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# EVALUATION REPORT

## REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE ARAB STATES STRATEGIC NOTE EVALUATION



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Independent Evaluation, Audit and Investigation Services of UN Women (IEAIS) led this evaluation under the supervision of Chaitali Chattopadhyay (Regional Evaluation Specialist for the Arab States region) together with International Evaluation Experts Rosie Aubrey and Tania Gatto. The evaluation was conducted between March and October 2025. The evaluation team is grateful to the stakeholders, including intergovernmental counterparts, development partners and UN Women personnel who participated in the evaluation process over video calls and communication exchanges. We appreciate their willingness

to engage in the evaluation and the rich quality of their contributions and insights.

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## REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE ARAB STATES STRATEGIC NOTE EVALUATION

2022 – 2025



**INDEPENDENT EVALUATION, AUDIT AND  
INVESTIGATION SERVICES (IEAIS)**

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION SERVICE (IES)

**UNWOMEN**

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# CONTENTS

ACRONYMS	5
LIST OF TABLES, FIGURES AND BOXES	6
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	7
1. BACKGROUND	10
2. EVALUATION APPROACH	16
3. FINDINGS	21
3.1 RELEVANCE	21
3.2 COHERENCE	23
3.3 EFFECTIVENESS	27
3.4 EFFICIENCY OF ROAS FUNCTIONS	46
3.5 GENDER, HUMAN RIGHTS AND SUSTAINABILITY	54
4. LESSONS LEARNED	57
5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	58



# ACRONYMS

ACRONYM	DEFINITION
<b>CCA</b>	UN Common Country Analysis
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>CSW</b>	Commission on the Status of Women
<b>EVAW</b>	Ending Violence Against Women
<b>GCC</b>	Gulf Cooperation Council
<b>HR</b>	Human Resources
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>MWGE</b>	Men and Women for Gender Equality Programme
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>OCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>ROAS</b>	Regional Office for the Arab States
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>UNCT</b>	United Nations Country Team
<b>UNDIS</b>	United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UN ESCWA</b>	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNSCR</b>	United Nations Security Council Resolution
<b>UNSDCF</b>	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
<b>WEE</b>	Women's Economic Empowerment
<b>WPPL</b>	Women's Political Participation and Leadership
<b>WPS</b>	Women, Peace and Security

# LIST OF TABLES, FIGURES AND BOXES

TABLE 1: ROAS RESOURCE MOBILIZATION, TARGET VERSUS ACHIEVEMENT (2022–2024)

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TABLE 2: TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS

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TABLE 3: ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT GUSKEY+ FRAMEWORK

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FIGURE 1: RECONSTRUCTED THEORY OF CHANGE

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FIGURE 2: ROAS PORTFOLIO ANALYSIS 2022–2025

---

FIGURE 3: SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY FOR DATA COLLECTION

---

FIGURE 4: ROAS' ALIGNMENT TO INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL CONVENTIONS

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FIGURE 5: GENDER AT WORK FRAMEWORK

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BOX 1: TESTING THE THEORY OF CHANGE – COORDINATION

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BOX 2: ROAS CONTRIBUTION TO NORMATIVE GAINS

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BOX 3: TESTING THE THEORY OF CHANGE – NORMATIVE

---

BOX 4: TESTING THE THEORY OF CHANGE – WEE

---

BOX 5: TESTING THE THEORY OF CHANGE – SOCIAL NORMS

---

BOX 6: WPS WORKING GROUPS RESULTS

---

BOX 7: ROAS' CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL ACTION PLAN RESULTS

---

BOX 8: TESTING THE THEORY OF CHANGE – WPS-HUMANITARIAN ACTION

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BOX 9: TESTING THE THEORY OF CHANGE – WPPL

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BOX 10: TESTING THE THEORY OF CHANGE – EVAW

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Purpose

The UN Women Independent Evaluation Service (IES) conducted this Strategic Note Evaluation to deliver a systematic assessment of the work of UN Women's Regional Office for the Arab States (ROAS) over the period 2022–2025. The evaluation's purpose is to support enhanced accountability for development effectiveness and learning to inform the next Strategic Note.

## Objectives

The evaluation objectives were to:

- Assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, sustainability, and gender equality and human rights of ROAS' work.
- Identify lessons learned and good practices that can be scaled.
- Provide actionable recommendations to inform development of the new Strategic Note.

## Intended users

The primary intended user of this evaluation is ROAS in designing its new Strategic Note. Secondary users include UN Women headquarters, intergovernmental stakeholders and regional partners seeking to identify effective practices, gaps and opportunities for advancing gender equality.

## Background

The Strategic Note is ROAS' main planning tool to articulate how it will support UN Women's triple mandate across normative, coordination and operational work in the 17 countries it oversees. As of June 2025, ROAS' total budget was US\$ 40 million over the period 2022–2025.

## Evaluation methodology

The evaluation followed gender-responsive principles and had a utilization focused lens. It used a theory-based design to assess the performance of the Strategic Note based on its stated assumptions about how change happens. The

evaluation was conducted using a mixed-data collection approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods. A desk review, interviews and focus groups were organized involving a total of 80 key informants (from UN Women, UN and intergovernmental partners, donors and civil society organizations [CSOs]) and two surveys were conducted with 34 respondents. Two case studies were developed on gender data and gender and disability inclusion. The evaluation used contribution analysis to assess the contribution made by ROAS towards its Strategic Note. The Gender at Work Analytical Framework was used to assess the extent to which ROAS' programmes had been gender transformative. Given the forward-looking nature of the evaluation, foresight principles<sup>1</sup> were applied to identify lessons and recommendations to help ROAS prepare for future scenarios.

## KEY FINDINGS

**Relevance and Coherence:** ROAS' areas of focus were found to be highly relevant and coherent with both regional and global gender equality priorities. Its Strategic Note aligns closely with UN Women's Corporate Strategic Plan (2022–2025). ROAS' comparative advantage lies in its convening power, technical expertise and bridging role between headquarters and Country Offices. Its emphasis on scaling up Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) and expanding engagement with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) beyond resource mobilization was considered timely and relevant. However, limited attention to subregional specificities, particularly the distinct contexts of countries affected by conflict, the Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW) portfolio and the increasing pushback against gender equality – mainly stemming from inadequate resources and limited clarity on UN Women's comparative advantage in humanitarian crisis contexts – constrained the Strategic Note's overall relevance.

**Effectiveness:** ROAS made notable contributions to advancing regional gender equality commitments by strategically leveraging intergovernmental platforms; building institutional capacities; and supporting policy and normative progress across thematic areas. Through partnerships with the League of Arab States, UN agencies and civil society, ROAS contributed to the development of regional frameworks and gender-responsive policymaking. ROAS played a catalytic role in elevating gender data and evidence for policy advocacy through tools such as GenTRACK<sup>2</sup>, Track-it!<sup>3</sup> and gender alerts, which informed humanitarian and development responses. ROAS also supported the increased visibility and

1. For more details, see [Connecting Foresight and Evaluation](#), Rick Davies, 2023.

2. [GenTRACK Arab States](#)

3. See: [Track-it!](#) - accessible to internal registered users only.

influence of youth and women-led organizations.

The strategic prioritization of WEE and the ambition to achieve impact at scale secured political endorsement and financing. ROAS expanded private-sector engagement via the Women's Empowerment Principles, positioning companies as gender equality champions.

Progress was also seen in work on positive masculinities and social norms change, with initiatives such as Dare to Care and IMAGES studies laying foundations for scale. Other gains included national-level policy reforms, including in the adoption and implementation of gender quotas.

However, the effectiveness of the portfolio was affected by several factors. For instance, in normative spaces, persistent implementation gaps, political resistance and limited follow-up mechanisms hindered the translation of policy gains into tangible change. Effectiveness in Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action was notable but fragmented, with limited integration of women-led organizations in decision-making spaces and the absence of a regional Women, Peace and Security (WPS) coordination mechanism. Short-term funding was another major impediment.

**Efficiency:** ROAS made progress in resource mobilization, particularly through securing non-earmarked funding to operationalize its Strategic Note and initiating partnership with international financial institutions. However, reliance on non-core funding and limited success in resource mobilization within the GCC region were raised as concerns. Internally, cross-thematic collaboration has improved but more structured spaces for joint strategizing are needed. ROAS' current structure appears increasingly stretched by its expanding priorities, suggesting the need for a functional review to ensure strategic alignment and responsiveness.

**Human rights and gender equality:** ROAS adopted a gender-transformative approach, advancing legal reforms, promoting women's leadership and fostering shifts in social norms, including through engagement with men and boys. Support to women-led organizations effectively bridged policy-level initiatives with grassroots action. However, implementation of leave no one behind principles was uneven, with limited clarity on intersectionality. While disability inclusion gained momentum through tools such as the EnAbility Audits, its integration across programming remained inconsistent.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### CONCLUSION 1:

The future iteration of the Strategic Note would benefit from more explicitly reflecting the Arab region's subregional diversity, particularly the distinct contexts of countries affected by conflict.

### CONCLUSION 2:

ROAS' comparative advantage lies in its regional convening strength and normative advocacy. However, its strategic partnership and coalition-building approaches require further consolidation to maximize impact.

### CONCLUSION 3:

ROAS demonstrated strategic intent to achieve impact at scale, but the depth and breadth of impact have varied across the portfolio.

### CONCLUSION 4:

Disability inclusion showed progress but remained inconsistently integrated.

### CONCLUSION 5:

The absence of outcome-level indicators and weak M&E systems undermined learning, accountability and strategic planning, especially in terms of scaling effective models.

**RECOMMENDATION 1: Deepen strategic focus and cross-thematic coherence.** Refine ROAS' strategic direction by ensuring that the Strategic Note adequately reflects the subregional contextual realities, particularly the distinct contexts of countries affected by conflict, guided by the new Strategic Plan; and by fostering cross-thematic collaboration and planning mechanisms to maximize impact.

**RECOMMENDATION 2: Consolidate strategic partnerships and coalition-building approaches.** ROAS should consolidate its strategic partnership portfolio and deepen inclusive collaboration with civil society organizations, grassroots movements and women-led organizations, while simultaneously strengthening coordination with other UN entities at the regional level to catalyse collective action.

**RECOMMENDATION 3: Strengthen operational efficiency and effectiveness.** To improve regional support functions, ROAS should reinforce systems in results-based management, knowledge management and conduct a functional analysis to ensure its structure is "fit for purpose."

**RECOMMENDATION 4: Integrate disability inclusion and leave no one behind across all phases of programme management.**

ROAS should integrate disability inclusion and leave no one behind across all phases of programme management and clarify its intersectional approach.





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# 1. BACKGROUND

## 1.1 Context for gender equality and women's empowerment in the Arab States region

The Arab States includes 22 countries covering the Middle East and North Africa, with a collective population of 350 million, including 175 million women and girls.<sup>4</sup> Despite its shared heritage, the region presents a diverse landscape, with some of the world's wealthiest and poorest nations.<sup>5</sup> While some countries have remained free from armed conflicts for extended periods, others have been engaged in protracted conflict. As of 2025, the region continues to face significant humanitarian challenges, particularly in Syria, Yemen, Lebanon and Gaza, with nearly 60 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>6</sup>

## 1.2 Gender equality and women's empowerment in the Arab States region

The Arab States face varying challenges in achieving gender equality. For instance, the Middle East and North Africa region faces the widest gender gap globally, ranking at 61.7 per cent, with disparities between countries.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in terms of women's political empowerment, while some countries have witnessed positive trends, such as an increase in the number of women in cabinet positions, others have regressed, with some governments including very few women in ministerial and decision-making roles.<sup>8</sup>

Regarding normative and policy progress, there have been some improvements, particularly in legal reforms, with many countries having toughened penalties for violence against women.<sup>9</sup> Gender-responsive budgeting in some countries has also led to legal frameworks backed by funding for gender equality policies and programmes.<sup>10</sup> While progress has been made, a few distinct gaps, such as in case of personal status laws, labour laws and the penal codes regarding domestic violence, remain largely unaddressed. Legislative progress has not always been followed by adequate implementation to reinforce the intent behind the laws.<sup>11</sup>

Available data on violence against women and girls in the Arab region is concerning, particularly domestic violence

and harassment in public spaces.<sup>12</sup> Online safety is also a critical issue with alarming trends in how violence and other harmful behaviours are becoming normalized in online spaces. While progress has been made in addressing harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriage, the prevalence of domestic violence remains high.<sup>13</sup> Patriarchal social structures and the persistent acceptance of gender discrimination further complicate efforts to achieve gender equality.<sup>14</sup>

The Arab States region performs relatively well on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap sub-index for educational attainment, except for countries affected by conflict. However, alongside South Asia, the region has the widest gap globally between educational attainment (97.2) and economic participation (43.1).<sup>15</sup> The contrast between high levels of education and low female economic participation results in substantial economic losses for national economies, contributing to economic stagnation in the region.<sup>16</sup>

Across the region gender inequality remains particularly acute in terms of income. While economic development varies between nations, all countries experience substantial wealth inequality.<sup>17</sup> These disparities are compounded by structural challenges, such as family laws that limit women's access to capital and limited investments in the care economy, affecting women's time for employment and career advancement.<sup>18</sup> Limited safe public transportation options further restrict women's access to jobs. These factors contribute to the partial exclusion of women from the workforce, making them particularly vulnerable to poverty, including many women from the middle class.<sup>19</sup>

Setbacks related to gender equality are also increasing in the region, often due to the weakening of democratic institutions, conflict or conservative interpretations of religion. Women's organizations, women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders across the region face increasing restrictions. Political instability, especially in conflict-affected areas, has not only reversed development gains but also regressed gender equality achievements.<sup>20</sup> In conflict zones, women's ability to participate in governance, peace processes and development, including education and employment, is severely limited.<sup>21</sup>

4. [Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. World Bank](#) Data from 2023, Accessed February 2025

5. For example, UAE with GNI per capita of US\$ 76,680 compared to Yemen with GNI per Capita of US\$ 3,020 [World Bank: Data from 2023](#) Accessed February 2025.

6. [UNOCHA \(2024\). UNOCHA reported as of December 2024 – 59 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance](#) Accessed February 2025

7. Despite this result, the region has seen an overall positive trajectory since 2006, advancing its gender gap score by +3.9 percentage points. [World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report, 2024](#) accessed February 2025.

8. [The IPU's global monitoring of women's parliamentary representation ranks the Arab States as the lowest performing region in the world at 18% in 2025](#). IPU 2025.

9. Such as Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. See Gender Justice Dashboard, 2024, <https://www.genderequalitydashboard.org/> accessed March 2024.

10. Such as Morocco and Tunisia.

11. [UN Women \(2023\) Background Note: Briefing to Executive Board](#), accessed February 2025.

12. [Arab Barometer, 2024](#), accessed February 2025.

13. UN ESCWA [Arab Report on the Periodic Review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 Years](#) accessed February 2025.

14. Op cit.

15. Gender Gap Report (2024) The World Economic Forum, Ibid 5.

16. The estimated national GDP loss due to unmet Female Labour Force Participation goals ranges from 4.4 per cent to 12.5 per cent, leading to an annual economic shortfall of US\$ 575 billion – an avoidable and preventable loss across the region. As reported by [UN Women \(2022\) Assessing macroeconomic response policies to COVID-19 in the Arab region: what implications for women's economic empowerment?](#) accessed February 2025.

17. The richest 10 per cent of the population in the Arab States receive 57.7 per cent of national income, while only 9.2 per cent is allocated to the bottom 50 per cent. World Inequality Database 2023, accessed February 2025.

18. Op cit.

19. Op cit.

20. Push Forward for Rights, Equality and Justice, An evolving UN Women Strategy, October 2024.

21. UN ESCWA [https://archive.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/synthesis-arab-report-periodic-review-beijing-declaration-platform-english\\_0.pdf](https://archive.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/synthesis-arab-report-periodic-review-beijing-declaration-platform-english_0.pdf) accessed February 2025



### 1.3 Escalating crises in the region

Since 7 October 2023, an estimated 50,000 people<sup>22</sup> have been killed in the Gaza war, 70 per cent of whom were women or children.<sup>23</sup> More than 1.9 million people – 85 per cent of the total population of Gaza – have been displaced, including nearly 1 million women and girls. The entire population of Gaza – roughly 2.2 million people – are in crisis levels of acute food insecurity or worse.<sup>24</sup>

Displacement has heightened vulnerabilities, leading to increased gender-based violence and eroding coping mechanisms. Despite escalating needs, only 0.09 per cent of funding from the Flash Appeal has been allocated to local women's organizations, underscoring the urgent need for gender-responsive interventions.<sup>25</sup>

Syria also faces a deepening humanitarian crisis after years of conflict. Following the December 2024 overthrow of the government by opposition forces, the situation remains volatile and uncertain and significant challenges remain to achieving peace and security.<sup>26</sup> Over one million people, mostly women and children, have been newly displaced. Health facilities are increasingly overwhelmed, and essential supplies are critically low.<sup>27</sup> Additionally intensified Israeli attacks on Lebanon have led to the rapid return of Syrian refugees into Syria, further straining limited resources.<sup>28</sup>

The funding cuts to the UN announced by USAID in February 2025, alongside reductions in development cooperation budgets stemming from changing government priorities in several European countries, have disrupted funding pools for gender-focused humanitarian and development initiatives.<sup>29</sup> This shift has intensified financial uncertainties for UN Women, women's rights organizations and humanitarian service providers.

### 1.4 UN Women in the Arab States

The UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States (ROAS) was established in Cairo in 2012, and covers 17 countries across the region, with overseas offices in Iraq, Yemen, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). ROAS is a regionally based member of UN Country Teams (UNCTs) in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. ROAS also covers Syria through the Syria programme; collaborates with the UAE Liaison Office on partnerships and resource mobilization; and provides technical support to Algeria and Qatar, focusing on gender mainstreaming and partnership development.

### 1.5 UN system coordination

ROAS invests in UN coordination work while also leveraging and anchoring UN coordination efforts within its normative and programmatic efforts, embedded as a key output across each result area. ROAS leads or is part of several UN regional coordination working groups. ROAS leads on gender analysis and gender equality integration as a member of the Regional Coordination Platform, including the Issue-Based Coalitions and the Regional Peer Support Group. ROAS also supports UNCTs to strengthen gender mainstreaming in UN Common Country Analyses and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) processes and through joint programming and technical support.

### 1.6 Regional Strategy

ROAS' Strategic Note covering the period 2022–2025, reflected several key strategic shifts to deepen its impact and partnerships. Conceptually, it aims to capitalize on existing enablers to accelerate and scale progress, investing in statistics and data and leveraging political leadership. Programmatically, it focuses on scaling the WEE portfolio to increase female labour force participation in the Arab States by 5 per cent (2022–2030);<sup>30</sup> advancing Women's Political Participation and Leadership (WPPL) by promoting gender parity in parliaments and cabinets; and intensifying EVAW efforts, particularly in terms of domestic violence and violence in public spaces. The Strategic Note also aims to strengthen linkages across thematic areas. Geographically, the Strategic Note prioritizes expansion in the Gulf, emphasizing WEE and WPPL, mobilizing larger pooled funds and leveraging the GCC for its normative leadership in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in the region.

### 1.7 Theory of change

The Strategic Note theory of change is set out below.

If ROAS provides oversight, technical and representational support to Country Offices and regional stakeholders in the impact areas shown below, including by:

- (a) advancing the availability of data or knowledge;
- (b) building complementary capacities of intergovernmental bodies, processes and Member States;
- (c) strengthening UN coordination and joint programming;

22. 45,000 Palestinians and 1,700 Israelis.

23. <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15944.doc.htm> accessed February 2025.

24. UN Women Gender Alert, January 2024.

25. Based on UN Women analysis of Financial Tracking Service data for the Flash Appeal as of 18 January 2024.

26. UNHCR, 2025, Syria Emergency, <https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies/syria-emergency>, accessed February 2025.

27. Op cit.

28. Op cit.

29. IGLA, 2025, <https://ilga.org/news/development-foreign-aid-cut/>, accessed May 2025.

30. The initial target to surge women's employment by 5 per cent by 2025 was later revised to 2030.



(d) expanding strategic partnerships with international financial institutions;

(e) strengthening voice and agency of young men and women and CSOs;

(f) defining common communications and advocacy strategies;

(g) implementing a Humanitarian–Development–Peace nexus approach and regional signature interventions or tools; and

(h) strengthening organizational architecture in the region

Then UN Women in the region will have contributed to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women

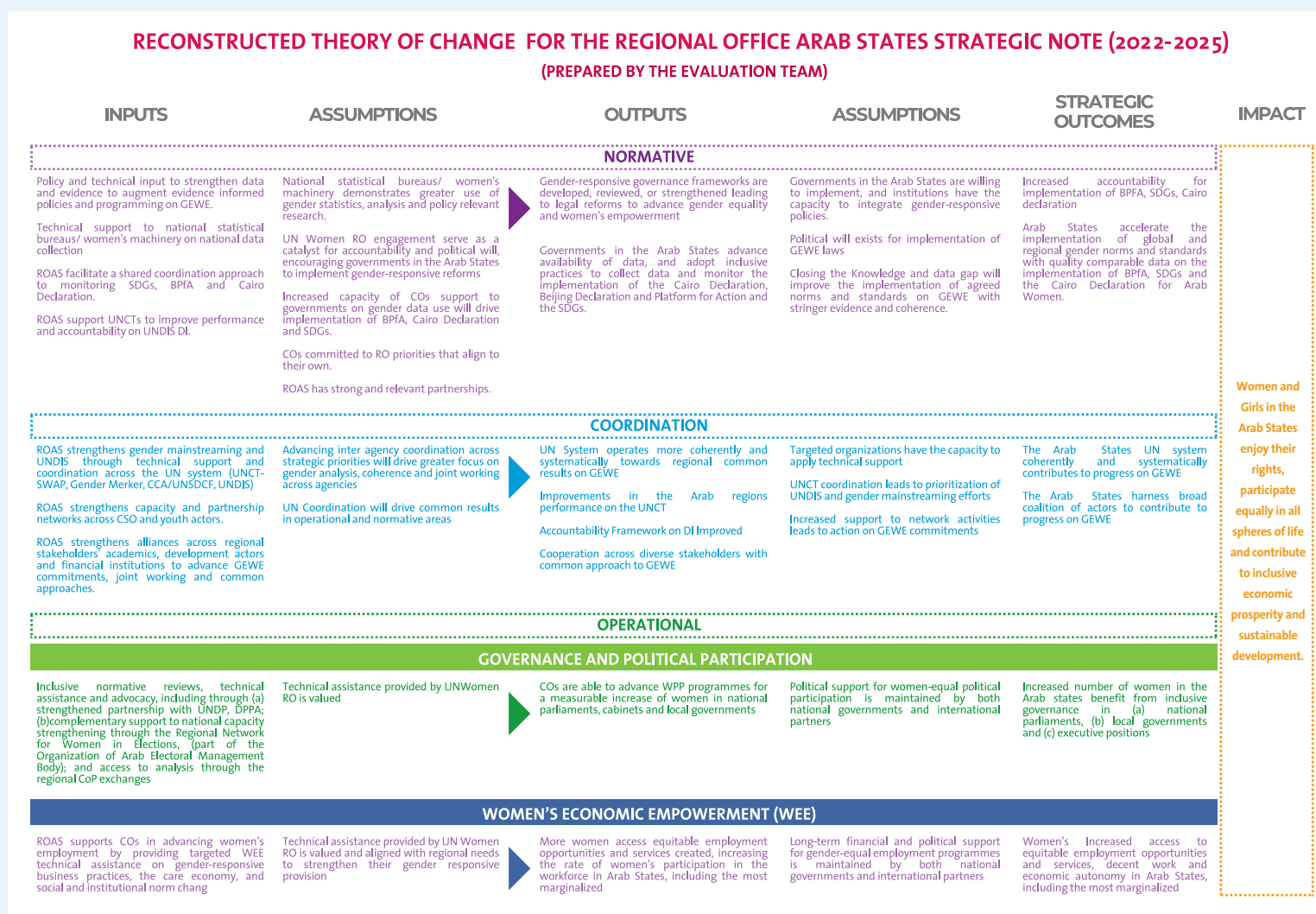
and sustainable development, including peaceful societies, by deepening capacities and accountabilities for the achievement of international standards for gender equality and women's empowerment, ensuring women live safe lives; have equal voice in decision-making; and have equal enjoyment of fundamental rights, choices and opportunities as men (particularly contributing to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] 1,5,8 and 16).

