

## 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)

