity development.

Priority

MEDIUM

Timeframe

MEDIUM TERM

Difficulty

LOW

Suggested steps that could be taken:

- The Regional Office should engage a capacity development expert to develop an outline of regional knowledge dissemination, generation and exchange processes. Participatory approach/consultation with the Country Offices and the Regional Office should be applied.
- In their reporting, Country Offices should highlight best practices, challenges and lessons learned related to capacity development that could be of use to colleagues region wide or globally.
- Assessment of capacity development approaches in the region should be carried out periodically to monitor and report on investment in capacity development, progress and related challenges, pilots and innovations used.
- Regional knowledge sharing and knowledge generation events could be organized, including for key stakeholders in the region and development partners, promoting the added value and uniqueness of UN Women's expertise and knowledge product

RECOMMENDATION 4.**The ECA Regional Office should identify thematic areas of interest for national partners as well as analyse and strengthen its own capacities with regards to capacity development in conflict and crisis contexts.**

COVID-19, humanitarian refugee crises and the war in Ukraine showed there is a continuous demand for expertise and capacity development of national partners with regards to protection of women and girls' rights, gender mainstreaming of humanitarian action and response, and recovery planning. While significant resources have been produced and training delivered, systematization and follow-up to assess the results of these efforts is necessary.

Priority

HIGH

Timeframe

MEDIUM TERM

Difficulty

MEDIUM

Suggested steps that could be taken:

- The process could be managed by the Regional Office engaging a Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action expert to systematize knowledge generated over the years and in various crisis settings and analyse trends in partners' demands against UN Women's capacities.
- Based on the lessons learned, UN Women's strengths and priorities for capacity development in crisis situations should be defined regionally and corporately and knowledge systematized.
- As partners' demand for UN Women's support to capacity development remains high in crisis situations, the results of this exercise should be communicated to UN and national partners and their expectations managed.

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The UN Women Independent Evaluation Service is co-located with the Internal Audit Service under the Independent Evaluation and Audit Service. The UN Women Independent Evaluation Service's main purpose is to enhance accountability, inform decision-making, and contribute to learning about the best ways to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment through the organization's mandate, including its normative, operational, and coordination work. The Independent Evaluation Service also works to strengthen capacities for gender-responsive evaluation within UN entities, governments, and civil society organizations.

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DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY
AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. A
GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND
GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED
TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON
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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