The evaluation noted that the theory of change did not adequately capture the full scope of ROAS' work across its triple mandate and associated risks and assumptions. As a result of these gaps, the evaluation team reconstructed the theory of change as shown in Figure 1.

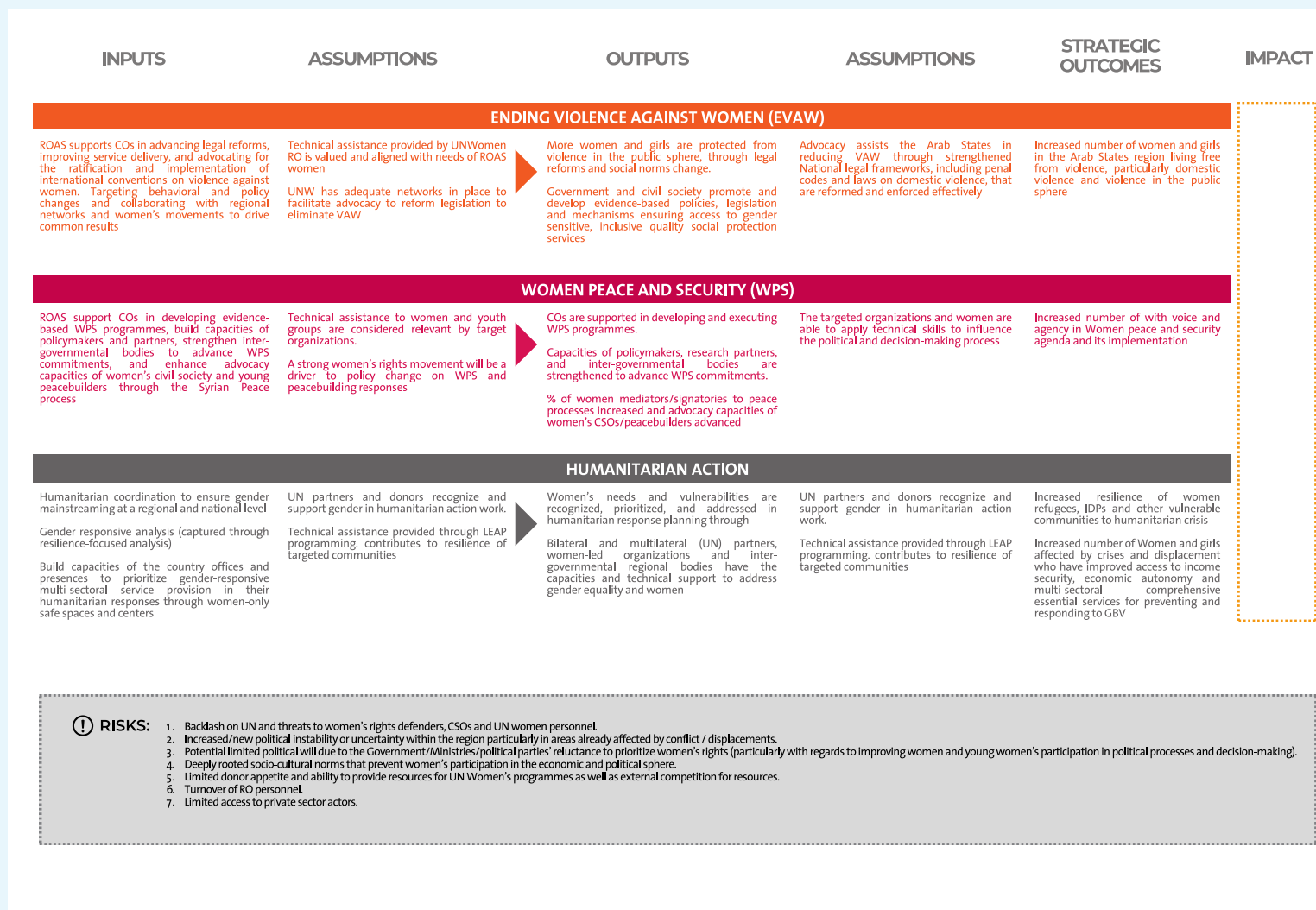


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**FIGURE 1. Reconstructed theory of change**



**FIGURE 1. Reconstructed theory of change**





## 1.8 Budget and human resources

The evaluation team conducted a portfolio analysis of ROAS' work from 2022 to February 2025 as detailed below.

ROAS leadership consists of the Regional Director, the Deputy Regional Director, with support from the Regional Operations Manager. The Regional Executive Office supports the Regional and Deputy Regional Directors and is managed by the Head of the Regional Executive Office, with an Executive Associate.

As of July 2025, ROAS had 73 personnel: 14 International Fixed-Term Appointments, 11 National Fixed-Term Appointments, 14 Service Contracts, 4 Special Service Agreement holders working full-time in the office, 6

home-based Special Service Agreement holders and 24 temporary contract consultants. This represents an increase from 59 personnel in January 2022.<sup>31</sup> As of June 2025, ROAS had 10 vacant positions, including thematic lead positions for ERAW and WEE. The ROAS organization chart is presented in Annex 6.

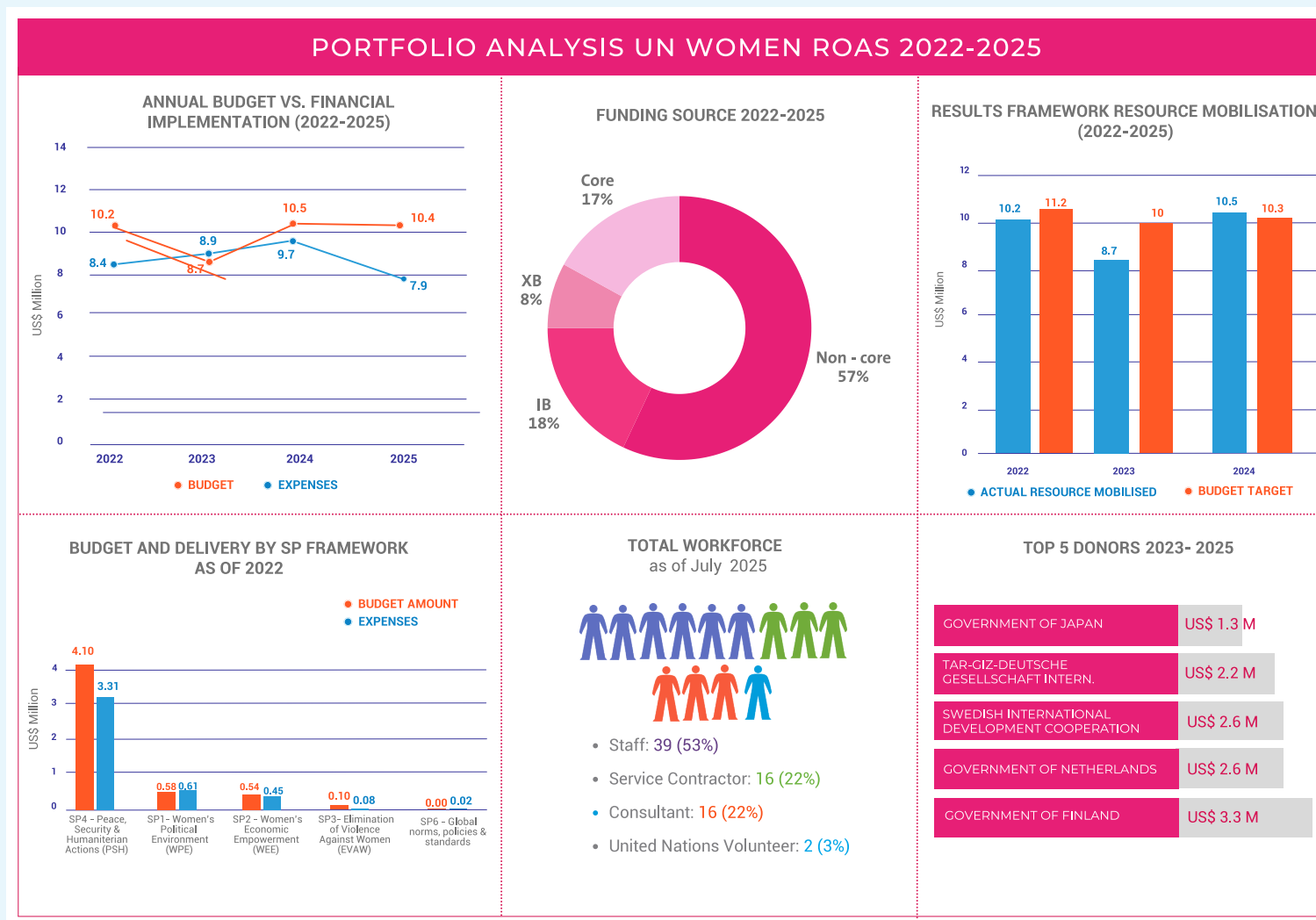
ROAS' total budget for 2022–2025 was US\$ 40 million. Non-core funding is the main source of funding, amounting to 57 per cent of total funding during 2022–2025. Financial implementation has ranged from 82 per cent in 2022 to 100 per cent in 2023 and 78.6 per cent in 2024. WPS and Humanitarian Action were the highest funded thematic areas of work. ROAS' top five donors include the governments of Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Germany and Japan (see Figure 2).



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31. Analysis conducted by the evaluation team based on a comparison of the ROAS organization chart in 2022 and 2025.

**FIGURE 2. ROAS portfolio analysis 2022–2025**<sup>32</sup>



Data source: Compiled by the Evaluation Team, Project Delivery Report, Quantum and Power BI, as of July 2025

32. Note that Figure 2 chart "Budget and delivery by Strategic Plan Framework" is as reported in 2022 only, as the portfolio analysis after 2022 is not available in the corporate system Quantum.



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## 2. EVALUATION APPROACH



## 2.1 Evaluation purpose and objectives

This was a planned Strategic Note Evaluation, whose purpose was two-fold: (a) accountability, to assess the contributions of UN Women in the Arab States region during the current Strategic Note period (2022–2025); and (b) learning from experience, to understand which strategies and elements were working well to support strategic learning and decision-making for the office moving forward. Therefore, the evaluation was primarily formative, to inform development of the next Strategic Note 2026–2030, but also included summative elements within its scope to support enhanced accountability.

Specifically, the objectives of the evaluation were to:

- Support decision-making to inform development of ROAS' next Strategic Note.
- Assess the relevance of ROAS' contribution at national levels and alignment with international agreements and conventions on gender equality and the empowerment of women.
- Provide insights into the extent to which ROAS has realized synergies between UN Women's triple mandate.
- Assess effectiveness, organizational efficiency and coherence in progressing towards the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women results as defined in the Strategic Note.
- Assess ROAS' structure and its support to countries through Country Offices, Programme Presences and as a Non-Resident UN Agency.
- Enable ROAS to improve its strategic positioning to better support the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Identify and validate lessons learned, good practices and examples of innovation that can be scaled up and replicated to support gender equality and human rights.
- Provide actionable recommendations with respect to development of ROAS' next Strategic Note.

The key evaluation questions were:

EQ1: How relevant is ROAS' focus, adaptability and responsiveness considering the changing political and

emergency context to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in the Arab States region?

EQ2: To what extent is UN Women leveraging its coordination mandate to strategically position itself and contribute to a more coherent and gender-responsive approach by UN partners and other development actors with respect to gender equality and women's empowerment in the region?

EQ3: How can ROAS leverage the Gender Equality Acceleration Plan to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in the UN system?

EQ4: How effective is ROAS' normative and operational work in contributing to regional Strategic Note target outcomes?

EQ5: How has ROAS contributed to catalysing country efforts in relation to its triple mandate, impact areas, emerging areas and resource mobilization?

EQ6: To what extent are ROAS functions effectively supporting Country Offices to deliver results in the region?

EQ7: Does ROAS currently have the right balance between oversight/support to Country Offices/Non-Programme Presences versus regional level delivery of results?

EQ8: Is ROAS' structure fit for purpose to deliver against its Strategic Note as well as effectively support offices in the region?

EQ9: How effectively has ROAS managed its external partnerships?

EQ10: Has the portfolio been designed and implemented according to human rights and leave no one behind principles, including disability perspectives?

## 2.2 Evaluation users and use

The primary intended users of the evaluation are UN Women ROAS, UN Women senior management and other relevant personnel at headquarters, regional and country levels, and the programme offices that ROAS oversees. The evaluation may also be useful for other actors working with ROAS including partner governments, civil society, UN agencies, international/non-governmental organizations, forums and platforms, donors and the private sector.



The primary intended uses of the evaluation are to:

- Support decision-making to inform development of ROAS' next Strategic Note.
- Enhance accountability for development effectiveness of the existing Strategic Note in terms of UN Women's contribution to gender equality and the empowerment of women, as well as organizational effectiveness, learning and knowledge management.
- Support learning on effective, promising and innovate strategies and practices.
- Enhance capacity development and mobilization of regional stakeholders to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women.

## 2.3 Scope

The evaluation covered the entire Strategic Note period from January 2022 to June 2025. The Strategic Note's entire programme of work was considered, including normative, coordination and operational work across all thematic areas. The scope of the evaluation also covers global programme activities at the regional level and regional programmes being delivered across countries. Joint programmes and programming were within the scope of this evaluation. Where joint programmes were included in the analysis, the evaluation considered both the specific contribution of UN Women, and the additional benefits and challenges from working through a joint modality.

The evaluation's focus is on outcome-level results. The evaluation did not collect output monitoring data, analyse the achievement of impacts or focus on evaluating UN Women's corporate management or systems outside of the regional context, such as its global architecture.

The geographical scope included the 17 countries in which ROAS operates. This includes those with established Country Offices (Iraq, Yemen, the Tunisia–Libya cluster, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Egypt and OPT). The scope also included countries where ROAS provides support as a regionally based member of the UNCT (Kuwait, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain); has a programme presence as in Syria; a Liaison Office (UAE);<sup>33</sup> or where ROAS provides support to Resident Coordinators and UNCTs focusing on gender mainstreaming, partnership development and capacity-building to enhance regional impact (Algeria and Qatar).

## 2.4 Evaluation design

The evaluation applied a theory-based approach<sup>34</sup> and United Nations Evaluation Group guidance on gender and human rights-based principles to evaluation through their incorporation into the evaluation questions, methodology and analytical approaches.<sup>35</sup> The evaluation applied the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development –Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) evaluation criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness and efficiency) and an additional human rights and gender equality criterion. The evaluation matrix key questions and sub-questions were used to articulate areas of evaluation focus (see Annex 4 for the evaluation matrix).

The evaluation applied mixed methods, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis, to assess the performance of ROAS. Contribution analysis was used, with the Strategic Note 2022–2025 theory of change serving as the basis for assessment. The evaluation used the Gender at Work Framework<sup>36</sup> to analyse the types of change ROAS contributes to across four interlinked domains necessary for sustainable progress on gender equality and women's empowerment, i.e. individual, formal, systemic and informal change. These frameworks supported the analysis of key principles, including the principle of leaving no one behind.

Given the forward-looking nature of the evaluation, foresight principles<sup>37</sup> were applied to identify lessons and recommendations that can help ROAS prepare for future scenarios, challenges and opportunities to enhance adaptability and resilience. The evaluation team collaborated closely with UN Women's Strategic Planning Unit, particularly the Foresight consultant and the ROAS Strategic Planning Specialist to design the evaluation questions and adapt methodology to capture foresight elements. The evaluation team also participated in the ROAS Strategic Note workshop, incorporating insights from the foresight discussions into the evaluative data.

In addition, a meta-synthesis of evaluations conducted between 2021 and 2025 was undertaken to generate insights and identify lessons related to the Development Results Framework. This included both country-level and regional-level evaluations, with joint programmes and programming in scope. The synthesis was supported by Artificial Intelligence analysis software (AIFYZE) to aggregate and analyse key findings and recommendations (see Annex 13).

33. The Head of UAE Liaison Office reports both to the Strategic Partnership Division at headquarters and to the ROAS Regional Director.

34. Theory-based approaches to evaluation use an explicit theory of change to draw conclusions about whether and how an intervention contributed to observed results. For more information, refer to the Government of Canada: Theory-based Approaches to Evaluation: Concepts and Practices, 2012.

35. <https://unevaluation.org/uneq-publications/uneq-guidance-integrating-human-rights-and-gender-equality-evaluations>

36. <https://genderatwork.org/analytical-framework/>

37. For more details, see [Connecting Foresight and Evaluation](#), Rick Davies, 2023

## 2.5 Evaluability assessment

In line with UN Women's commitment to results-based management, an evaluability assessment was conducted by the evaluation team at the inception phase. Key observations included missing outputs; indicators with unclear framing and insufficient disaggregation; and a lack of benchmarking. The original theory of change did not adequately capture the full scope of ROAS' work across its triple mandate and associated risks and assumptions, requiring its reconstruction to enable a more effective evaluation. The full evaluability assessment can be found in Annex 5.

## 2.6 Sampling and data collection

Purposive sampling was used through a consultative approach with the ROAS team to ensure the sample had a balanced representation of various programme interventions and generated diverse perspectives from a wide range of stakeholders. The evaluation team carried out a detailed stakeholder mapping exercise and analysis during the inception phase to understand the sampling universe, the role of various stakeholders and to draw a representative sample to ensure the perspectives of various individuals and groups were taken into consideration in the sample. The stakeholder mapping exercise was reviewed and finalized through consultation with ROAS personnel. While the evaluation did not directly consult women targeted by UN Women's regional programmes, the inclusion of CSOs in the sample ensured that the perspectives of groups representing women with disabilities and those from hard-to-reach communities were reflected among the stakeholders consulted. The list of stakeholders consulted can be found in Annex 11.

The evaluation used a mixed-method approach of qualitative as well as quantitative data collection and analysis methods, document and portfolio analysis, and key informant interviews and surveys. The evaluation approach utilized both quantitative and qualitative data to triangulate and validate the data through cross verification from multi-data sources and tested the consistency of findings obtained through different instruments.

Specifically, the objectives of the evaluation were to:

- A review of more than 70 documents, including programme documents, annual reports, annual workplans, donor reports, programme evaluations and monitoring data.

- Portfolio and financial analysis drawn from the UN Women results management system and financial records.
- A meta synthesis of previous country and regional-level evaluations between 2021 and 2025.
- 80 key informant interviews with diverse stakeholders, including: UN Women personnel, intergovernmental and development partners, UN partners, CSOs, the private sector and donors.
- Two surveys of UN Women personnel across the region and implementing partners.
- Two foresight workshops exploring forward-looking conversations facilitated with the Strategic Planning team (see Figure 3 for details).
- Two case studies on gender evidence and data and disability inclusion.

## 2.7 Governance and quality assurance

The evaluation was led by the Arab States Regional Evaluation Specialist, who is a member of UN Women IEAIS and acted as the team lead. The draft evaluation report was shared with the regional leadership and thematic leads for validation, and their feedback and comments were integrated into the report. IEAIS provided quality assurance support to the process. The Director, IEAIS and Chief, IES provided oversight and methodological guidance. The report was also reviewed by an internal peer reviewer.

## 2.8 Challenges and limitations

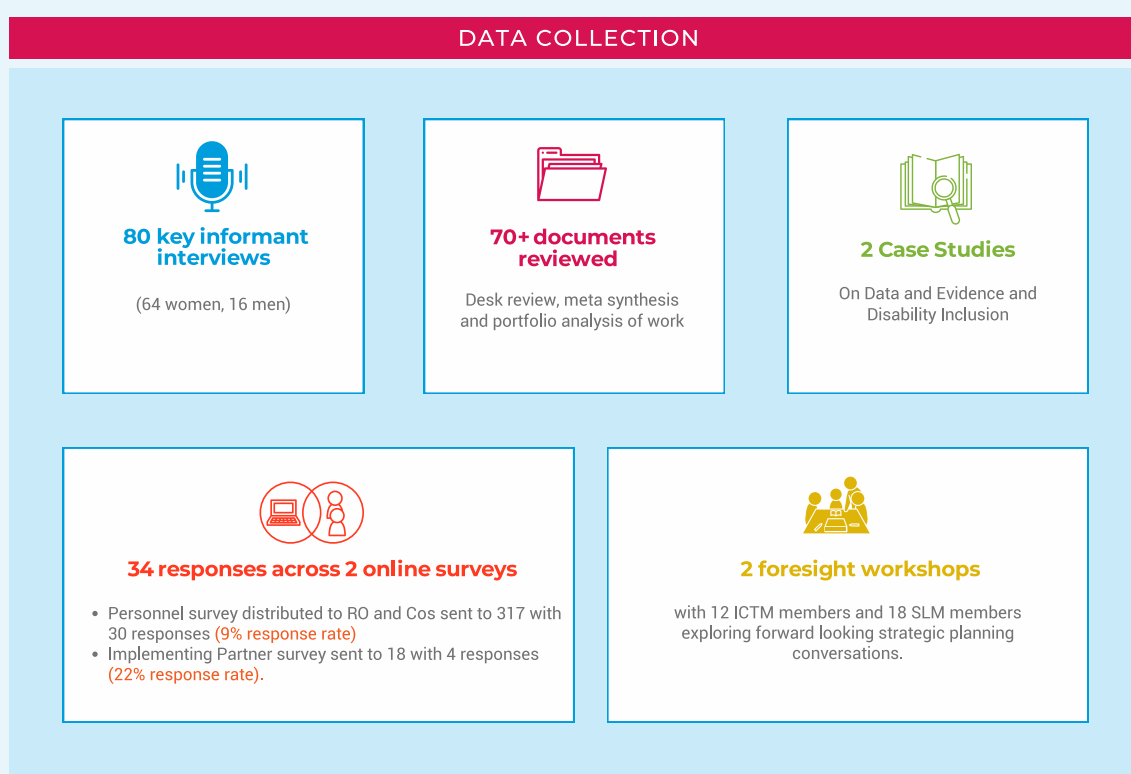
The evaluation faced several challenges and limitations.

- Data collection coincided with the holy month of Ramadan, potentially affecting stakeholder availability. The team mitigated this by scheduling consultations at times that caused minimal disruption and inconvenience.
- Despite the relatively large target population, the survey response rate among both UN personnel and implementing partners was low. While qualitative insights added value, the evaluation team had to compensate for the limited survey data by relying on other data collection methods, such as additional interviews and the data from foresight workshops.

- ROAS' thematic work is closely integrated with country-level programmatic implementation and depends largely on the results achieved by Country Offices. Consequently, distinguishing ROAS' specific contributions from those of the Country Offices proved complex and required sustained engagement with stakeholders at both levels. In several instances, it was not possible to clearly attribute particular inputs or outcomes to either ROAS or the respective Country Office. Where feasible, the contribution

analysis sought to differentiate the roles and inputs of key actors, including ROAS, Country Offices and other partners. To further validate the evidence and explore this issue, the evaluation team utilized the foresight workshop with ROAS and Country Office personnel. During the workshop, it was clarified that this distinction is largely theoretical, as results achieved at the country level are also considered part of ROAS' results, given the nationally focused nature of ROAS' thematic work.

**FIGURE 3. Source and methodology for data collection**





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## 3. FINDINGS

THIS SECTION OUTLINES THE EVALUATION FINDINGS ORGANIZED BY THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS.



## 3.1 RELEVANCE

**Q1:** How relevant is ROAS' focus, adaptability and responsiveness considering the changing political and emergency context to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in the Arab States region.

### FINDING 1

The Strategic Note demonstrates alignment with regional, international and UN Women corporate priorities. Its emphasis on scaling up WEE and expanding engagement with the GCC beyond resource mobilization was considered timely and relevant. However, limited attention to subregional specificities, particularly those countries affected by conflict; the ERAW portfolio; and the increasing pushback against gender equality constrained the Strategic Note's overall relevance. **(Relevance)**

ROAS developed its current Strategic Note in 2021 through a participatory and consultative process, engaging Member States, CSOs, youth representatives and donors. This inclusive approach reflects a commitment to transparency and stakeholder ownership.

The evaluation found that the Strategic Note remains relevant and aligned with both international and regional normative frameworks on gender equality and women's empowerment. It articulates key commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), particularly Articles 7 and 11, which advocate for the elimination of barriers to women's full and equal participation in political and economic spheres. The Strategic Note is consistent with United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs), notably UNSCR 1325 (2000) on WPS, which underscores the importance of women's participation in peacebuilding, humanitarian response and post-conflict reconstruction; and UNSCR 2122, which reinforces the centrality of gender equality and women's empowerment in sustaining international peace and security.

The Strategic Note is aligned with the four impact areas of UN Women's Corporate Strategic Plan (2022–2025), thereby contributing directly to the achievement of SDGs 1, 5, 8, and 16, namely, the eradication of poverty, gender equality, decent work and economic growth, and peace, justice and inclusive institutions (see Figure 4).

**FIGURE 4. ROAS' alignment to international and regional conventions**



Source: Prepared by the evaluation team

Stakeholder consultations reaffirmed the Strategic Note's alignment with key regional frameworks and intergovernmental processes. In particular, the Strategic Note reflects the principles of the Cairo Declaration on Women and Development (2020),<sup>38</sup> which emphasizes the integration of gender equality into national development

38. Cairo Declaration on Women and development, 2020.

agendas across the Arab States. The Strategic Note also demonstrates responsiveness to critical intergovernmental review mechanisms, including the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development and the Beijing+30 review process.

Findings from the evaluation survey indicate a good perception of relevance among key stakeholders. Specifically, 70 per cent of UN Women personnel (N=21/30) and 75 per cent of implementing partners (N=3/4) affirmed that ROAS' strategic direction is well-aligned with the region's most pressing gender equality and women's empowerment priorities.<sup>39</sup>

Stakeholders affirmed the relevance of ROAS' strategic approach, particularly its ambition to achieve impact at scale – an aspiration that aligns with the growing demand on the UN system to demonstrate sustainable and measurable results. Stakeholders acknowledged that ROAS had taken deliberate and concrete measures to embed this approach within its programme design. Notable examples include the Regional Flagship Initiative to Surge Women's Employment, which aims to increase women's labour force participation by 5 per cent by 2030 through a combination of legal and policy reforms, shifts in social norms and the creation of new economic opportunities.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, the Dare to Care programme was designed to achieve impact at scale, targeting approximately 1.3 million individuals through a youth-led regional movement and strategic partnerships with youth-serving institutions.<sup>41</sup>

The Strategic Note also demonstrated a commitment to enhancing women's leadership, with targets to reach 30 per cent representation in parliaments and cabinets across the region by 2025, and to increase the participation of women as mediators, negotiators and signatories in peace processes in Syria, Libya, Iraq and Yemen.

Stakeholders further identified the Strategic Note's focus on scaling up WEE initiatives as a highly relevant response to the region's urgent need to increase female labour force participation. This focus was also viewed as a neutral and pragmatic entry point for engaging Member States in broader gender equality and women's empowerment efforts.

The expansion of programme engagement into the GCC region – beyond just resource mobilization – was recognized as a valid and forward-looking strategy. External stakeholders provided positive feedback on UN Women's technical contributions through its coordination mandate in the GCC, as elaborated under Finding 2.

The commitment towards gender data and statistics within the current Strategic Note was also valued as a relevant approach by both internal and external stakeholders. Tools such as GenTRACK<sup>42</sup> and Track-it!<sup>43</sup> were highlighted as instrumental in demonstrating ROAS' impact and in supporting evidence-based programming and policy formulation.

The evaluation revealed a strong consensus among stakeholders regarding ROAS' agility and adaptability in responding to evolving regional contexts. All stakeholders consulted affirmed this capacity, and 73 per cent of evaluation survey respondents across both ROAS personnel and implementing partners (N=24/33) validated the same.<sup>44</sup> A frequently cited example was ROAS' ability to generate timely Gender Alerts in humanitarian crises, notably in Gaza and Lebanon. These were seen as critical contributions to gender-responsive crisis responses.

Despite the overall positive assessment of the Strategic Note's relevance, the evaluation identified several areas of concern:

- Stakeholders highlighted that the Strategic Note did not adequately reflect the subregional contextual realities of many countries, particularly those affected by conflict. Given that the Arab States region includes a significant number of conflict-affected contexts, this dimension was perceived as underrepresented.<sup>45</sup>
- Operational agility was flagged as a challenge. While ROAS demonstrated responsiveness – e.g. through the generation of Gender Alerts in crises such as Gaza and Lebanon – its ability to produce timely data to inform programming was reportedly constrained by perceived lengthy corporate compliance and approval procedures. These processes, although essential for accountability, were perceived to hinder rapid response and limit ROAS' adaptive capacity in emergency contexts.
- The evaluation further observed that the Strategic Note's narrowed focus on EVAW – specifically on violence in public spaces and domestic violence – appeared to be a pragmatic refinement aimed at demonstrating measurable results. However, stakeholders widely indicated that EVAW remained an underprioritized portfolio during the Strategic Note period.<sup>46</sup> Many emphasized the need for ROAS to adopt a more strategic and visible role in coordination and normative spaces to enhance its relevance, credibility and influence in advancing the EVAW agenda.

39. This information is based on results from the personnel and implementing partner survey completed by the evaluation team in June 2025. However, it should be noted that the response rate was low, with only 30 of 317 UN personnel responding (of which only two were from the Regional Office) and only 4 of 18 implementing partners responding. Where possible, data was triangulated with interviews and insights from the Foresight workshop to mitigate these limitations.

40. [Regional Flagship Initiative to Surge Women's Employment](#).

41. [Dare to Care Programme](#).

42. [GenTRACK Arab States](#).

43. [See: Track-it! - accessible to internal registered users only](#).

44. ROAS UN personnel and implementing partner survey results.

45. While stakeholders acknowledged that humanitarian action has not traditionally been a corporate focus for UN Women – and that the Entity's formal engagement with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee is relatively recent – they emphasized that, for the Arab States region, conflict and humanitarian crises are a lived reality. In particular, the Gaza crisis underscored the urgency of strengthening UN Women's preparedness and strategic focus on gender issues in conflict and humanitarian settings.

46. The evaluation noted that the EVAW Specialist role had been vacant since January 2023, when the incumbent was reassigned, which further limited technical leadership in these areas. However, the evaluation team acknowledge that several attempts have been made to recruit for the position and that it has been temporarily covered through consultancy and other internal arrangements.

- In the context of increasing pushback on gender equality, most stakeholders emphasized that ROAS did not sufficiently demonstrate leadership in addressing this sensitive and complex issue. External stakeholders, in particular, expressed concern about the absence of a clear, unified regional strategy to respond to the growing pushback, and limited guidance on effective language and response mechanisms. They also noted the absence of dedicated platforms or convening spaces to facilitate dialogue and collective action, which reportedly undermined ROAS' visibility and credibility as a key actor in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Concerns were also raised about ROAS' limited engagement on gender and climate change issues. Stakeholders

highlighted pressing challenges such as water scarcity and the disproportionate impacts of climate change on women, particularly in countries like Morocco. While some knowledge products and exchanges were acknowledged, ROAS' overall strategic direction in this area was perceived as unclear. The evaluation noted emerging plans to address climate-related issues within the WEE portfolio, especially through sustainable agricultural practices.

- Finally, the evaluation found that most Country Representatives were not fully familiar with the Strategic Note. This was attributed to limited induction processes and a lack of ongoing reflection and engagement with the regional strategy, particularly among newly appointed personnel.



Photo©UN Women Arab States



## 3.2 COHERENCE

**EQ 2 & 3:** To what extent is UN Women leveraging its coordination mandate to strategically position itself and contribute to a more coherent and gender-responsive approach by UN partners and other development actors with respect to gender equality and women's empowerment in the region? How can ROAS leverage the Gender Equality Acceleration Plan to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in the UN system?

### FINDING 2

ROAS contributed to several regional coordination mechanisms across the UN system. However, the effectiveness of coordination varied across platforms. ROAS' coordination support to UNCTs and Country Offices across the region is well recognized. In GCC countries, ROAS utilized its coordination mandate to deepen its strategic engagement beyond resource mobilization. While the Gender Equality Acceleration Plan holds potential, progress has been limited by a lack of strategic guidance from ROAS (**Coordination**)

Evaluation survey data reflected positive feedback regarding ROAS' coordination efforts: 67 per cent of ROAS personnel (N=20/30) and 75 per cent of implementing partners (N=3/4) indicated that ROAS was effectively leveraging its coordination mandate.<sup>47</sup>

Stakeholders highlighted UN Women's coordination mandate as a key comparative advantage, positioning the organization to lead multi-agency platforms effectively. ROAS' technical expertise in gender equality and the empowerment of women, along with its capacity to convene and engage a diverse range of actors (including Member States, regional intergovernmental bodies, the private sector and CSOs) was seen as a strength. This strategic positioning enables UN Women to lead UN-wide responses to emerging gender equality challenges.

**Regional coordination:** ROAS has contributed to several regional coordination platforms across the UN system. However, the evaluation found that the effectiveness of coordination varied across platforms. For instance, thematic coalitions such as the Regional Gender in Humanitarian Action and the Issue-Based Coalition on Jobs and Social Protection were reported to be more effective than coalitions with broader focus such as the Issue-Based Coalition on Gender Justice and Equality.

Stakeholders recognized the Regional Gender in

Humanitarian Action platform co-chaired by UN Women and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as an effective coordination mechanism and a valued space for knowledge exchange. Stakeholders appreciated ROAS' leadership in ensuring the inclusion of women-led organizations and voices from the ground. However, the evaluation noted the need to further strengthen linkages between regional and national Gender in Humanitarian Action mechanisms to enhance country-level decision-making and operational responsiveness.

ROAS also co-chairs the Issue-Based Coalition on Gender Justice and Equality with UNFPA<sup>48</sup> which brings together over 10 UN entities to foster coordination, communication and information-sharing on gender equality issues. Despite its broad membership, stakeholders expressed concerns regarding the coalition's strategic effectiveness, noting that it has largely functioned as an information-sharing platform with limited capacity to drive coordinated action.<sup>49</sup>

ROAS co-chairs the EVAW sub-group, which aims to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls through policy advocacy and joint initiatives. However, external partners noted that ROAS' contribution to EVAW coordination has been limited, particularly since 2023, when the sub-group's activity declined. Some stakeholders attributed this to weakened partnerships with other UN agencies, notably UNFPA. The evaluation found that this

47. UN Women (2025) Strategic Note Evaluation implementing partner survey.

48. From 2022 to 2023, the Issue-Based Coalition on Gender Justice and Equality focused its inter-agency coordination on strategic priorities related to WEE and EVAW, particularly within the context of COVID-19 recovery. In 2024, the focus shifted towards advancing the care economy, aligning with UN Women's focus areas and evolving regional priorities.

49. In contrast, the previous Gender Theme Group was perceived as a more effective platform in bringing together gender focal points from various UN entities in fostering more coherent and action-oriented coordination across agencies.

was largely due to the ERAW thematic lead position having been vacant since January 2023. With a full-time expert (consultant) in place since February 2025, efforts are under way to revitalize the sub-group and strengthen coordination.

ROAS also participates in the Issue-Based Coalition on Jobs and Social Protection, which was viewed more favourably by stakeholders due to its thematic focus and tangible outputs. Notably, the associated UN Technical Working Group on the Care Economy (established by ROAS in collaboration with the International Labour Organization [ILO] and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia [UN ESCWA]) was highlighted as a successful model of multi-agency coordination. In February 2025, this group convened the first regional conference on the care economy and social protection, in partnership with the Arab Women Organization, bringing together over 400 stakeholders from government, UN agencies, civil society and the private sector. The conference resulted in the development of the first regional road map for the care economy in the Arab region,<sup>50</sup> followed by a series of national technical workshops for parliamentarians. The stakeholders consulted during the evaluation indicated that these workshops played a key role in influencing labour codes and social protection laws to ensure adequate coverage for care work, and in supporting legislative pathways for their adoption.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, while ROAS has convened a WPS Working Group comprising regional practitioners, policy experts, academics and peacebuilders, internal stakeholders highlighted the absence of a dedicated regional coordination mechanism for WPS across the UN system.

**Regional Joint Programmes:** During the Strategic Note period, joint programming efforts led by ROAS were limited in number but demonstrated strategic relevance and potential for impact.<sup>52</sup> Only one joint regional programme was initiated during the evaluation period – Promoting Productive Employment and Decent Work for Women in Egypt, Jordan and the Palestine – implemented in partnership with ILO. The evaluation of this programme highlighted key lessons, particularly the importance of a shared vision, clearly defined roles and a coordinated approach among participating agencies to achieve effective and sustainable results.<sup>53</sup>

Beyond formal joint programmes, ROAS engaged in several collaborative initiatives with other UN entities. A notable example is the Gender Justice and Equality Before the Law initiative, jointly implemented with UNDP, UNFPA and UN ESCWA.<sup>54</sup> This initiative was appreciated by stakeholders

and was recognized by the UN Secretary-General as a model of excellence in inter-agency coordination, reflecting its strategic coherence, operational effectiveness and contribution to normative advancement in the region.<sup>55</sup>

Stakeholders acknowledged that coordination within the UN system remains inherently complex, requiring UN Women to play a dual role: motivating and supporting other agencies to prioritize gender equality, while simultaneously navigating competitive dynamics around limited funding. The evaluation team observed that although competition among UN entities was evident, particularly in resource-constrained environments, there remained strong interest in and opportunity to foster more cohesive, UN-wide joint initiatives and messaging on gender equality. Examples of emerging opportunities include potential collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization on shifting social norms through agricultural programming, and partnership with the International Fund for Agricultural Development to advance WEE.

**Gender Equality Acceleration Plan:**<sup>56</sup> The UN entities consulted acknowledged that the Gender Equality Acceleration Plan offers a valuable opportunity to reinvigorate coordination efforts. However, limited strategic guidance from ROAS has reportedly hindered its effective implementation. As a result, the plan's potential to strengthen alignment, promote joint action and enhance coherence across UN entities in the region remains largely unrealized. The UN personnel survey conducted by the evaluation indicated several actions which would optimize the utility of the Gender Equality Acceleration Plan, including conducting regular joint briefings and providing technical support to UNCTs; establishing a regional gender equality and women's empowerment task force to track implementation; and enhancing accountability mechanisms through the appointment of gender focal points and senior leadership champions.<sup>57</sup>

**Coordination support to UNCTs and Country Offices:** ROAS is widely recognized for its coordination role and for providing technical support to UNCTs and Country Offices across the region. ROAS' contribution to strengthening gender mainstreaming in key planning and implementation processes (e.g. Common Country Analyses and UNSDCFs) both in countries where it has a programmatic presence and where it operates in an advisory capacity through UNCTs as a Non-Resident Agency was acknowledged. Stakeholders across Country Offices appreciated ROAS' technical guidance and quality assurance function in applying the UNCT-SWAP Gender Equality Scorecard, delivering Gender Equality Marker training and facilitating integrated capacity-building efforts.<sup>58</sup>

50. [Towards a regional roadmap for care economy, 2025](#)

51. UN Women, Issue-Based Coalition Progress Note, November 2024.

52. [UN Women ILO JP Mid Term evaluation, 2023](#).

53. *ibid.*

54. [Gender Justice and Equality Before the Law initiative](#).

55. See: <https://genderjustice.unescwa.org/> last accessed July 2025

56. [UN Gender Equality Acceleration Plan](#).

57. UN Women ROAS Strategic Note Evaluation personnel survey, June 2025

58. In 2022, training sessions on the Gender Equality Marker were conducted with UNCTs in Bahrain and Jordan, involving Resident Coordinators Offices, the Development Coordination Office and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Orientation sessions on the Gender Theme Group were also held with UNCTs in Palestine, Syria, Saudi Arabia and the Bahrain Resident Coordinator's Office (as reported in the ROAS Annual Report 2022).

In GCC countries, ROAS effectively leveraged its coordination mandate as an entry point to deepen thematic/programmatic engagement beyond resource mobilization. Its technical contributions around gender equality and the empowerment of women facilitated by the Regional Coordination Specialist were acknowledged and appreciated by stakeholders. Notable outcomes include a partnership with Nokia Saudi Arabia to advance WEE and a formal agreement with the Kingdom of Bahrain to establish a UN Women office, supported by an initial funding allocation of US\$ 563,000 in 2023.<sup>59</sup>

The evaluation noted strong interest from UN Resident Coordinator Offices in GCC countries for UN Women to establish a formal presence in their respective contexts to enable more timely and sustained engagement. Stakeholders cautioned that delays in establishing such engagement risk national partners turning to other UN agencies for support or losing momentum in advancing gender equality agendas.

Despite these positive developments, internal stakeholders expressed some concerns regarding ROAS' engagement strategy with GCC countries. Some internal stakeholders questioned the value of GCC engagement, citing limited resource mobilization compared to other UN entities, which was perceived as a strategic shortfall. The evaluation observed that a draft strategy for GCC engagement was developed in 2022 but had not been finalized or communicated internally, leading to uncertainty about its strategic direction.<sup>60</sup>

**Alignment with the UAE-based UN Women Liaison Office:**

The evaluation identified limited alignment between ROAS and the UAE-based UN Women Liaison Office, which was established in 2016 to support global advocacy, resource mobilization and partnership development across the GCC. This disconnect has prompted growing calls to reassess the Liaison Office's role and functions to better reflect evolving regional priorities and to enhance strategic coherence with ROAS. Stakeholders expressed the need to objectively assess the strength, weakness, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of ROAS' GCC engagement and to clarify objectives, expected results and the value added of UN Women's presence in the GCC subregion.

**Coordination resourcing:** The evaluation noted that coordination efforts have been modestly resourced, led primarily by a P4 Regional Coordination Specialist with support from a UN Volunteer. Stakeholders expressed concern that, despite being one of UN Women's core mandates, coordination work was not adequately valued or invested in, potentially limiting its strategic impact.

### BOX 1. Testing the theory of change – Coordination

The theory of change assumption that advancing regional inter-agency coordination across strategic thematic priority areas would enhance gender analysis and coherence among UN entities was valid and yielded some success—particularly in humanitarian action and social protection. However, coordination gaps remained in areas such as ERAW and WPS. The assumption that regional inter-agency coordination would seamlessly translate into improved coordination between regional and national level proved to have limitations and remains an area requiring further attention. ROAS is well recognized for its coordination role at the UNCTs- providing technical support to the UNCTs and Country Offices across the region- this warrants greater recognition in future ROAS theory of change for Coordination

59. However, at the time of the evaluation, the office was still under establishment.

60. Outlined in the UN Women Arab States 'Strategic Vision for the Gulf Cooperation Council' document.

## 3.3 EFFECTIVENESS

The following section outlines the key findings across ROAS' normative and operational mandate. The findings are organized by thematic areas: Normative, WEE, Social Norms, WPS-Humanitarian Action, WPPL and ERAW to provide an assessment of ROAS' contributions to target outcomes.

**EQ 4 & 5:** How effective is ROAS' normative and operational work in contributing to regional Strategic Note target outcomes? How has ROAS contributed to catalysing country efforts in relation to its triple mandate, impact areas, emerging areas and resource mobilization? Has ROAS' support helped secure more long-term, flexible funding for Country Offices?

### FINDING 3

ROAS strategically leveraged key regional intergovernmental and civil society partnerships to advance its normative agenda. However, CEDAW remains under-utilized as a normative instrument in the region. Persistent challenges include resistance from some Member States to CSO participation in formal intergovernmental processes and ongoing gaps between legal frameworks and their implementation. **(Normative)**

The current Strategic Note included commitments to advance gender equality and women's empowerment through strategic engagement with global normative frameworks and processes, notably the Beijing Platform for Action, CSW and CEDAW via regional engagements with regional intergovernmental organizations and CSOs. ROAS strategically leveraged key partnerships to advance its normative and policy agenda. Notable among these were collaborations with the League of Arab States, which contributed to the development of regional frameworks such as the Cairo Declaration for Arab Women and the Arab Strategy for Women, Peace and Security,<sup>61</sup> both of which were aligned with CEDAW and the SDGs. In partnership with UN ESCWA, ROAS also contributed to the first regional review of the Cairo Declaration on Arab Women by 21 League of Arab States members, reaffirming their commitment to promoting women's leadership and political participation.<sup>63</sup>

**CEDAW normative engagement:** Stakeholders recognized ROAS' role in strengthening CEDAW reporting mechanisms in Egypt, Iraq and Jordan through institutional support, capacity development and gender data systems, in partnership with UN ESCWA and the Arab Women Organization. According to them, the regional capacity-building platforms for state parties<sup>64</sup> to prepare national reports to the CEDAW Committee, complemented by technical support to generate and use gender data through the Gender Justice Portal,<sup>65</sup> have been key enabling factors.

ROAS also facilitated critical dialogue on harmonizing Islamic legal interpretations with international gender equality norms, particularly in relation to CEDAW reservations, through its engagement with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's Women Development Organization and the global feminist network Musawah.

Another key achievement identified by stakeholders was the CEDAW Committee's commitment to integrating regionally prioritized themes – specifically disability rights and WPS – into the 2024 draft of General Recommendation No. 40.<sup>66</sup> According to the stakeholders consulted, in partnership with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, ROAS demonstrated its leadership, convening civil society actors, UN entities and thematic experts to facilitate this outcome.

Despite these contributions, stakeholders expressed concern that CEDAW remains underutilized as a normative instrument in the region, with Arab States maintaining some of the most extensive and substantive reservations. While acknowledging the structural and political constraints<sup>67</sup> that limit its effectiveness, stakeholders emphasized ROAS' potential to play a more proactive role in utilizing regional platforms to facilitate CEDAW implementation through dialogue and collective efforts.

**Beijing Platform for Action:** ROAS played a strategic role in supporting implementation of the Beijing Platform for

61. [Cairo Declaration for Arab Women](#).

62. [Arab Strategy for Women, Peace and Security](#)

63. [First Regional Review of the Cairo Declaration on Arab Women 2022.pdf](#).

64. Participants from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, OPT, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen.

65. <https://www.unescwa.org/portal/gender-justice>

66. [CEDAW General Recommendation No. 40](#).

67. National legal frameworks, particularly personal status laws, often conflict with CEDAW principles and resist reform due to religious and customary influences. Gender equality is frequently politicized, framed as a foreign concept, which undermines reform efforts. Implementation mechanisms remain weak, with under-resourced national women's machineries and limited public awareness. CSOs face increasing restrictions, further limiting advocacy. In conflict-affected contexts, weakened governance deprioritizes treaty obligations.

Action by strengthening Member States' capacities to integrate gender considerations into national development frameworks and report on their progress. Between 2023 and 2024, ROAS convened nine regional consultations as part of the Beijing+30 review process. These consultations were widely regarded by stakeholders as participatory and inclusive, engaging CSOs, women-led groups, youth networks and marginalized communities in substantive dialogue to inform both national and regional reporting.

A key output of this process was the Comprehensive Arab Report on Progress in Implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Thirty Years On,<sup>68</sup> developed in collaboration with UN ESCWA and the League of Arab States. The report was highlighted as a significant achievement providing consolidated regional analysis of gender equality advancements but also served as a normative reference point for future advocacy.

**CSW:** Stakeholder consultations indicated that ROAS has played a strategic role in shaping regional engagement with CSW, positioning the Arab States as a coherent and visible bloc within global gender equality dialogues. According to stakeholders, ROAS' convening of high-level intergovernmental meetings was instrumental in fostering consensus, amplifying regional advocacy and facilitating the endorsement of the Arab CSW Declarations (CSW66, CSW67 and CSW68) – each endorsed by 22 members of the League of Arab States. These declarations reflected regional priorities aligned with global CSW themes, including climate change, economic empowerment and institutional reform.<sup>69</sup>

**Voluntary National Reviews:** Stakeholders acknowledged the technical inputs and data provided by ROAS to support Member States in preparing national reviews and integrating gender perspectives into Voluntary National Reviews.

**Gender Justice Portal:** Stakeholders noted that the Gender Justice Portal<sup>70</sup> (developed in collaboration with UN ESCWA, UNDP and UNFPA), was an accessible tool for tracking progress on gender justice. Its utility spans governments, researchers and CSOs. Stakeholders noted that the portal has encouraged Member States to benchmark their performance, fostering motivation through peer comparison. The responsiveness of Member States has further enabled the publication of annual status reports.

However, stakeholders also emphasized the need to enhance the portal's analytical utility by incorporating cross-country policy analysis and regional benchmarking. Such enhancements would facilitate comparative learning and peer support, thereby strengthening the portal's role in driving gender-responsive normative reforms across the region.

**Programmatic engagements:** ROAS also made important normative contributions facilitated by respective thematic teams. For instance, work on social norms contributed to the adoption of paternity leave provisions in Egypt, OPT, Morocco, Oman and Tunisia, reflecting progress towards more gender-equitable labour policies. Further details of normative contributions are covered under each thematic area, Box 2 and the contribution analysis table in Annex 7.

Stakeholders identified several challenges constraining normative progress in the region:

- Resistance from some Member States to civil society participation. Stakeholders consistently advocated for a more structured approach to civil society involvement in normative mechanisms and emphasized the need to expand engagement with development partners, the private sector and donors to strengthen normative outcomes.
- Persistent gaps between legal frameworks and their implementation. ROAS' efforts need to be better tailored to each country's specific context to effectively support Country Offices in achieving progress at the national level.
- Internal stakeholders also identified the need for a more coordinated approach to normative work, one that systematically links programmatic interventions with broader efforts to advance gender equality norms and highlighted a coordination gap between ROAS and the Regional Offices for West and Central Africa and East and Southern Africa, which has hindered the full integration of North African countries into regional normative processes.

68. [Comprehensive Arab report on progress in implementing Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action thirty years on, 2024](#)

69. The CSW68 Declaration, for example, highlighted the importance of poverty eradication and institutional strengthening through a gender lens, while CSW67 emphasized women's roles in emerging green and blue economies.

70. <https://www.unescwa.org/portal/gender-justice>



## BOX 2. ROAS contribution to key normative gains

Area	UN Women's contribution	Other key players	Results reported by management
WPS	Supported adoption of eight National Action Plans; established Women's Advisory Boards & Arab Women Mediators Network; built government capacity for gender-responsive planning.	Member States, CSOs, donors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nine National Action Plans adopted, Iraq and Jordan funded implementation.</li> <li>• Arab Women's Mediators Network and Syrian Women's Advisory Boards represent significant normative achievement to institutionalize women's participation in formal peace processes.</li> <li>• Syrian Women's Advisory Boards produced 12 knowledge products.</li> </ul>
Humanitarian Action	Co-chaired Regional Gender in Humanitarian Action; contributed to cross-UN gender mainstreaming; and supported CSOs' gender-responsive humanitarian engagement.	OCHA, League of Arab States, UN partners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• League of Arab States adopted the Framework for Protection of Arab Women During Armed Conflicts; stronger gender mainstreaming in humanitarian coordination.</li> </ul>
Gender Data	Developed GenTRACK & Track-it! tools; supported Gender Justice Initiative; produced Gender Alerts.	UN partners, INGOs, Country Offices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased national focus on gender statistics; Gender Alerts informed national responses; two UN ESCWA gender-statistics recommendations adopted (2024); Gender Justice Portal actively used to track progress.</li> </ul>
WPPL	Advanced Gender Justice Portal; supported 94 institutions; led Beijing+30 consultations; strengthened normative agenda.	UN ESCWA, UNDP, UNFPA, Member States, CSOs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 21 League of Arab States members renewed Cairo Declaration commitment (2022); 15 states issued 39 legal texts and 16 reforms; 18 Beijing Platform for Action reports submitted; regional consensus on CSW &amp; COP27 gender commitments; consultations on CEDAW resolution no. 40; strengthened legal protections for women in elections and increased representation in national parliaments.</li> </ul>
WEE	Promoted the Women's Empowerment Principles (761 signatories); launched Flagship initiative	ILO, Member States, CSOs, private sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 25 legal reforms; labour law changes in Jordan and Oman; political support for launching surging women's employment in the Arab States by 5% by 2030 programme; and 90 women entrepreneurs; supported gender-responsive labour reforms.</li> </ul>
Social Norms	Produced IMAGES & GEMS studies; engaged faith and male leaders; and created dialogue platforms	Member States, League of Arab States, Ra'edat, Arab Women Organization, universities/religious institutions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 22 Arab States endorsed CSW68 Declaration with commitment to elevate the care economy as central to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women. Labour reforms advanced gender equality in the workplace: paternity leave reforms in seven countries; new gender-equal pension laws; and care policy reforms (e.g. Egypt's Elderly Rights Law, Morocco's reproductive health funding).</li> </ul>
EVAW	Provided legal drafting/review support; co-chaired the Regional Gender in Humanitarian Action platform; and supported justice reforms and CSW advocacy.	OCHA, UNFPA, UN partners, Member States.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bahrain repealed marital rape exemption; Iraq established domestic violence courts; Lebanon passed anti-harassment law; UAE, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia reformed family and protection laws; and Jordan criminalized workplace harassment.</li> </ul>

Prepared by the evaluation team, Data source: UN Women Annual Reports 2022–2024

### BOX 3. Testing the theory of change – Normative

The theory of change assumption that UN Women's technical support and normative engagement (alongside access to quality gender data and statistics) would catalyse gender equality and the empowerment of women reforms, including the implementation and reporting of CEDAW, CSW and the Beijing Platform for Action, was largely valid. Similarly, the expectation that inter-agency and intergovernmental partnerships would serve as enablers for normative progress was well-founded. However, the assumption that institutional capacity-building and advisory support would directly translate into Member States' willingness to implement laws and policies revealed certain limitations. Evidence indicates that while gender data portals have contributed to motivating Member States and facilitating benchmarking of progress and gaps, they have not been sufficient to address the underlying political will and commitment required for sustained implementation.

## FINDING 4

**Stakeholders widely endorsed the prioritization of WEE within the Strategic Note cycle, particularly the Regional Flagship Initiative aimed at increasing women's employment by 5 per cent by 2030. This was seen as a significant shift towards a more integrated and multidimensional approach to advancing WEE. Political endorsement and securing a US\$ 254 million financing agreement with the Islamic Development Bank were key achievements. However, a prolonged design phase with limited results among target populations were noted. Application of the Women's Empowerment Principles has positioned private-sector companies as gender equality champions, although adoption remains limited in scale. (WEE)**

The evaluation found that prioritization of WEE within the Strategic Note cycle was widely appreciated by the stakeholders consulted. Under the Strategic Note, the WEE portfolio encompassed three regional programmes: the joint UN Women–ILO programme; the Regional Flagship Initiative; and Women's Empowerment Principles.

**Joint UN Women–ILO programme:** The evaluation observed that the UN Women–ILO Joint Programme on Productive Employment and decent work<sup>71</sup> (2018–2023) made a substantive contribution to strengthening the regional WEE portfolio. The joint programme was particularly effective in fostering gender-responsive employment environments across Egypt, Jordan and OPT. According to programme monitoring data, the initiative reached over 4.4 million women through a combination of awareness-raising campaigns, legislative reforms and capacity-building interventions.<sup>72</sup>

According to past evaluative evidence, one of the key achievements of the programme was its contribution to 25 policy and legislative changes, both new enactments and amendments, across the three countries (see Annex 13 for details). For example, Ministerial Decrees (No. 43 and 44)

issued in Egypt granted women the right to work in any job or profession, removing previous restrictions on their participation in certain sectors. Similarly, in Jordan, the joint programme supported the enactment of maternity regulation that helped working mothers return to work by ensuring access to childcare.<sup>73</sup> These reforms were instrumental in creating more enabling environments for women's participation in the labour market and advancing decent work standards.

The programme generated a set of key lessons that have informed current efforts to scale WEE interventions. These include the importance of aligning employment promotion with legal and policy reforms; leveraging multi-stakeholder partnerships; and ensuring sustained technical support to national institutions. The evaluation also highlighted the comparative advantage of the partnership, which stemmed from the complementary technical expertise of UN Women and ILO. This collaboration enabled the programme to address both normative and operational dimensions of WEE. However, the evaluation also noted that compartmentalization of roles across the two agencies limited the scope to amplify the programme and that inter-agency collaboration needs improvement to achieve sustainable programme outcomes.<sup>74</sup>

71. UN Women and ILO Joint Programme "Work for Women in Egypt, Jordan and Palestine" (2018–2023) Learning document, 2024

72. UN Women (2025) Summary of main results achieved in Strategic Note 2022–2025 (WEE thematic area)

73. UN Women ILO Joint Programme Mid-Term Evaluation Report, 2023

74. *ibid*



**Regional Flagship Initiative:** The Regional Flagship Initiative to Surge Women's Employment by 5 per cent by 2030<sup>75</sup> was acknowledged as a strategic and timely intervention. The initiative aims to achieve impact at scale by addressing structural barriers to women's economic participation through coordinated legal, policy and social interventions. Stakeholders viewed the initiative as a significant departure from short-term employment assistance programmes, marking a regional shift towards a more multidimensional model. Internally, the initiative was commended for its integrated design process, which was characterized by regular cross-thematic engagements. These engagements facilitated the incorporation of diverse perspectives from key portfolios, including social norms, normative frameworks and private-sector engagement, thereby enhancing the coherence and relevance of the programme design.

The programme design drew on lessons learned from the UN Women-ILO Joint Programme and was informed by extensive consultations with Member States, diagnostic studies, market analyses, employment impact assessments, and legal and policy reviews.<sup>76</sup> The initiative employed context-specific analysis to identify potential growth sectors for women's employment, particularly within STEM, and green and care economies<sup>77</sup> across seven countries in the region. While Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia adopted a developmental and economic growth-oriented approach, the chapters for Iraq, Lebanon and OPT reflected a recovery-oriented strategy. Stakeholders emphasized that the articulation of a strong regional narrative enabled Country Offices to position themselves more strategically and enhance resource mobilization efforts at the national level.

Political commitment to the initiative was evidenced by its regional endorsement across 22 Arab States through the CSW68 declaration.<sup>78</sup> The programme also successfully mobilized a broad coalition of actors, including the private sector, international financial institutions and UN entities. A notable outcome was the establishment of a financing model through collaboration with international financial institutions. In 2024, UN Women signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Islamic Development Bank<sup>79</sup> securing US\$ 254 million in capital to support women's employment in Tunisia and Jordan.<sup>80</sup>

Despite these achievements, the evaluation identified some challenges. Chief among them was the extended design

phase, which involved substantial time investment from ROAS leadership. Internal stakeholders reported that this inadvertently diverted attention from other critical portfolios and functions. While the initiative has laid the essential groundwork and demonstrated ambition to scale, it has yet to yield measurable results among the intended target populations. The upcoming Strategic Note period will therefore be critical to translate this groundwork into tangible national outcomes.

Concerns were raised regarding the initiative's donor engagement strategies, particularly the risks of soliciting support from existing bilateral donors for new activities. Stakeholders cautioned that such approaches could create confusion or result in the reallocation of funds away from ongoing programmes. While the evaluation acknowledges the importance of launching new initiatives – especially in resource-constrained environments – it highlights the need for a more structured and strategic approach to resource mobilization. This includes setting clear targets across thematic areas and safeguarding existing donor commitments, wherever possible, to ensure that efforts to secure new resources do not inadvertently undermine current initiatives.

**Women's Empowerment Principles:** Application of the Women's Empowerment Principles has played a catalytic role in positioning private-sector companies as gender equality champions across the region. The Women's Empowerment Principles framework provided a concrete model for implementing gender-responsive practices, contributing to a notable increase in signatories – from 174 in 2018 to 761 companies by 2025<sup>81</sup> – across all targeted countries.

Emerging results during the Strategic Note period indicate that Women's Empowerment Principles commitments are increasingly being translated into tangible workplace improvements. According to a survey of signatories conducted by ROAS in 2023, 91 per cent of companies (N=136/150) reported offering flexible working arrangements; 98 per cent (N=147/150) retained women post-maternity; and 72 per cent (N=108/150) noted increased female employment.<sup>82</sup> Evidence also pointed to enhanced family-supportive workplace policies,<sup>83</sup> particularly for working mothers, and growing efforts to achieve pay equity, with 65 per cent (N=97/150) of companies reporting progress on equal pay. Notably, increased representation of women in leadership roles was observed, especially among smaller enterprises and

75. [Background Note: Briefing to the Executive Board, Second Regular Session 2023 "UN-Women's operational response in the Arab States" Regional Drive Towards Increasing Women Labor Force Participation in the Green Economy, STEM Economy and Care Economy](#).

76. *ibid.*

77. For example, Egypt's plan targets 200,000 jobs for women; Jordan's strategy includes 15,000 roles across emerging sectors; Tunisia's road map will create 20,000 jobs for women via transnational remote work and sustainable finance; while Morocco anticipates over 30,000 jobs in rural care and ICT.

78. The Arab States, in their declarations for CSW68, have demonstrated a commitment to advancing the care economy, particularly focusing on social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure. See: [CSW 68 Conclusions](#) accessed August 2025

79. UN Women also updated an existing Memorandum of Understanding with the African Development Bank.

80. As per the key informant interviews, the project in Tunisia has been allocated US\$ 200 million and in Jordan, US\$ 3.5 million.

81. UN Women (2025) Summary of main results achieved in Strategic Note 2022-2025 (WEE thematic area).

82. UN Women (2023) Women's Empowerment Principles infographic.

83. *ibid.*

companies that had maintained Women's Empowerment Principles commitments for five years or more.<sup>84</sup>

Despite advancements, the overall number of signatories to the Women's Empowerment Principles remains limited relative to the private-sector landscape. Stakeholders emphasized that signing the Women's Empowerment Principles is an initial step: sustained technical assistance, peer learning and network strengthening are essential to support implementation and systemic change.

Beyond the Women's Empowerment Principles, the evaluation noted that targeted private-sector partnerships, although modest in scale, have contributed to advancing gender-responsive workplaces and skills development.

ROAS' partnership with Nokia, for instance, has promoted women's digital literacy, entrepreneurship and employment in the STEM sector across Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Tunisia since 2022. Programme monitoring data from 2022–2024 indicated that 89 per cent of targeted women (N=267/300) reported improved prospects for employment as a result of UN Women's interventions.<sup>85</sup> Strategic collaborations with firms such as Leo Burnett and CNN were also recognized for amplifying women's voices and influencing public discourse on the value of women's economic participation. Internal stakeholders acknowledged these efforts as promising, while also noting untapped potential to deepen private-sector engagement and expand partnerships to other thematic areas.

#### BOX 4. Testing the theory of change – WEE

ROAS provided technical assistance to Country Offices on WEE to advance the care economy and promote policy, legal and institutional changes to enable greater access to equitable, decent work and economic autonomy. The underlying assumption was that increased access to long-term financial and political support for gender-responsive employment programmes would lead to sustained improvements in women's economic participation. Evidence indicates that ROAS' inputs have contributed to strengthened political recognition, financial commitment and strengthened private-sector engagement in this area. However, the translation of such commitments to women's economic autonomy have not yet been fully realized to fully test the theory of change assumption.

## FINDING 5

**ROAS' work on promoting positive masculinities, transforming social norms and advancing the care economy emerged as one of the key effective areas of work. Notable contributions include the first multi-country IMAGES study in the Middle East and North Africa region, which captured attitudes and practices on masculinities and gender equality, and informed models for engaging men in social norms change. The Dare to Care programme (launched in 2023) aims to reach 1.3 million individuals by 2026, although its reach remains at an early stage. There is a recognized need to mainstream social norms work across all thematic areas beyond WEE.**  
**(Social Norms)**

The evaluation found that ROAS' work on promoting positive masculinities, transforming social norms and advancing the care economy to be one of its key areas of work. The portfolio included two key programmes, Men and Women for Gender Equality (MWGE) (2015–2022)<sup>86</sup> and the Dare to Care initiative (since 2023), implemented across six countries.<sup>87</sup> The stakeholder consultation reflected positive feedback about this portfolio. Similarly, the evaluation survey showed positive response with 63 per cent of personnel (N=19/30) indicating that the portfolio effectively contributed to Strategic Note outcomes.

**Men and Women for Gender Equality (MWGE) regional programme:** A key contribution of MWGE programme was the first multi-country International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) study in the Middle East and North Africa region, capturing attitudes and practices of over 14,000 women and men on masculinities and gender equality.<sup>88</sup> This study continues to shape the design of interventions for promoting positive masculinities and social norms in the region.

Stakeholders indicated that the programme demonstrated

84. *ibid.*

85. UN Women (2024) ROAS Strategic Note Annual Report.

86. Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Jordan and Tunisia.

87. 'Dare to Care': Transforming Patriarchal Masculinities and Social Norms.

88. *Understanding masculinities, results from the International Men and Gender Equality Study in the Middle East and North Africa, 2017*

effective models for social norms change involving men at the household and community level in the Arab region. Peer-to-peer engagement, positive deviance approaches<sup>89</sup> and the Gender Transformative Parenting model were acknowledged as effective in the MWGE programme evaluation.<sup>90</sup> The evaluative evidence also indicated that these approaches, combined with tools such as the Gender Equitable Men Scale,<sup>91</sup> enabled measurable change even in conservative contexts.<sup>92</sup>

In terms of scale, the evaluation observed that MWGE reportedly reached over 150,000 individuals through community-based interventions and parenting programmes,<sup>93</sup> and an estimated 48 million through the Because I Am a Man campaign.<sup>94</sup> The evaluation found that baseline–endline assessments for the community-based interventions (in Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and OPT) conducted by the MWGE programme between 2019 and 2022, demonstrated that positive attitudes towards gender equality increasing by 20.5 percentage points, rising from 45.7 per cent to 66.2 per cent; while positive behaviours increased by 17.2 percentage points, from 37.4 per cent to 54.7 per cent. These shifts reflected the programme's effectiveness in fostering more equitable gender norms at the individual level.<sup>95</sup> In addition, among the 756 targeted parents who participated in the Gender Transformative Parenting programme in Egypt, Morocco and OPT, it was noted that positive attitudes towards gender equality increased by 16.8 percentage points; domestic work by male partners increased by 7.4 percentage points; and sharing of equal childcare responsibilities by male partners increased by 12.86 percentage points.<sup>96</sup>

The evaluation found that the MWGE programme also contributed to policy and institutional change, including laws on sexual harassment (Lebanon) and paternity leave (Morocco, OPT, Egypt, Oman, Tunisia). Eleven government institutions, including military agencies in Lebanon, institutionalized the Gender Transformative Parenting approach.<sup>97</sup>

One of the key facilitating factors reported for normative gains was the policy briefs on gender-equitable interpretations of religion, developed in partnership with the League of Arab States and Musawah<sup>98</sup> – a global movement that advocates for equality and justice in the Muslim family. The briefs covered topics from divorce, child marriage in Muslim family law to the concept of marriage as a partnership of equals.<sup>99</sup>

Dare to Care regional programme: The evaluation found that the Dare to Care programme (launched in October 2023) builds on the lessons and progress achieved under the MWGE programme. It aims to transform patriarchal masculinities and promote equitable care work, with a target to reach 1.3 million individuals by September 2026. The evaluation found that, while still in early implementation, the programme has contributed to elevating the care economy in global policy discourse, notably influencing CSW68 outcomes on the care economy to advance gender equality and end women's poverty.

Other key reported achievements include the establishment of a Regional Network of Male Decision Makers; the development of a Male Allyship Manual for gender-equitable workplaces;<sup>100</sup> and the launch of “Ra’edat,” a regional network for women parliamentarians. The programme also mobilized a coalition of 18 institutions (including universities, religious bodies and youth organizations) to advance social norms change.

Stakeholders indicated the need for greater attention to address the deeply entrenched drivers of gender discrimination and the escalating backlash against gender equality across the region. They also emphasized that the social norms portfolio should not operate in isolation and instead must be integrated across all thematic areas. While notable progress has been made in mainstreaming social norms within the WEE portfolio, particularly around the care economy, this approach should be extended to other areas, including humanitarian action, WPPL and WPS.

### BOX 5. Testing the theory of change – social norms

Social norms change was not explicitly detailed within the ROAS theory of change or in its underlying assumptions; however, it represents a core component of ROAS' overall approach and gender transformative model. Evaluation evidence indicates that ROAS' social norms programming supported gender equality analyses and large-scale initiatives addressing social norms related to the care economy and positive masculinities. This work has contributed to shifts in social norms at both community and policy levels and reinforced change across multiple thematic areas indicating the validity of the intervention model. At the same time the theory of change of social norms portfolio needs to be integrated across all thematic areas for scale and impact.

89. This method involved identifying and engaging gender equality champions, who were supported to promote positive behaviours within their social networks.

90. The Gender Transformative Parenting programme or fatherhood approach, which provides concrete strategies and activities to engage men in active fatherhood starting from their partners' pregnancies through their children's early years, can drive meaningful change, even in contexts where gender norms and behaviours are deeply entrenched.

91. GEM Scale

92. ITAD (2022) Final Evaluation of UN Women's regional Middle East and North Africa MWGE programme.

93. UN Women (2025) Arab States programme results snapshot and ROAS Annual Progress Report 2024.

94. Arab States programme results snapshot, 2025.

95. *ibid.*

96. *ibid.*

97. Arab States programme results snapshot, 2025

98. [Musawah](#) – a global movement that advocates for equality and justice in the Muslim family, grounded in Islamic principles, human rights, constitutional guarantees and the lived realities of women and men.

99. See: [The briefs covered topics from divorce, child marriage in Muslim family laws to the concept of marriage as a partnership of equals](#) – last accessed July 2025.

100. [Male Allyship Manual for gender-equitable workplace](#), 2025

## FINDING 6

ROAS advanced the WPS agenda through support to National Action Plans, Women's Advisory Boards and the regional Arab Women Mediators Network; however, impact was constrained by the limited integration of grassroots women into formal governance and policy spaces, and the absence of a coherent strategy for engaging men and communities. In the humanitarian space, ROAS made notable contributions to gender-responsive action, particularly through gender data and support to women-led organizations, although its operational model limits direct emergency response. While a regional Humanitarian–Development–Peace nexus vision remains underdeveloped, promising country-level initiatives suggest potential for more integrated approaches. (WPS-HA)

The evaluation found that advancing the WPS agenda was a key focus area during the current Strategic Note period. This work was guided by global and regional commitments, including UNSCR 1325 and the League of Arab States Executive Action Plan on WPS.<sup>101</sup> ROAS' WPS portfolio encompasses technical support to Country Offices, a regional WPS programme spanning six countries<sup>102</sup> and the Syria Programme.<sup>103</sup>

There was largely positive feedback across consultations and in the evaluation survey: 63 per cent of UN Women personnel (N=19/30) rated the portfolio as effective in contributing to Strategic Note outcomes and 75 per cent of implementing partners (N=3/4) affirmed ROAS' added value, particularly in amplifying women's voices in the Syrian peace process.

ROAS' strategic collaboration with the League of Arab States<sup>104</sup> yielded several key outcomes: the development of an Executive Action Plan for implementation of UNSCR 1325; the establishment of the Arab Women Mediators Network; and support to the Emergency Committee for the Protection of Women in Armed Conflict.<sup>105</sup> ROAS' leadership in convening national women's machineries to discuss regional WPS priorities was also acknowledged.

While the Arab Women Mediators Network was widely considered as a key step towards institutionalizing women's representation in peace and mediation processes, past evaluative evidence noted its limited tangible impact and weak link with national or subnational mediators' networks.<sup>106</sup>

ROAS' contribution to fill regional evidence gaps through strategic research partnerships with institutions such as the Issam Fares Institute and Inclusive Peace was also acknowledged by stakeholders. Notable outputs mentioned

included policy papers on women's participation in local mediation<sup>107</sup> and transitional justice.<sup>108</sup> The establishment of a regional WPS working group was indicated as another key contribution, providing a platform for policy dialogue (see Box 6).<sup>109</sup> However, gaps in formal UN-level coordination on WPS were noted, as outlined in Finding 2.

### BOX 6. WPS working group results

- Brought together regional practitioners, policy experts and academics to discuss WPS in the region.
- Published two reports from Amman and Geneva sessions.
- Provided recommendations for WPS stakeholders and began development of White Paper setting out recommendations for WPS in the region

Source: Middle East Council on Global Affairs

**National Action Plans:** At the country level, one of the WPS portfolio's key contributions was ROAS' advisory role and technical support to Country Offices in the development and implementation of nine National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325, including second-generation plans in OPT, Iraq and Jordan. The evaluation consultations validated prior evaluative evidence that participatory approaches were instrumental in fostering stakeholder engagement and national ownership throughout the National Action Plan development process.<sup>110</sup>

UN Women's role as a bridge between government and civil society was particularly valued. The combination of regional oversight with Country Office autonomy was reported to be effective in ensuring the contextual relevance of the plans<sup>111</sup> (see Box 7)

101. [LAS WPS Regional Action Plan](#)

102. [Regional programme Women Peace and Security in the Arab States](#), Lebanon, Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, Iraq and Jordan.

103. [Supporting Syrian Women's Engagement in the Syrian Political Process: Building a Constituency for Peace](#)

104. Cynose (2023) End-term Programme Evaluation of UN Women Regional WPS Programme (2019–2022)

105. The League of Arab States developed a framework and plan of action for its Emergency Committee for Protection of Arab Women During Armed Conflicts, which aims to shed light on the reality of the status of women during armed conflicts, and how international law can respond to the challenges faced by women.

106. Cynose (2023) End-term Programme Evaluation of UN Women Regional Programme Women Peace and Security in the Arab States Phase II (2019 – 2022).

107. [Women's Participation in local mediation: Lessons from Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen, 2022](#)

108. UN Women (2022) Transitional Justice and National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security in the Middle East and North Africa Region.

109. See: [The WPS Working Group for Arab States](#) accessed July 2025.

110. Cynose (2023) End-term Programme Evaluation of UN Women Regional Programme Women Peace and Security in the Arab States Phase II (2019 – 2022).

111. *ibid.*



## BOX 7. ROAS' contribution to National Action Plan results

- Strengthened government capacity to advance the WPS agenda.
- Fostered broad collaboration and ownership across government, development and CSO partners.
- Led to the dedication of national resources to National Action Plan implementation in Iraq and Jordan.
- Led to the development of four monitoring and evaluation frameworks, supporting systematic tracking of National Action Plan implementation in Jordan, OPT, Lebanon and Iraq.

Source: Cynose (2023) End-term Programme Evaluation of UN Women Regional WPS Programme (2019–2022)

Despite notable progress, the evaluation identified several persistent challenges in advancing National Action Plans across the region. Chief among these was the limited availability of financial resources, which constrained both the institutionalization and sustained implementation of commitments. In some contexts, such as Libya, political backlash against gender issues further impeded progress. This resistance was partly rooted in the misperception that endorsing a National Action Plan implied full ratification of CEDAW.<sup>112</sup>

**Women's Advisory Boards:** Efforts to institutionalize women's participation in political peace processes through the establishment of Women's Advisory Boards in Syria, Yemen and Iraq were identified as promising.<sup>113</sup> The Syrian Women's Advisory Board, in particular, was found to be an effective mechanism, having influenced key regional and international stakeholders and served as a critical entry point to broader political processes. It also contributed to building the capacity and expertise of women peacebuilders. While some critiques were noted (such as the limited influence of advisory roles and the risk of symbolic inclusion), the Women's Advisory Board model was broadly validated as a valuable tool for enhancing women's representation.<sup>114</sup> However, opportunities remain to strengthen engagement with regional actors, including the League of Arab States.<sup>115</sup>

In Yemen and Iraq, the Women's Advisory Board and Women's Advisory Group on Reconciliation and Politics, respectively, represented important efforts to institutionalize women's voices in peacebuilding. However, their effectiveness was contingent on formal integration into political structures, sustained support and inclusive representation of diverse women's constituencies.<sup>116</sup>

**Support to women-led organizations and CSOs:** The WPS portfolio supported Country Offices in building the capacities of women-led organizations and CSOs across Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, OPT, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen.<sup>117</sup> Initiatives included training in local mediation, conflict resolution, leadership, digital literacy and preventing violent extremism. Monitoring data from regional programming from 2022–2024 indicated that over 2,346 women peacebuilders and human rights defenders were trained, alongside approximately 500 youth engaged in peacebuilding initiatives.<sup>118</sup>

The evaluation found that grassroots peacebuilding initiatives contributed to local peace outcomes; empowered women as credible agents of change; and amplified women's voice and agency.<sup>119</sup> Support also enabled women's organizations to continue operating in displacement and diaspora contexts, helping to sustain women's demands in conflict-affected settings such as in Syria and Yemen.<sup>120</sup> The establishment of the women-led organizations platform in 2024 was noted as an important step towards institutionalizing feminist organizing in such contexts.<sup>121</sup>

Nonetheless, some limitations were identified. A key gap was the insufficient linkage between trained women and national or local governance structures, which limited the strategic impact of their WPS engagement. Grassroots women's contributions were often confined to awareness-raising and remained marginalized in formal peace processes. This highlighted the need to strengthen linkages between grassroots actors and higher-level formal policy platforms where linkages remain limited.<sup>122</sup>

The portfolio also reportedly lacked a coherent strategy for engaging men and community-level institutions. There was minimal systematic engagement with male, religious and community leaders to address resistance to women's participation in peacebuilding, undermining the potential for sustainable gender-transformative change.<sup>123</sup>

112. *ibid.*

113. *ibid.*

114. *ibid.*

115. Women (2023) Syria Programme Phase II Evaluation.

116. El-Bushra, J., & El-Karib, A. (2021). Women's meaningful participation in peace processes: Lessons from Yemen. Conciliation Resources.

UNAMI & UN Women. (2020). Women's Advisory Group on Reconciliation and Politics for Iraq – Progress Report. Available: <https://www.unwomen.org>

117. UN Women (2025) Corporate thematic evaluation of UN Women's support to women's participation in peace processes.

118. UN Women, Strategic Note Annual Reports 2022–2024.

119. UN Women (2025) Corporate thematic evaluation of UN Women's support to women's participation in peace processes.

120. *ibid.*

121. UN Women (2025) ROAS Strategic Note personnel survey.

122. *ibid.*

123. *ibid.*

**Humanitarian Action:** During the evaluation period, ROAS enhanced its strategic positioning within humanitarian contexts, contributing to the advancement of gender-responsive humanitarian action. This period coincided with UN Women's institutional strengthening in the humanitarian domain, including articulation of a clearer vision and strategy,<sup>124</sup> and the Entity's formal integration into the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

At the regional level, several structural and technical developments were observed. These included the recruitment of a Regional Crisis Response Specialist at the P4 level; the establishment of robust data and evidence architecture tailored to gender and humanitarian contexts; and reinforcement of coordination platforms through the Regional Gender in Humanitarian Action working group. Internal capacity-building efforts were also undertaken with the Humanitarian Action and Crisis Response Office, targeting ROAS personnel.

Fifty-seven per cent (N=17/30) of surveyed personnel rated ROAS' humanitarian programmatic work as effective, noting the achievements made in response to the Gaza crisis, both in terms of interventions and in the use of data and statistics.<sup>125</sup> Similarly, 50 per cent (N=2/4) of implementing partners surveyed rated UN Women's added value in Humanitarian Action as high.<sup>126</sup> Respondents indicated room to improve ROAS' work in this area, particularly by further strengthening work around data, evidence and local women's representation in humanitarian coordination and decision-making.

Stakeholder interviews underscored ROAS' added value through its capacity to generate timely and relevant gender data, particularly in relation to the Gaza and Lebanon crises. For example, in Gaza, UN Women's Rapid Gender Assessment (October 2023),<sup>127</sup> informed the Entity's humanitarian response plan. Four Gender Alerts were issued, highlighting the gendered impact of the crisis (January 2024); effects of conflict on essential services for women and girls (April 2024); impact on women-led organizations with operational disruptions and funding constraints (June 2024); and the war's effects on women's health (September 2024).<sup>128</sup>

In Lebanon, a parallel series of Gender Alerts critically examined the intersectional vulnerabilities of women and girls, particularly in contexts of displacement, economic collapse and armed conflict.<sup>129</sup> These alerts emphasized the pivotal role of women-led organizations in delivering localized, inclusive responses and advocated for their

meaningful participation in decision-making processes. Stakeholders affirmed that these analytical products enabled UN Women and its partners to activate gender-responsive humanitarian programming in both crises. The evaluation notes that UN Women's gender analyses were utilized by international actors<sup>130</sup> to inform decision-making, uphold women's rights and monitor compliance with international legal standards.

UN Women's contributions, particularly those driven by civil society engagement, facilitated the mainstreaming of gender considerations within the Syrian cross-border humanitarian response to the February 2023 earthquake,<sup>131</sup> with the preliminary findings from the Syria Status Report also reported to have influenced UK government engagement in Northeast Syria.<sup>132</sup> UN Women's rapid response to conflicts in Lebanon and Gaza through partnerships with women-led organizations was reported by management to have facilitated the delivery of life-saving assistance to over 300,000 individuals and their families.<sup>133</sup> Stakeholder consultations emphasized that women-led organizations were central to UN Women's humanitarian response, with selected partners demonstrating strong local positioning and capacity to deliver gender-responsive aid.

Monitoring data from 2022–2024 indicated that ROAS and Country Offices' humanitarian interventions (across both protracted and active crisis contexts) reached, according to management, approximately 470,000 individuals across seven countries during the evaluation period.<sup>134</sup> These interventions encompassed livelihood support, access to protection services, and emergency relief and assistance, reflecting a multisectoral approach. ROAS monitoring data provided by Track It! highlighted that interventions have empowered women by increasing decision-making autonomy; reducing harmful coping mechanisms; enhancing skills and rights awareness; and improving safety, although long-term employment outcomes remained limited.<sup>135</sup> These outcomes were consistently validated by prior evaluations as a key strength of ROAS' humanitarian programming<sup>136</sup> and during qualitative interviews with stakeholders.

Overall, stakeholders expressed an expectation that ROAS would assume a more strategic role within the humanitarian architecture – particularly in light of UN Women's recent membership of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee – to ensure that humanitarian actions are gender-responsive. While acknowledging that specialized UN entities are mandated to deliver humanitarian aid and

124. [UN Women Humanitarian Strategy 2022–2025 – In Brief \(PDF\)](#)

125. UN Women (2025) ROAS Strategic Note personnel survey.

126. UN Women (2025) ROAS Strategic Note implementing partner survey

127. [UN Women rapid assessment and humanitarian response in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2023](#)

128. Gender alert: The gendered impact of the crisis in Gaza, January 2024; Gender alert: impact of war in Gaza on water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), April 2024; Gender alert: Contributions of Palestinian women-led organizations to the humanitarian response in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, June 2024; Gender alert: Gaza: A war on women's health, September 2024.

129. Gender Alert on the Conflict in South Lebanon, December 2023; Gender Alert: Urgent Needs of Crisis Affected Women and Girls in Lebanon, September 2024; Gender Alert: Gender and Displacement in Lebanon at the Juncture of the ceasefire, December 2024.

130. Including Human Rights Watch, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the International Court of Justice.

131. UN Women (2024) Syria Programme Phase II Evaluation

132. ROAS Annual Report 2023

133. UN Women (2025) Humanitarian infographic. This included the provision of cash assistance, dignity kits and clothing to address urgent humanitarian needs.

134. Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Yemen.

135. UN Women (2025) Humanitarian infographic.

136. Aguilhas (2022) EU Madad Evaluation Synthesis Report

services, stakeholders underscored UN Women's comparative advantage in generating gender-disaggregated data; producing evidence-based analysis; advocating for gender equality; and coordinating efforts to mainstream gender across humanitarian interventions.

At the same time, internal stakeholders noted that UN Women's operational systems are not currently configured to directly implement emergency response activities on the ground, highlighting a structural limitation in the Entity's humanitarian delivery model (highlighted in the Relevance section).

In relation to integrated programming and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus, the evaluation found that while a shared conceptual vision of the nexus model was lacking across the Arab States region, several UN Women initiatives exemplified its operationalization. These included the Women's Leadership, Empowerment, Access and Protection programme;<sup>137</sup> efforts to link humanitarian interventions with durable development solutions (e.g. in Iraq and OPT); and the engagement of local peace mediators trained by UN Women to deliver humanitarian assistance during crises (e.g. in Lebanon). These examples illustrate the potential for strengthening intentionality and coherence in integrated ways when working under the nexus framework.<sup>138</sup>

### BOX 8. Testing the theory of change – WPS-Humanitarian Action

The underlying theory of change assumption was that strengthening women's technical capacities and providing institutional support would drive women's rights movements within the WPS agenda and ensure UN partners consider gender in their Humanitarian Action work. Evidence confirms that this assumption largely held true: there has been a notable increase in the number of women engaged in peacebuilding and mediation efforts at regional, political and community levels as well as greater attention on gender in Humanitarian Action responses. While the theory of change did not explicitly outline the pathways through which WPS and Humanitarian Action would intersect, in practice ROAS' programming contributed to stronger linkages between peacebuilding, humanitarian response and development efforts. The portfolio's emphasis on institutional capacity-building and women's leadership in crisis contexts helped reinforce operationalization of the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus, positioning ROAS as a critical regional actor.



Photo©UN Women Arab States

137. [Women's Leadership, Empowerment, Access and Protection \(LEAP\) – Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Regional Component](#).  
138. Formative evaluation on Humanitarian Development Peace Nexus in Arab States, (ongoing).

## FINDING 7

ROAS played a catalytic role in facilitating regional inter-governmental processes to reinvigorate political commitments to WPPL. ROAS contributed to national-level efforts for policy reforms, including quota adoption, backed by strong stakeholder engagement. However, persistent resource constraints and political instability continue to limit the portfolio's effectiveness. The need to strengthen cross-portfolio linkages was emphasized to address intersecting barriers such as political violence and to amplify women's voices in peacebuilding and decision-making processes. (WPPL)

The current Strategic Note reflects a deliberate narrowing of the WPPL portfolio, with a targeted focus on promoting gender parity in parliaments and cabinets through strengthened engagement across electoral cycles, aiming for 30 per cent representation through regional engagement and technical support to Country Offices.

**Support to regional intergovernmental processes:** ROAS played a catalytic role in facilitating regional intergovernmental processes, notably the 2022 review of the Cairo Declaration on Arab Women by 21 members of the League of Arab States, which reinvigorated political commitment to women's leadership.<sup>139</sup> Complementing this, the Gender Justice and the Law initiative was reported to be an effective advocacy tool, advancing legal reform and fostering regional benchmarking.<sup>140</sup>

**Country-level technical support:** At the national level, in partnership with Country Offices, ROAS' advocacy on women's equal participation contributed to key legal and policy reforms that enhanced enabling environments for women's political engagement. Portfolio monitoring data indicated support to 94 government and civil society entities through capacity-building and policy advocacy,<sup>141</sup> alongside coordination with 58 women's networks and feminist coalitions to advance gender-responsive legislation.<sup>142</sup> Notable achievements include legislative reforms in Libya introducing a 20 per cent quota for women in the House of Representatives (2023);<sup>143</sup> the establishment of a Women's Empowerment Unit within Jordan's Independent Election Commission; and ratification of laws in Jordan mandating increased female representation in political parties and elected bodies.<sup>144</sup> In Iraq, UN Women supported normative frameworks including the Women's Quota Law and gender-sensitive electoral regulations;<sup>145</sup> while in Lebanon, advocacy efforts focused on a draft law proposing a minimum quota for women in elections.<sup>146</sup>

The evaluation received overall positive feedback on the effectiveness of capacity-building initiatives, which primarily targeted women leaders, candidates and aspirants. Programme monitoring data showed that 1,120 women received leadership training during the Strategic Note period.<sup>147</sup> Feedback from a sample of 113 training participants revealed high levels of self-reported improvement: 82 per cent (N=93/113) reported increased confidence in leadership skills; 98 per cent (N=110/113) in decision-making ability; and 87 per cent (N=98/113) in their overall capacity for political participation.<sup>148</sup>

Stakeholders consulted during the evaluation attributed progress in the WPPL portfolio to UN Women's technical expertise, localized approaches and trusted partnerships with national institutions, civil society and intergovernmental bodies. ROAS' reputation for political impartiality was consistently highlighted as a strategic asset, enabling its convening role and facilitating women CSOs' access into political spaces. All the implementing partners surveyed as a part of the evaluation (N=4/4) rated UN Women's added value in governance and WPPL as high.<sup>149</sup>

The portfolio demonstrated a commitment to addressing structural barriers to women's political participation, particularly patriarchal norms and violence against women in politics. Portfolio monitoring data indicated that awareness-raising campaigns reached over 4,200 individuals during the Strategic Note period, advocating for legal reforms and protective mechanisms.<sup>150</sup> Country-level initiatives included targeted training and media outreach in Iraq to counter online harassment; Jordan's nationwide campaign supporting women candidates through legal awareness and reporting mechanisms; Lebanon's #VoteEqual campaign amplifying women's voices; and Libya's workshops enhancing civil society capacity to address political violence.<sup>151</sup> These efforts were validated by stakeholders, who emphasized the need for continued investment in this area.

139. WPP Retro analysis compiled by ROAS, 2025 and evaluation key informant interviews.

140. 23 member states from Africa and the Arab region validated country-specific updates on gender-responsive legislation under the Gender Justice and the Law initiative, reinforcing regional momentum for women's political empowerment.

141. ROAS Annual Report 2024

142. *ibid*

143. ROAS Annual Reports 2022-2024

144. *ibid*, Jordan Country Portfolio Evaluation, 2023.

145. ROAS Annual Report and Iraq CPE, 2025

146. ROAS Annual Report 2022-24

147. Data drawn from Track-It!

148. *ibid*

149. UN Women (2025) ROAS Strategic Note Evaluation implementing partner survey

150. UN Women (2025) WPPL Retro analysis compiled by ROAS in 2025

151. *ibid*



ROAS' leadership in multi-country research on violence against women in politics was acknowledged as a key contribution, generating evidence on prevalence, impact and barriers to reporting, particularly online violence targeting politically active women.<sup>152</sup> In Jordan, this research reportedly catalysed initial policy discussions on political violence.

While linkages with ERAW were evident, stakeholders indicated the need and opportunities for greater thematic integration to connect WPPL with WEE to address the financial barriers faced by women candidates. Additionally, the need to articulate synergies between WPPL and WPS initiatives were highlighted to amplify women's voices in national dialogues, constitutional processes and transitional justice mechanisms.

The evaluation noted intentional efforts to apply leave no one behind principles, with targeted support for marginalized groups including women with disabilities and youth under this portfolio. Notable examples included the establishment of a regional Community of Practice on Disability Inclusion and WPPL, in partnership with the Arab Forum of Women with Disabilities and the Arab Organization for Persons with Disabilities.<sup>153</sup>

Despite these achievements, internal feedback revealed mixed perceptions of ROAS' effectiveness in this area of work, with 50 per cent of surveyed personnel (N=15/30) indicating satisfaction with ROAS' contribution.<sup>154</sup> Country Office stakeholders called for more consistent technical guidance and a stronger presence of Arabic-speaking specialists to support WPPL advocacy and capacity-building efforts. Internal stakeholders indicated that while regional surge support helped address gaps, it was insufficient to meet the full scope of needs.

The evaluation found that the regional target of 30 per cent representation remains unmet,<sup>155</sup> and the four-year time frame proved insufficient given the challenges posed by political instability, diverse governance systems and regression in some contexts, e.g. Tunisia's repeal of its gender parity law. Resource constraints further limited progress. WPPL has reportedly not been a donor priority and, at the time of the evaluation, a regional programme was still under development. The portfolio is managed by a small team, with the P5 Thematic Adviser also overseeing normative and disability inclusion work, supported by one Programme Associate.

### BOX 9. Testing the theory of change – WPPL

ROAS' WPPL programming focused on advancing women's representation and leadership in decision-making spaces, particularly through promoting gender parity in parliaments and cabinets and strengthening engagement across electoral cycles. The underlying assumption was that technical assistance, advocacy and institutional reforms to promote gender parity would expand women's access to political spaces and foster gender-responsive governance. The theory of change was largely valid, as evidenced by increased women's representation in national parliaments across the region. However, it did not fully account for external factors influencing women's access to political and decision-making spaces. Progress towards the regional target of 30 per cent representation remains constrained by political instability, limited resources and persistent patriarchal norms.



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<sup>152</sup>. Unpublished for the sensitivity of the subject matter and for using the evidence primarily for policy dialogue with national institutions.

<sup>153</sup>. *ibid*

<sup>154</sup>. UN Women (2025) ROAS Strategic Note Evaluation personnel survey

<sup>155</sup>. The latest data from the Inter Parliamentary Union was from 2022, which reported WPP regional average of 16.9 per cent.

## FINDING 8

**EVAW remained a strategic priority in the existing Strategic Note, albeit with a narrowed focus on domestic violence and violence in public spaces. However, the portfolio faced significant funding challenges and prolonged staffing gaps, which hindered coordination and continuity. While ROAS contributed to legal reforms and produced relevant knowledge products, progress in aligning services with global standards and expanding access remained limited. Persistent data gaps, especially on SDG indicators, further constrained impact. (EVAW)**

EVAW was a strategic priority within the current Strategic Note, albeit with a narrowed thematic focus on domestic violence and violence in public spaces. ROAS' EVAW interventions were found to be jointly positioned under the protection pillar, emphasizing support to Country Offices in enhancing service provision; while advocacy and prevention efforts were embedded within broader regional social norms programming. (Progress on social norms has been covered separately under Finding 5.)

A significant challenge noted was the financial contraction of the EVAW portfolio, with allocations declining from US\$ 10.97 million in 2022 to US\$ 5.88 million in 2023.<sup>156</sup> This reduction coincided with critical capacity gaps, as the regional EVAW specialist post remained vacant from late 2022 until February 2025, when a full-time consultant was recruited.<sup>157</sup> These gaps constrained the scope and continuity of EVAW programming, particularly in relation to joint operational and coordination efforts.

Among the implementing partners surveyed, only 25 per cent (N= 1/4) rated the current EVAW portfolio as adding high value.<sup>158</sup> Similarly, only 56 per cent (N=17/30) of UN Women personnel indicated that the portfolio was contributing effectively to Strategic Note outcomes. Interviews with internal and external stakeholders consistently underscored that EVAW had not received adequate prioritization during the current Strategic Note period.<sup>159</sup>

At the normative level, the evaluation acknowledges positive contributions arising from ROAS' advocacy and technical support to Country Offices, which facilitated legal reforms in several Arab States aimed at strengthening protection for women. However, implementation gaps remain substantial (see Annex 7 for contribution analysis).

The evaluation found that ROAS has also contributed towards filling evidence and knowledge gaps through

production of knowledge products. The key reports mentioned by stakeholders included a regional study on online violence against women and girls; a comprehensive mapping of laws and services addressing ICT-facilitated violence; and two specialized training manuals – one focused on case management and psychosocial support for survivors of violence and another designed to guide women-led organizations in delivering remote services to survivors of EVAW (see Annex 9 for details). These resources were disseminated through 48 women's networks and organizations to enhance engagement with duty bearers and support broader advocacy and capacity-building efforts across the region.<sup>160</sup>

As outlined under Finding 2, coordination efforts with UN entities on EVAW were hindered by staffing gaps and inconsistent inter-agency engagement. However, the recruitment of a dedicated consultant in 2025 marked a renewed commitment to revitalizing this area. Stakeholders also highlighted the Spotlight Initiative proposal as a promising opportunity to galvanize coordinated action and strengthen regional responses to violence against women.

Despite some reported achievements, stakeholders highlighted limited progress in aligning EVAW services with the global Essential Services Package<sup>161</sup> and in expanding service access for survivors.<sup>162</sup> According to the stakeholders consulted, this was primarily due to a capacity gap at the Regional Office level and reflected systemic barriers to survivor access and institutional support. Nonetheless, stakeholders viewed the strategic shift from awareness-raising to capacity-building, particularly within prevention programming, as a positive development. Personnel also emphasized the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships, including engagement with youth and men, to amplify efforts to eliminate violence against women.<sup>163</sup>

Another critical area identified by the evaluation as requiring

156. UN Women (2024) EVAW Retro analysis prepared by the ROAS EVAW Specialist

157. The PSMU head supported EVAW work during this period.

158. UN Women (2025) ROAS Strategic Note Evaluation implementing partner survey.

159. UN Women ROAS Strategic Note Evaluation personnel survey (2025)

160. Based on website analytics provided by ROAS. See Annex 9 for individual downloads across knowledge products.

161. SP\_D.0.4.b: Number of countries supported to revise, develop, or implement guidelines, protocols and standard operating procedures to improve EVAWG services in line with the global Essential Services Package (ESP)

162. SP\_D.0.4.1: Number of countries where there has been an increase in the number of women who access services after experiencing violence or discrimination (CO)

163. UN Women (2025) ROAS Strategic Note Evaluation personnel survey.

attention was the availability and quality of data on violence against women. Stakeholders consistently emphasized that the persistent lack of reliable, timely and disaggregated data – particularly in relation to SDG indicators 5.2.1<sup>164</sup> and 5.2.2<sup>165</sup> – constitutes a major barrier to advancing ERAW outcomes in the Arab States region. Administrative data from police, health and justice sectors remains fragmented, often lacking age and sex disaggregation, and is rarely shared across institutions, thereby impeding coordinated monitoring and response efforts. Prevalence surveys are conducted infrequently and suffer from methodological inconsistencies, with sensitive forms of violence, such as sexual violence and marital rape, frequently excluded due to prevailing cultural taboos, resulting in substantial underreporting.<sup>166</sup>

Furthermore, institutional and technical capacity within national statistical systems is limited, with insufficient resources, trained personnel and mechanisms for inter-agency coordination. Data on marginalized groups, including women with disabilities and refugees, is rarely collected, further obscuring the full scope and nature of violence against women in the region.<sup>167</sup>

Overall, the evaluation identified the need for greater strategic clarity regarding the ERAW agenda within ROAS. Given the portfolio's strategic importance, there was unanimous support among thematic leads and country office leadership to retain ERAW as a priority area in the forthcoming Strategic Note.<sup>168</sup>

### BOX 10. Testing the theory of change – ERAW

The ERAW portfolio's underlying assumption was that technical assistance to strengthen normative frameworks and institutional capacity will improve access to protection services and reduce violence against women. Evidence shows that the theory of change was partially valid: ROAS contributed to strengthened legal frameworks and increased awareness through multi-stakeholder engagement. However, this did not necessarily translate to improved access to services for survivors of violence. Systemic barriers constrained the full realization of intended outcomes and long-term reductions in violence remain dependent on sustained investment, coordinated advocacy and integration with broader social norms initiatives.



Photo©UN Women Arab States

164. Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age.

165. Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence.

166. UNFPA & UN Women (2019). Strengthening Methodologies to Measure Violence against Women in the Arab Region.

167. UN ESCWA (2022). Statistical Brief: Gender Equality in the Arab Region.

168. Regional workshop for ROAS Strategic Note development, Cairo 1–3 June 2025.

## FINDING 9

ROAS made strategic investments to institutionalize gender data and statistics. A dedicated Data and Evidence team was established, and two digital platforms – GenTRACK and Track-it! – were developed. While GenTRACK improved regional data availability, its uptake was limited due to dissemination gaps. Track-it! enabled real-time monitoring; however, data completeness needs attention. Gender Alerts enhanced humanitarian response visibility, although delays in clearance reduced its timeliness.

**Gender data and statistics:** The ROAS Strategic Note reflected a strategic shift towards institutionalizing gender data and statistics as a tool for accountability, policy reform and inclusive development across the Arab States. ROAS translated this vision into tangible commitments.

A key milestone was the establishment of a dedicated Data and Evidence team, comprising a Regional Gender Statistics Specialist (P4) and a Programme Coordination Specialist – Resilience and Monitoring (P4), supported by two consultants: a Data and Results Management Specialist and a GenTRACK Specialist.

To operationalize its vision, ROAS invested in the development of two online platforms – GenTRACK<sup>169</sup> and Track-it!<sup>170</sup> – designed to streamline and centralize data collection, and enhance knowledge generation on gender equality and the empowerment of women trends to inform data-driven decision-making. The development of Track-it! was further supported by Kobo Toolbox.

During the evaluation period, a total of US\$ 720,000 was invested in developing these platforms, reflecting a strong financial commitment to enhancing data systems and digital solutions for improved monitoring and results tracking (see Annex 3 for details).

The GenTRACK gender data portal – a data visualization and tracking platform – was developed through a multi-agency collaboration involving UN Women, ILO, UN ESCWA and the World Bank. According to some stakeholders, GenTRACK has improved access to gender-related data, including for the SDGs and trend analysis (across 17 Arab States, offering 194 indicators across four thematic domains). According to these stakeholders, its integration of nine global datasets and the addition of contextual layers enhance its utility for policy dialogue and advocacy. Overall, the evaluation found that GenTRACK represents a valuable strategic initiative to

strengthen gender data and evidence systems. It fills a regional gap by consolidating data across Arab States and contextualizing gender equality indicators in a way that the global SDG 5 portal does not always capture. The evaluation observed particular interest from GCC authorities for potential collaboration.

However, some stakeholders questioned the portal's added value, citing persistent data gaps, especially on ERAW and SDG 5 indicators, and emphasized the need for UN Women to prioritize data generation over platform development. Some users reported a preference for more established sources, such as the World Bank's Gender Data Hub, suggesting limited uptake of GenTRACK for data access. In general, dissemination of GenTRACK data was found to be limited, with low awareness among external stakeholders. Internally, while GenTRACK has laid a foundation, the evaluation noted the need for stronger ownership and strategic alignment with UN Women's core thematic work to enhance its relevance and sustainability.

The Track-it! portal was developed to establish a unified internal monitoring system, enabling systematic tracking of qualitative and quantitative data at both output and outcome levels across regional and country-level interventions. The evaluation found that it contributed to a "One Monitoring Approach" through standardized indicators, enhancing coherence across regional and country-level reporting. A key strength was its ability to centrally capture reach data, with over 109,000 women and 65 partners registered across nine countries.<sup>172</sup> The platform's flexible, multi-modal registration system – accessible via mobile app, web form, QR code and WhatsApp – enabled near real-time data collection, including demographic disaggregation.

Track-it! also facilitated baseline and endline data collection, with a potential to support long-term impact assessment of interventions. Its utility in crisis contexts,

169. [GenTRACK Arab States](#)

170. See: Track-it! – accessible to internal registered users only.

171. These features allow users to correlate gender trends with historical developments and assess national legal frameworks against international standards, thereby strengthening the portal's utility for policy dialogue and advocacy.

172. Source data taken from the Track-it! database.



such as Gaza and Lebanon,<sup>173</sup> was particularly noted, where it enabled contacts with the registered target groups to generate relevant, rapid Gender Alerts and insights into women's resilience in humanitarian settings.

Despite these successes, limitations were observed. Recording of results was inconsistent across thematic areas with humanitarian indicators more effectively mapped and other areas (including WEE and WPS) still under development. Despite registering over 109,000 target women, only 9 per cent completed baseline assessments and 7 per cent completed endlines, raising concerns about potential underrepresentation of programme reach. Limited harmonization of indicators across UN Women's Strategic Plan, Regional Strategic Note and donor reporting frameworks was also highlighted, along with the need for clearer integration with corporate reporting systems such as RMS.

The evaluation noted some concerns regarding data credibility, as data collection is primarily led by implementing partners and programme personnel, which may limit perceived independence. Stakeholders indicated that systematic sample verification and engagement of third-party actors for independent validation are viable options to enhance reliability. However, these approaches carry resource implications, which may affect their feasibility and scalability.

Stakeholders also indicated that while these initiatives contributed to a shift in thinking at the country level, reinforcing evidence-based approaches, more needs to be done to support the uptake of this data for learning, course correction and decision-making.

The evaluation found that ROAS advanced gender statistics through targeted interventions under the Women Count programme, focusing on strengthening national statistical systems; increasing the availability of gender-disaggregated data; and integrating gender statistics into policy and humanitarian planning.<sup>174</sup> Notable reported achievements included technical support to Tunisia's gender-integrated National Strategy for Development of Statistics (2024–2026); and co-production of the Gender Snapshot for the Arab Region<sup>175</sup> with UN ESCWA, which stakeholders recognized as a valuable SDG monitoring tool. ROAS also demonstrated methodological leadership through its partnership with UNFPA and the World Health Organization, producing the first dataset on technology-facilitated violence against women in Libya.<sup>176</sup> According to the stakeholders consulted, this study informed regional advocacy and positioned UN Women as a key actor

in emerging areas of gender data (see Annex 3 for details).

The evaluation found that generating gender-disaggregated evidence to inform humanitarian response has also been a strategic focus for ROAS. Gender Alerts contributed to responses in crises such as the Türkiye–Syria earthquake, the Gaza war and Lebanon's conflict escalation. Thematic Gender Alerts – covering water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), health, protection and women-led organizations – were utilized by humanitarian actors and cited by international bodies, including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Human Rights Watch and the International Court of Justice. According to the stakeholders consulted, these outputs enhanced UN Women's visibility and credibility in humanitarian contexts. However, the evaluation identified delays in the internal clearance process, particularly at the headquarters level, as a key constraint. Given the time-sensitive nature of humanitarian interventions, such delays risk diminishing the relevance and utility of Gender Alerts in informing timely decision-making.

173. During the Lebanon crisis, UN Women was able to reach targeted women through Track-it! to conduct rapid assessments. See: [Gender Alert: When Crises Strike, Gender Inequalities are often Exacerbated: The Urgent Needs of Crisis Affected Women and Girls in Lebanon](#), last accessed June 2025

174. [UN Women Women Count Programme](#)

175. Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals A gender snapshot of the Arab region 2024

176. [UN Women BigDataAnalytics\\_OVAW Libya Jun2023.pdf](#)

## 3.4 EFFICIENCY OF ROAS FUNCTIONS

**EQ 6–9:** To what extent are ROAS' functions effectively supporting Country Offices to deliver results in the region? Does ROAS currently have the right balance between oversight/support to Country Offices/Non-Programme Presences versus regional-level delivery of results? Is the ROAS structure fit for purpose to deliver against its Strategic Note, as well as effectively support offices in the region? How effectively has ROAS managed its external partnerships?

### FINDING 10

ROAS made progress in resource mobilization, particularly through securing non-earmarked funding and initiating partnerships with international financial institutions to operationalize the Strategic Note. However, reliance on non-core funding and limited success in the GCC region were raised as concerns. ROAS effectively bridged corporate and country-level efforts, especially during crises, and maintained strategic engagement in complex contexts. ROAS' operations functions showed improvement, but finance, procurement and Human Resources (HR) still require improvement. Internally, cross-thematic collaboration has improved but more structured spaces for joint strategizing are needed.

**Resource mobilization:** The evaluation found that while ROAS' Resource Management Action Plan had established annual budget targets for the Strategic Note period, actual resource mobilization from 2022 to 2024 consistently fell short of these targets<sup>177</sup> (see Table 1).

**TABLE 1. ROAS resource mobilization, target versus achievement (2022–2024)**

Year	Target (US\$)	Resource mobilized (US\$)	Resource mobilization targets met (%)
2022	13,524,582	10,154,554	75%
2023	14,000,000	10,114,806	72%
2024	14,000,000	11,352,021	81%

Data Source: As reported in Resource Action Plan and Quantum

Non-core funding sources constituted approximately 53 per cent of the total budget, underscoring ROAS' reliance on donor-driven contributions. However, concerns were raised regarding the sustainability of this growth, given the shifting

donor landscape and anticipated UN-wide funding cuts.<sup>178</sup>

ROAS received non-earmarked funding of approximately US\$ 811,406 from the Government of Finland in December 2021, allocated for a 12-month period to support implementation of the current Strategic Note.<sup>179</sup> Stakeholders emphasized that this funding played a catalytic role in operationalizing the regional strategy – it was the first direct contribution to the Strategic Note – enabling cross-thematic, multi-country initiatives aligned with regional priorities and supporting under-resourced Country Offices.<sup>180</sup> For example, ROAS seed funding reportedly enabled Morocco to develop and contextualize its WEE portfolio.

ROAS successfully mobilized funding for regional programmes with multi-country scope from donors who view regional programming as a preferred modality.<sup>181</sup> In line with its Resource Management Action Plan,<sup>182</sup> ROAS prioritized expanding partnerships and diversifying financing beyond traditional donor sources. A key achievement in this regard was the strategic engagement with international financial institutions, marking a shift

177. UN Women (2022) Resource Management Action Plan, ROAS 2022–2025

178. Portfolio Analysis conducted by the evaluation team

179. The funds were allocated to advance results in the ROAS Strategic Note in 2022 under three impact areas: Governance and WPP, aiming to support the increase of women's political participation in parliaments and intergovernmental governance for women employment in the green economy; WEE, supporting UN Women's Regional Strategy to assist the Arab States in increasing women employment from 20.4 per cent (2021) to 25 per cent (2030); and EAW, supporting women and girls in the Arab States region live a life free from violence, with a focus on domestic violence and violence in the public sphere (including online violence).

180. UN Women (2025) Foresight Analysis Strategic Planning Workshop report 1–3 June 2025, Cairo, Egypt.

181. For example, the WPS regional programme, Joint ILO programme, Dare to Care, and the EU Madad Fund.

182. UN Women (2022) Resource Management Action Plan, ROAS 2022–2025

towards funding streams and securing US\$ 254 million in capital from the Islamic Development Bank<sup>183</sup> to support women's employment in Tunisia and Jordan.<sup>184</sup>

Despite these achievements, targeted resource mobilization efforts in the GCC region have yet to yield significant financial gains. Several Country Offices also reported expectations for greater support from ROAS in identifying donor opportunities and building strategic partnerships. In the evaluation survey, 47 per cent of UN personnel respondents (N=14/30) indicated that resource mobilization required enhanced efforts<sup>185</sup> and should be treated as a shared responsibility between ROAS and Country Offices. These concerns were echoed during ROAS' foresight workshop for Strategic Note development.

Stakeholders further emphasized the need for stronger engagement with the private sector and collaboration with other UN agencies for joint funding initiatives.<sup>186</sup> They also emphasized the importance of ROAS ensuring a minimum level of core resources and structural support within existing Country Offices, particularly before considering any expansion in geographical coverage. This was seen as essential to maintaining institutional credibility, achieving meaningful scale and impact and safeguarding UN Women's reputation.

**Bridging corporate (headquarters) and Country Office efforts:** ROAS has played a pivotal role in contextualizing and aligning UN Women's global stance with regional realities, thereby enhancing its relevance and positioning in the Arab States region. Survey data indicated that 63 per cent of personnel (N=19/30) viewed ROAS as effective in bridging corporate headquarters and Country Office efforts. Stakeholders provided concrete examples, noting ROAS' role as a key interlocutor during the war in Gaza and Lebanon (managing corporate processes, approvals and communications) while Country Offices focused on delivering humanitarian responses.

The evaluation found that ROAS also played a key role in enabling substantive engagement with key actors across some of the most diverse and politically complex contexts. Notably, its ability to maintain strategic dialogue with GCC countries, as well as sustain programming in fragile settings such as Syria (despite the absence of a physical presence on the ground), was consistently acknowledged by stakeholders.

**Finance and procurement:** The evaluation noted incremental improvements in ROAS' finance and procurement functions

during the Strategic Note period, including the establishment of a support lab aimed at assisting finance and procurement personnel in Country Offices. However, survey results revealed mixed perceptions of effectiveness. Only 40 per cent of respondents (N=12/30) rated procurement as adequately delivered, with personnel frequently citing top-down, lengthy and slow processes as a key concern. Similarly, 47 per cent (N=14/30) rated finance as an effective function.<sup>188</sup> Stakeholders emphasized the need for more proactive troubleshooting, particularly in relation to challenges with the Quantum system, rather than frequent referrals to headquarters.

**Internal coherence:** The evaluation found that ROAS has cultivated a culture of cross-thematic collaboration that is appreciated by internal stakeholders. The evaluation survey data supports this observation, with 66 per cent of personnel surveyed (n=20/30) affirming that ROAS has been effective in fostering internal cross-thematic coherence.<sup>189</sup> Notable examples of cross-thematic coordination include the biweekly inter-team coordination meetings, which bring together regional thematic leads to facilitate regular engagement across thematic areas. Additionally, the inter-thematic working group that led development of the Regional Flagship Initiative to Surge Women's Employment reportedly exemplified effective collaboration between thematic leads and programmatic teams. These mechanisms contributed to more integrated planning and strategic alignment across the ROAS portfolio.

According to stakeholders, these mechanisms also contributed to enhanced coherence between country-level initiatives and regional thematic efforts. However, feedback suggested regional and Country Office collaboration could be strengthened. Both thematic leads and country-level leadership emphasized the need for more structured and dedicated spaces for joint strategizing and internal coordination. They indicated that the existing platforms, such as all-staff meetings and senior leadership meetings, offered limited opportunities for substantive engagement between regional thematic and country teams. Senior leadership meetings, in particular, were identified as a potentially valuable mechanism that could be leveraged to facilitate in-depth strategic discussions between Country Office leadership and ROAS thematic leads. Stakeholders also advocated for the replication of collaboration models (such as those employed in the Flagship Initiative to Surge Women's Employment) across other thematic areas to foster contextually nuanced, cross-sectoral approaches.

**HR and Quality Assurance function:** The evaluation

183. UN Women also updated an existing Memorandum of Understanding with the African Development Bank

184. As per the key informant interviews, the project in Tunisia has been allocated US\$ 200 million, and in Jordan US\$ 3.5 million.

185. UN Women (2025) ROAS Strategic Note Evaluation personnel survey

186. UN Women (2025) ROAS Strategic Note Evaluation personnel survey

187. ROAS Strategic Note Evaluation personnel survey, June 2025.

188. *ibid*

189. UN Women ROAS Strategic Note Evaluation personnel survey, June 2025

consultations revealed mixed perceptions regarding the efficiency of ROAS' HR function. While some stakeholders appreciated ROAS' technical advice, guidance and surge support to Country Offices, others expressed concerns about delays in recruitment and onboarding processes. These delays are likely to be somewhat systemic across the organization and not unique to ROAS.<sup>190</sup> Evaluation survey data showed that only 33 per cent of personnel (N=10/30) rated the HR function as adequate, highlighting the need to improve onboarding and orientation for new personnel.

The evaluation found that ROAS' Quality Assurance function led by the Programme Management Support Unit and Quality Assurance missions to Country Offices was generally effective in identifying and addressing challenges across HR, leadership, operations and programme management. However, only 43 per cent of personnel (N=10/30) rated it as effective, indicating room for improvement.<sup>191</sup> Stakeholders suggested quality assurance missions should be more systematic, with a stronger focus on diagnosing root causes.<sup>192</sup>

## FINDING 11

**ROAS' thematic technical guidance to Country Offices was appreciated; however, concerns were raised about the limited availability of regional thematic advisers, as they are often engaged in programme management and resource mobilization for regional initiatives. ROAS' current structure appears increasingly stretched by its expanding priorities, suggesting the need for a functional review to ensure strategic alignment and responsiveness. Capacity development was seen as limited, and stakeholders recommended more inclusive partnerships, clearer guidance and stronger support for grassroots organizations.**

**Technical advice and support:** The evaluation consultation found that Country Offices highly valued ROAS' technical advice and support in strategic planning. This was validated by evaluation survey data, with 67 per cent of personnel (N=20/30) indicating that ROAS had been effective in supporting Country Offices in developing their Strategic Notes. Stakeholders emphasized the need to further strengthen ROAS' capacity to provide political and macroeconomic foresight through trend analysis, analytical work and enhanced peer learning opportunities.

Technical support in results-based management, monitoring and donor reporting was also appreciated, although the need for continuous and responsive support was highlighted.<sup>193</sup>

Thematic technical support from ROAS was positively received, particularly in areas where designated expertise was available. However, gaps were noted in ERAW and WEE, due to the absence of consistent, dedicated thematic leads. Country Offices expressed the need for more consistent technical guidance and a stronger presence of Arabic-speaking specialists in the area of WPPL.

A recurring concern raised by Country Offices was that thematic advisers were often engaged in programme

management and resource mobilization for regional programmes, which in turn limited their availability to provide technical guidance and oversight to Country Offices. Country Office stakeholders emphasized that reducing the burden on thematic leads for resource mobilization, programme management and implementation responsibilities would allow for greater prioritization of technical support and strategic oversight to the Country Offices.

At the same time, feedback acknowledged that in contexts with less established Country Offices, ROAS may need to retain programme management responsibilities. Conversely, Country Offices with stronger programme management capacity should be empowered to lead the respective country chapters of the regional programmes, including partnership management at the national level. Looking ahead, stakeholders envisioned ROAS' role to centre on thought leadership, technical/advisory support and coordination, with greater emphasis on localization in programme implementation and facilitating cross-country exchange on key regional issues.<sup>194</sup>

Stakeholder consultations and document reviews indicated that the ROAS structure does not appear to be fully "fit for purpose." During the Strategic Note period, ROAS' priorities

190. While some progress was made in accelerating recruitment in 2022, the key performance indicators for recruitment in 2023 and 2024 regressed, with the average completion time increasing to 20 weeks. This decline was due to a range of factors, including shifting and competing priorities, many of which were driven by the escalating crisis in the region. As reported by ROAS management in Annual Reports 2022-2024.

191. *ibid*

192. Also outlined in CPEs such as for Jordan (2023) and Iraq (2025).

193. Findings related to regional data, evidence and knowledge management are covered separately under Finding 11.

194. UN Women (2025) Foresight Analysis, Strategic Planning Workshop 1-3 June 2025, Cairo, Egypt and UN Women Strategic Note Evaluation personnel survey, June 2025



expanded significantly, particularly in relation to its humanitarian portfolio (e.g. responses to the Gaza and Lebanon crises); an ambitious WEE portfolio; strategic engagement with GCC countries; and the growing data and evidence portfolio. The Syria programme also expanded, with two ROAS positions now based inside Syria, including a UN Women Syria Gender Adviser embedded in the UN Resident Coordinator's Office.

At the same time, key thematic functions – such as EVAW, knowledge management, thematic monitoring and donor reporting – were identified as areas requiring strengthening. Overall, ROAS' structure has grown by approximately 25 per cent since 2022, with new roles reflecting the need for a systematic functional review. Such a review would help ensure that the structure is strategically aligned with ROAS' forthcoming priorities and responsive to UN Women's pivot towards field engagement, especially in light of core funding constraints across the organization.

**Capacity development:** Despite positive feedback on Gender in Humanitarian Action training, overall capacity development support from ROAS was perceived as limited, with only 20 per cent of personnel (N=6/30) finding capacity-building initiatives relevant and impactful.<sup>195</sup> Consultations indicated a focus on individual development, with insufficient attention to broader workforce needs.<sup>196</sup> Stakeholders called for institutionalized mechanisms, such

as annual training needs assessments, to address gaps in gender-transformative approaches, sustainable financing and data-driven communication, alongside procedural training in programme management, Quantum and results-based reporting.<sup>197</sup>

The evaluation found that ROAS maintains strong relationships and funding modalities with programme partners, as indicated across interviews (N=4). Evaluation survey data from implementing partners reflected positive perceptions, with 75 per cent (N=3/4) rating partnerships as very effective and 25 per cent (N=1/4) as effective.<sup>198</sup> ROAS' contributions were valued across thematic areas, particularly for its inclusive approach and efforts to amplify local voices.

While stakeholders provided positive feedback, they also underscored the need for deeper engagement with grassroots and emerging women-led organizations, particularly in conflict-affected contexts, and called for more inclusive consultations during strategy and programme design. Reported challenges included lengthy administrative procedures, delays in fund disbursement, unclear partnership requirements, limited training on financial systems and slow communication.<sup>199</sup> To address these issues, stakeholders emphasized the importance of systematic onboarding, clearer operational guidance and enhanced technical support.

## FINDING 12

**Monitoring and reporting capacity gaps, limited outcome-level reporting and donor concerns underscored the need for stronger results-based management. ROAS was effective in knowledge generation, but exchange and dissemination remained ad hoc. Greater institutional recognition of the Knowledge Management function was emphasized.**

**Monitoring and reporting:** From a technical capacity perspective, the evaluation observed capacity gaps in monitoring and reporting. Except for the Dare to Care Programme, no other regional thematic portfolio had dedicated monitoring and reporting capacity. At the Country Office level, Jordan and Tunisia were in the process of recruiting a dedicated monitoring and reporting personnel, while the other Country Offices in the region did not have dedicated capacity for the same. Although the Data and Evidence team were providing technical support, including through Track-It!, challenges remained specifically around corporate and donor reporting.

Evaluation consultations also highlighted concerns from some donors regarding limited outcome-level reporting, underscoring the need to strengthen results-based donor reporting. The evaluation noted that, despite significant efforts to strengthen results-based management capacity

during the Strategic Note period, 70 per cent of surveyed personnel (N=21/30) reported the need for continued support for results-based planning, monitoring and reporting.<sup>200</sup>

During the evaluation period, five regional programme evaluations were conducted.<sup>201</sup> ROAS' total investment in these evaluations was US\$ 447,768,<sup>202</sup> funded through non-core resources. This represents approximately 1 per cent of the total programme budget of US\$ 40 million regional budget, falling short of the targeted spending of 2–3 per cent of programme budget for evaluation activities.

**Knowledge management:** The evaluation applied the Guskey+ analytical model to assess the effectiveness of knowledge management within ROAS (see Table 3).<sup>203</sup>

**Organizational support:** The evaluation observed that a Knowledge

195. ROAS Strategic Note Evaluation personnel survey, June 2025

196. UN Women (2025) Strategic Note Evaluation personnel survey

197. *ibid*

198. UN Women (2025) Strategic Note Evaluation implementing partner survey

199. UN Women (2025) Strategic Note Evaluation implementing partner survey

200. UN Women (2025) Strategic Note Evaluation implementing partner survey.

201. UN Women Syria Programme Phase II Evaluation; the End-Term Programme Evaluation of the Regional Programme on Women, Peace and Security in the Arab States (2019–2022); the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Joint Programme on Productive Employment and Decent Work with the ILO; and the Final Evaluation of the MWGE Phase II Programme; and Humanitarian Development and Peace Nexus Formative evaluation (ongoing).

202. Evaluations: MWGE (US\$ 297,768); Syria programme (US\$ 35,000); WPS (US\$ 30,000); Joint Programme (US\$ 50,000); and Humanitarian–Development–Peace nexus (US\$ 35,000).

203. Guskey et al. (2002) Gauge impact with 5 levels of data

Assessment across the framework is presented below.

Output: Between 2022 and 2025, ROAS published 28 knowledge products (one was unpublished due to the sensitive nature of its content). The type of knowledge products included Gender Alerts, thematic regional snapshots, training toolkits, research papers, policy briefs and three workshop reports (see Table 2 and Annex 9).

**TABLE 2. Types of knowledge products**

Types of knowledge products	Regional	Country
Gender Alerts	0	5
Working group and innovation reports	3	0
Policy briefs	6	0
Research reports	5	0
Toolkits/Manuals	5	0
Infographics	4	0

Management Plan was developed as a part of the current Strategic Note document, identifying the need to expand knowledge production; strengthen knowledge-sharing capacity across ROAS and Country Office personnel; and develop a knowledge-sharing culture across the office. However, the plan was not reviewed regularly to assess progress or limitations to inform any course correction.

The evaluation observed that ROAS used different dissemination pathways: publishing research reports, policy papers, conferences and briefings; however, as per stakeholder feedback, overall dissemination and knowledge management practices remained ad hoc. The scale of dissemination efforts also varied across thematic areas. In the personnel survey, 73 per cent (N=21/30) felt ROAS was effective in dissemination.<sup>206</sup>

**Access, reaction, use and change:** The evaluation highlighted positive feedback from stakeholders who had used the knowledge products regarding their relevance and quality, and recognizing their contribution to enhancing regional understanding and analysis about gender equality and the empowerment of women issues. They also indicated their increased knowledge and capacity as a result of the knowledge products. Examples cited included Gender Alerts to inform humanitarian responses in the Lebanon and Gaza crisis, the IMAGES research, Male Allyship manual and the Gender Justice Portal in helping government stakeholders monitor legal

progress on gender equality and the empowerment of women.<sup>207</sup> The evaluation observed that 89 per cent of knowledge products had under 100 downloads, possibly reflecting the limited uptake of online knowledge products.<sup>208</sup> However, there was no systematic way of capturing reaction and use of knowledge products beyond download rates. Similarly, there was no systematic way of capturing any knowledge and capacity enhancements among stakeholders or the impact of knowledge products on changes created in practice to determine how effectively these products reached and influenced their intended audiences.

In the evaluation personnel survey, 76 per cent of respondents (N=22/30) stated that the ROAS Knowledge Management function was effective in terms of knowledge generation, but that knowledge exchange needs more attention.<sup>209</sup> Similar observations were highlighted in past evaluations of regional programmes.<sup>210</sup>

The evaluation consultation with external stakeholders also revealed that not many were fully aware of the scope of ROAS' knowledge products or regularly use them in their work. In the evaluation survey, 50 per cent of implementing partners (N=2/4) rated ROAS' knowledge products and knowledge exchange as effective.<sup>211</sup>

Country Office stakeholders highlighted that the approach to knowledge products was often top-down, limiting their ownership and broader utility. According to these stakeholders, ROAS' effectiveness in knowledge management was strongest when Country Offices were actively engaged in the development process and their feedback was incorporated.

Internal stakeholders highlighted opportunities to enhance ROAS' role as a hub for cross-country knowledge exchange and learning. They cited Morocco's work on gender-responsive budgeting and statistics, and Jordan's engagement with the armed forces as valuable practices that could inform broader regional efforts. There was a specific call to facilitate dialogue on sensitive issues, such as family law reform through collective, cross-country platforms. As noted under the internal Coherence subsection under the efficiency criteria, the evaluation found that ROAS has fostered learning exchanges through greater cross-thematic collaboration, which was appreciated by internal stakeholders. The stakeholders indicated that this approach should be sustained and further strengthened by building on lessons from the ILO partnership and the Regional Flagship Initiative under the WEE portfolio.

Stakeholders also noted a critical gap in comparative analysis on gender backlash, despite its widespread relevance across contexts. Procedural compliance delays in signing off knowledge products with headquarters were reported to hinder the timely dissemination of strategic publications, including Gender Alerts. Finally, the Knowledge Management function was perceived as undervalued and in need of greater institutional recognition to effectively support evidence-based programming and regional learning.

206. UN Women (2025) Strategic Note Evaluation personnel survey

207. UN Women ROAS Strategic Note 2022-2025 Knowledge Management Plan, January 2022 and UN Women (2025) Annual Reports 2022-2024

208. Limited download rates across knowledge products were identified by data analytics provided by the ROAS Communications Unit (see Annex 9 for detailed analysis of download rates across knowledge products).

209. UN Women (2025) Strategic Note Evaluation personnel survey.

210. UN Women Syria Programme Phase II Evaluation; the End-Term Programme Evaluation of the Regional Programme on Women, Peace and Security in the Arab States (2019-2022); Mid-Term Evaluation of the Joint Programme on Productive Employment and Decent Work with the ILO; and the Final Evaluation of the MWGE Phase II Programme.

211. UN Women (2025) Strategic Note Evaluation implementing partner survey.

**TABLE 3. Assessment of the effectiveness of knowledge management using the Guskey+ framework Prepared by the evaluation team**

	I. Output	II. Organizational support	III. Access	IV. Reaction	V. Use of knowledge and learning	VI. Change created
Indicator	No. and type of knowledge products	Evidence that UN Women knowledge dissemination mechanisms function effectively	No. of access and by whom	No. of knowledge product users that found knowledge products engaging and relevant	Evidence of increased knowledge/ capacity among target groups	Evidence of knowledge changing practice
Data source	Document review <sup>212</sup>	Document review, <sup>213</sup> key informant interviews, web search	Document review <sup>214</sup> , key informant interviews and review of knowledge documents downloaded.	Key informant interviews	Document review <sup>215</sup> and key informant interviews	Document review <sup>216a</sup> and key informant interviews
Overall assessment	28 published knowledge products and one unpublished	<p>Use of different pathways noted, e.g. meetings, conferences, briefings</p> <p>However, scale of dissemination efforts varied across thematic areas, with WPS-Humanitarian Action, WEE and social norms noted as areas of particular strength.</p> <p>Initial Knowledge Management Plan developed</p>	<p>Limited uptake of stakeholders accessing knowledge products, with limited download rates noted.<sup>217</sup></p> <p>Not all stakeholders aware of range of products available.</p> <p>Communication team generate data on rate of use but not disaggregated by stakeholder type.</p>	<p>Evaluators received positive feedback regarding relevance and quality of knowledge products among the stakeholders consulted who had used knowledge products, such as the Gender Alerts, to inform humanitarian responses in the Lebanon and Gaza crises and in the Syria cross-border operation.</p> <p>No systematic way of capturing reaction and use of knowledge products beyond download rates.</p>	<p>Evaluators received positive feedback regarding increased knowledge and capacity.</p> <p>For example, in relation to understanding around drivers of ICT-related violence, providing real-time gender analysis in humanitarian contexts and in regards to the Gender Justice Portal in helping government stakeholders monitor legal progress on gender equality and the empowerment of women.</p> <p>No systematic way of capturing knowledge and capacity among stakeholders.</p>	<p>Evaluators received positive feedback on the use of Gender Alerts used by international organizations in humanitarian contexts to change practices.</p> <p>Examples cited were EVAW Training Manual on Case Management, PSS and ICT-related violence and Male Allyship Manual used in capacity development and advocacy.</p>

212. Twenty-eight knowledge products, including Gender Alerts, infographics, research papers, policy briefings and manuals were reviewed as outlined in Annex 9

213. UN Women ROAS Strategic Note 2022-2025 Knowledge Management Plan, January 2022 and UN Women (2025) Annual Reports 2022-2024

214. Data analytics of knowledge products provided by the ROAS Communications team

215. UN Women ROAS Strategic Note 2022-2025 Knowledge Management Plan, January 2022, UN Women (2025) Annual Reports 2022-2024 and regional evaluations

216. UN Women ROAS Strategic Note 2022-2025 Knowledge Management Plan, January 2022 and UN Women (2025) Annual Reports 2022-2024

217. Limited download rates across knowledge products were identified by data analytics provided by the ROAS Communications Unit. See Annex 9 for detailed analysis of download rates across knowledge products.

## 3.5 GENDER AND HUMAN RIGHTS

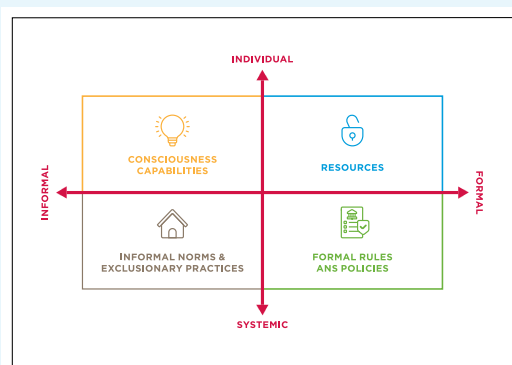
**EQ 10:** Has the portfolio been designed and implemented according to human rights and leave no one behind principles, including disability perspective?

### FINDING 13

ROAS adopted a gender-transformative approach, advancing legal reforms, promoting women's leadership and fostering shifts in social norms, including through engagement with men and boys. Support to women-led organizations effectively bridged policy-level initiatives with grassroots action. However, implementation of leave no one behind principles was uneven, with limited clarity on intersectionality and the inclusion of LGBTQI+ populations. While disability inclusion gained momentum through tools such as the EnAbility Audits, its integration across programming remained inconsistent.

The evaluation applied the Gender at Work Framework to assess the holistic nature of ROAS' portfolio, examining the interrelationship between gender equality outcomes, institutional and organizational change, and the power dynamics within communities (see Figure 5).

**FIGURE 5. Gender at Work Framework**



ROAS has demonstrated a gender-transformative approach within the formal quadrants of the Gender at Work Framework by effectively influencing UN mechanisms, Member States and intergovernmental normative frameworks. Notable contributions include

advancing women's representation in parliaments; promoting equitable participation in electoral processes; and securing legal and institutional commitments in the care economy, such as paternity leave provisions. ROAS also strengthened normative frameworks supporting women's participation in peace and security processes. While these efforts reflect systemic-level change, the evaluation identified a need for more systematic follow-up to ensure operationalization and sustained results at the country level.

Within the framework's informal quadrants, the evaluation found that ROAS has made meaningful progress in advancing gender-transformative change at the individual and relational levels. Programming has strengthened women's economic agency, leadership and decision-making capacities, both within households and in public spheres. Targeted initiatives engaging men and boys have contributed to observable shifts in social norms, particularly around caregiving and positive masculinities, with reported changes in men's attitudes towards household responsibilities and recognition of women's roles in peacebuilding and political participation.

Beyond individual-level change, the evaluation found that ROAS has played a pivotal role in facilitating access to technical support and financial resources for women-led organizations, ensuring that women's voices and rights are meaningfully integrated into decision-making and negotiation processes. The Women's Advisory Board for the



Syrian peace and political process exemplifies this inclusive approach.

Strategic engagement with regional partners (including the League of Arab States, the Arab Women Organization and the Network of Arab Mediators) has been instrumental in bridging formal and informal platforms, linking high-level policy work with grassroots interventions. However, in politically sensitive contexts such as Libya, Syria, Yemen and Iraq, pushback against gender equality issues remain contentious. Women human rights defenders and women-led organizations continue to face resistance from state actors, generating significant risks and prompting many CSOs to scale back advocacy efforts.

The evaluation found that while leave no one behind is embedded at the planning stage, its implementation and monitoring remain inconsistent across the ROAS portfolio. The evaluation team's review of a purposive sample of nine projects, representing ROAS thematic areas revealed stronger leave no one behind integration in normative work related to implementation of Beijing +30 and the SDGs, WPS, WPPL, Humanitarian Action and gender statistics portfolio. Displaced and crisis-affected women were most consistently considered (see Annex 14).<sup>218</sup> However, rural women, women with disabilities and ethnic minorities were notably underrepresented.

Some initiatives such as the Women's Leadership, Empowerment, Access and Protection programme<sup>219</sup> and the Nokia fisheries programme in Morocco<sup>220</sup> demonstrated targeted outreach to highly marginalized groups, where nearly one third of participants are widows and most have minimal formal education. The lack of disaggregated data continues to hinder effective tracking, although progress is under way through tools such as Track-It!

Stakeholder feedback also indicated that ROAS' WEE programming often prioritized urban, middle-class women, raising concerns about equitable reach. However, it was observed that the Flagship Initiative of Surging Women Employment By 5 per cent before 2030, was making an intentional effort to address the needs of rural women. Nevertheless, stakeholders called for greater attention to the needs of the most marginalized women, including those in rural, informal and crisis-affected settings who are often engaged in informal markets and face compounded barriers to access.

Limited shared understanding of gender-transformative

and intersectional approaches within the organization and among national stakeholders, coupled with uncertainty regarding ROAS' position on LGBTQI+ inclusion, were identified as risks to inclusive implementation and community-level acceptance.<sup>221</sup> At the same time, there was acknowledgment of the challenges associated with addressing these sensitive issues, particularly those related to LGBTQI+ inclusion in the region.

The evaluation found that disability inclusion had progressively emerged as a strategic priority for ROAS during the current Strategic Note period, reflecting a growing institutional commitment to centring women and girls with disabilities within gender equality and women's empowerment efforts. This shift was catalysed by the launch of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS) in 2019.<sup>222</sup>

Implementation has been spearheaded by the WPPL thematic adviser, supported by country-level focal points. Key initiatives included the promotion of the UNDIS training module aimed at strengthening capacity and improving understanding across workstreams. ROAS has also employed the EnAbility Audits to assess integration of disability inclusion across operations and communications.<sup>223</sup> The 2019 EnAbility audit established a baseline, revealing critical gaps in recruitment, accessibility and inclusive communication; while the 2023 audit evidenced incremental progress, particularly in awareness and engagement. Efforts to capture disability inclusion-related data through Track-It! indicated that 6.4 per cent of the individuals reached across reported projects were identified as having a disability.<sup>224</sup>

At the UN-system level, the evaluation noted that ROAS' support to UNCTs in OPT, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia contributed to enhanced performance under the UNCT Accountability Framework on Disability Inclusion.

ROAS also played a catalytic role in advancing regional discourse on disability inclusion through its strategic partnerships with the Arab Forum for Women with Disabilities and the League of Arab States. One of the key achievements was to lobby governments and the private sector to ensure that the effect and response of governments post COVID-19 included women with disabilities at the 4th Regional Arab Forum of Women with Disabilities in 2022.<sup>225</sup>

Several enabling factors were identified by the evaluation team. These include ROAS' technical leadership in

218. The following nine projects were selected for the sample: Implementation of Beijing +30 & SDGs (US\$ 25,200), Reducing online and ICT-facilitated violence, UN Women Count, Bahrain UNCT Coordination (US\$ 557,503), Dare to Care SIDA (US\$ 710,300), Strengthening resilience of vulnerable refugee and internally displaced women impacted by crises, displacement and disasters (US\$ 499,999), Flagship initiative (US\$ 1,180,000), SP3 outcome 1 (US\$ 800,00) and Support to Syrian Women for Peace Phase II Finland (US\$ 2,453,245).

219. [Women's Leadership, Empowerment, Access & Protection in Crisis Response Programme](#)

220. [Nokia fisheries programme in Morocco](#) UN Women (2025) Foresight Analysis, Strategic Planning Workshop 1 – 3 June 2025, Cairo, Egypt.

222. UN Disability Inclusion Strategy

223. ROAS EnAbility Audits Report 2023

224. ROAS (2025) Foresight Analysis Strategic Planning Workshop 1 – 3 June 2025, Cairo, Egypt.

225. [Call to Action: Inclusion of Women with Disabilities and Migrant Women Workers in Covid-19 Response and Recovery Plans | UN Women – Arab States](#).

advancing UNDIS implementation. The structured use of EnAbility Audits also provided a mechanism to track progress over time, demonstrating measurable improvements in awareness and engagement.

Despite these advances, challenges remain. Structural barriers, including inadequate infrastructure and limited budgets, continue to constrain systemic change. The Disability Inclusion Scorecard has not achieved the same level of institutionalization or uptake as the Gender Scorecard in the UNCT. Only 40 per cent of surveyed personnel considered ROAS' efforts to address the needs of the most marginalized, including persons with disabilities, as effective.<sup>226</sup> A strategic misalignment was observed between ROAS' commitment to UNDIS and the degree to which disability is embedded in programme design and target group identification. While thematic leads reported improved understanding and integration of disability inclusion into workstreams, application remains uneven.

Data collection also remains fragmented with inconsistent data disaggregation. Stakeholders emphasized the imperative of systematic sex, age and disability-disaggregated data to inform inclusive programming.

The evaluation highlighted the need to move beyond checklist-style approaches towards a more substantive integration of intersectionality throughout the programme cycle. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of clearly identifying specific target groups, rather than relying on broad categorizations such as "vulnerable", and addressing their differentiated needs and contexts. Visual tools, such as intersectional mapping, were seen as useful for illustrating overlapping identities and informing inclusive programme design, implementation and monitoring.<sup>227</sup> Strengthening the role of country-level focal points and institutionalizing regular leave no one behind audits were identified as critical next steps.<sup>228</sup>



Photo©UN Women Arab States

226. UN Women (2025) Strategic Note Evaluation personnel survey

227. Cited during key informant interviews with ROAS personnel and the UN Women ROAS Strategic Note Evaluation personnel survey, June 2025

228. UN Women (2025) Foresight Analysis, Strategic Planning Workshop 1–3 June 2025, Cairo, Egypt.





Photo©UN Women Arab States

## 4. LESSONS LEARNED



1. Investing in gender data can drive transformative change, but producing gender data alone is not sufficient – data must be actively integrated into decision-making and coordination processes. Investments in digital platforms, strategic partnerships and crisis-responsive data generation have positioned ROAS as a leader in gender data innovation. Tools such as GenTRACK and Track-it! have proven effective in enhancing visualization and accessibility of data, while platforms such as the Gender Justice Portal have improved evidence availability for strategic advocacy. Lessons from ROAS' experience highlight that ensuring data completeness and systematic dissemination is a shared responsibility and critical to promote meaningful use among partners. Strengthening partnerships with national statistical offices, building stakeholders' data literacy and embedding gender data functions within regional coordination frameworks are essential to translate data into actionable policy, programmatic decisions and accountability.

2. The Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus offers a strategic framework for fostering coherence across sectors to address complex crises and promote sustainable peace and development. Its value lies in enabling integrated, context-responsive and sustainable solutions by bridging short-term humanitarian responses with long-term development goals and peacebuilding efforts. UN Women has the potential to add unique value to this space by placing gender equality and women's empowerment at the centre of nexus programming, leveraging the Entity's normative mandate, operational presence and coordination role. While a shared conceptual vision of the nexus model was not fully

developed across the UN Women Arab States region, several initiatives demonstrated its operationalization. These included the Women's Leadership, Empowerment, Access and Protection (LEAP) programme; efforts to link humanitarian interventions with durable development solutions in contexts such as Iraq and Palestine; and the engagement of local peace mediators trained by UN Women to deliver humanitarian assistance during crises, notably in Lebanon. UN Women's leadership in generating gender data; systematically engaging grassroots women-led organizations in decision-making; and supporting the development of clear gender accountability frameworks and guidelines within the UN system will be instrumental in advancing a gender-transformative Nexus agenda.

3. A holistic, inter-thematic, cross-portfolio approach to gender equality ensures that interventions address interconnected issues such as leadership, violence and access to justice. This integrated lens strengthens impact by recognizing the complex realities of women's lives and advancing transformative change across systems. The development of the Flagship Initiative Surging Women's Employment by 5% before 2030 illustrates the value of a cross-thematic and holistic approach. By integrating social norms change, economic empowerment and political participation within a flexible and responsive framework, the initiative addresses the interconnected nature of gender equality challenges. This model effectively balances strategic entry points, such as WEE, with a comprehensive rights-based agenda, offering a replicable model for future programming that demands agility, coherence and cross-sectoral collaboration.



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## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section provides overall conclusions and corresponding recommendations. The recommendations have been drafted following a consultative approach. Presentation of the preliminary findings and the way forward took place with senior management and regional leadership through a series of foresight workshops to inform the recommendations below. Each recommendation is tied to corresponding conclusions and includes actions for consideration by ROAS. The level of priority and responsibility for actions are indicated with each recommendation.

**Conclusion 1:** The future iteration of the Strategic Note would benefit from more explicitly reflecting the Arab region's subregional diversity, particularly the distinct contexts of countries affected by conflict.

The ROAS Strategic Note reflected a consultative and inclusive development process, ensuring alignment with both regional and corporate priorities. ROAS demonstrated notable agility and intentionality in scaling up impactful interventions and adapting to the region's evolving dynamics. Nonetheless, given the Arab region's pronounced diversity – spanning varied political, economic and social contexts – the regional strategy would have benefitted from a more explicit articulation of these contextual differences, particularly the distinct contexts of countries affected by conflict. While strategic engagement with the GCC countries extended beyond resource mobilization and underscored the ROAS' value addition, a limited shared understanding of this engagement persists among ROAS and Country Office personnel. Limited attention to the ERAW portfolio also constrained the Strategic Note's overall relevance. ROAS' progress in strengthening cross-portfolio linkages – particularly between WEE and social norms, WPPL and efforts to end violence against women – was effective. Moving forward, amid resource constraints and heightened expectations to demonstrate impact at scale, the strategy will need to further consolidate an integrated programme approach that deepens these cross-portfolio synergies. [\(Findings 1,2,4–8, Relevance, Coherence and Effectiveness\)](#)

### **Recommendation 1: Deepen strategic focus and cross-thematic coherence.**

Refine ROAS' strategic direction by ensuring that the Strategic Note adequately reflects the subregional contextual realities, particularly the distinct contexts of countries affected by conflict, guided by the new Strategic Plan; and by fostering cross-thematic collaboration and planning mechanisms to maximize impact.

RESPONSIBLE ENTITY: ROAS MANAGEMENT, REGIONAL STRATEGIC PLANNING UNIT

PRIORITY **HIGH**

#### **Suggested action points:**

1. Establish regional priorities across normative, coordination and operational domains that explicitly reflect the diverse subregional contexts, including protracted crises, the increasing frequency of sudden-onset conflicts and emerging climate-related challenges.
2. Articulate and communicate ROAS' unique value addition in the Humanitarian system building on the work undertaken in this area thus far and UN Women's membership in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC).
3. Finalize and disseminate the draft GCC strategy to clarify the overall vision and strategic direction for the subregion, ensuring improved alignment with the UAE-based Liaison Office.
4. Strengthen strategic coherence across thematic portfolios through more structured cross-portfolio collaboration, particularly linking WPPL and WPS, mainstreaming social norms programming and inter-connectedness between the three pillars of the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus.
5. The Strategic Note should consolidate its ERAW portfolio ensuring the portfolio is well-resourced to demonstrate tangible results.

**Conclusion 2: ROAS' comparative advantage lies in its regional convening strength and normative advocacy. However, its strategic partnership and coalition-building approaches require further consolidation to maximize impact.**

ROAS has demonstrated leadership in the normative space and contributed to policy reforms; however, persistent gaps between legal frameworks and their implementation continue to impede normative progress. ROAS has cultivated partnerships with a diverse range of actors, including the private sector, grassroots and women-led organizations, international financial institutions, youth networks and initiatives engaging men and boys. In doing so, ROAS has often served as a bridge between formal institutions and CSOs. Nevertheless, in the context of constrained civic space and increasing pushback against gender equality, there is a pressing need to consolidate strategic partnerships and coalition-building approaches. This includes deepening engagement with civil society and grassroots organizations to strengthen alliance-building and collective advocacy. Amid this challenging environment, partners continue to look to ROAS to leverage its coordination mandate to convene stakeholders, create spaces for dialogue and foster collective action. (Findings 2, 3,5–7, Coherence, Normative and Effectiveness)

**Recommendation 2: Consolidate strategic partnerships and coalition-building approaches.**

ROAS should consolidate its strategic partnership portfolio and deepen inclusive collaboration with CSOs, grassroots movements and women-led organizations, while simultaneously strengthening coordination with other UN entities at the regional level to catalyse collective action.

RESPONSIBLE ENTITY: ROAS MANAGEMENT, THEMATIC LEADS, REGIONAL STRATEGIC PLANNING UNIT

PRIORITY MEDIUM

**Suggested action points:**

- 1. Adopt a more structured and systematic approach to strategic partnerships, including with CSOs, youth-led groups and women-led organizations to strengthen alliance-building and collective advocacy. This should encompass strengthening of sub-national/national/regional linkages to advance gender-responsive and inclusive decision-making within coordination mechanisms and platforms.
- 2. Prioritize the provision of technical support to UNCTs and UN Women Country Offices to assist Member States in operationalizing key normative gender commitments. This includes promoting the systematic use of CEDAW as a mechanism for advancing legal harmonization and reinforcing accountability for gender parity obligations.
- 3. Leverage the Gender Equality Acceleration Plan to revitalize and strengthen UN system-wide collaboration to achieve gender equality.
- 4. Strengthen leadership in addressing pushback against gender equality by establishing dedicated convening spaces for dialogue, facilitating collective analysis and developing unified regional strategy and response mechanisms to support UN partners and other partners in navigating these challenges.



**Conclusion 3: ROAS demonstrated strategic intent to achieve impact at scale, but the depth and breadth of impact have varied across the portfolio.**

ROAS' initiatives demonstrate a clear strategic intent to achieve impact at scale; however, the depth and breadth of impact have varied across the portfolio. Investments in the evidence and data portfolio have begun to enable systematic tracking of programme reach and outcome-level results at both regional and country levels. Despite these advancements, work remains to institutionalize the use of data for decision-making and organizational learning. While ROAS has produced several knowledge products of substantive value, dissemination and utilization of these resources require further strengthening to optimize their influence on policy and practice. Over the Strategic Note period, efforts have been made to enhance results-based planning, monitoring and reporting systems; nonetheless, capacity constraints persist, limiting the full realization of these improvements. ROAS has effectively bridged corporate and country-level efforts, particularly during crises, and maintained strategic engagement in complex operating environments. However, staffing has expanded incrementally over the years in response to evolving needs, without a systematic assessment of alignment with current and forthcoming strategic objectives. Furthermore, regional thematic advisers have reportedly been stretched by demands related to regional programmes and resource mobilization, reducing their availability for technical support to Country Offices. [\(Findings 4–12 Effectiveness and Efficiency\)](#)

**Recommendation 3: Strengthen operational efficiency and effectiveness.**

To improve regional support functions, ROAS should reinforce systems in results-based management, knowledge management and conduct a functional analysis to ensure its structure is "fit for purpose."

RESPONSIBLE ENTITY: ROAS MANAGEMENT, DATA AND EVIDENCE TEAM, HR BUSINESS PARTNER AND OPERATIONS

PRIORITY **HIGH**

**Suggested action points:**

1. Conduct a functional review to ensure that the ROAS organizational structure is "fit for purpose" and fully aligned with the priorities of the new Strategic Note.
2. Strengthen the Knowledge Management function within ROAS by enhancing planning, budgeting and systematic tracking of knowledge product utilization. Invest in documenting lessons learned and institutionalizing mechanisms for peer-to-peer exchange across countries to promote cross-learning and evidence-based practice.
3. Address capacity gaps in results-based monitoring and reporting by institutionalizing regular training on results-based management and designating dedicated focal points for monitoring, reporting and evaluation across all regional thematic portfolios to strengthen their technical capacities.
4. Develop a regional strategy and road map for the Gender Data and Statistics Portfolio to consolidate gains and ensure strategic coherence and effective resource mobilization.
5. Ensure all programmes – particularly large-scale interventions, such as the Regional Flagship Initiative – set clear, time-bound targets and establish robust monitoring systems to guarantee that interventions effectively reach and benefit the intended populations.



**Conclusion 4: Disability inclusion showed progress but remained inconsistently integrated.**

ROAS adopted a gender-transformative approach that sought to advance legal reforms, promote women's leadership and catalyse shifts in social norms, including through strategic engagement with men and boys. Its support to women-led organizations served as a critical mechanism for bridging high-level policy initiatives with grassroots mobilization and action. However, while leave no one behind principles were embedded during the planning phase, their implementation and monitoring exhibited inconsistencies across the ROAS portfolio. There was limited shared understanding of intersectionality, which constrained efforts to address the multiple vulnerabilities experienced by marginalized groups. Although disability inclusion was identified as a priority – reflected in the use of tools such as EnAbility Audits – its integration across programming remained uneven. Structural barriers, fragmented data systems and the limited uptake of the UNCT Disability Inclusion Scorecard collectively hindered progress towards systemic change at the country team level. [\(Finding 13, Gender and Human Rights\)](#)

**Recommendation 4: Integrate disability inclusion and leave no one behind across all phases of programme management.**

ROAS should integrate disability inclusion and leave no one behind across all phases of programme management and clarify its intersectional approach.

RESPONSIBLE ENTITY: ROAS MANAGEMENT

PRIORITY 

MEDIUM

**Suggested action points:**

- 1. Embed disability inclusion substantively across the programme cycle, deliberately integrating it at all stages to align with UN Women's commitments to the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy.
- 2. Ensure a leave no one behind focus is consistently embedded beyond programme planning and across the programme cycle, systematically collecting data to demonstrate that leave no one behind commitments are being implemented effectively.
- 3. Build internal capacity and a shared understanding of intersectionality to support the integration of leave no one behind and disability inclusion. Strengthen the capacity of country-level focal points and institutionalize regular leave no one behind audits.



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# ANNEXES

ANNEXES ARE AVAILABLE  
IN VOLUME II OF THE  
REPORT.

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Produced by the Independent Evaluation Service (IES) of the UN Women Independent Evaluation, Audit and Investigation Services (IEAIS)

The UN Women Independent Evaluation Service is co-located with the Internal Audit and Investigation Services under the Independent Evaluation, Audit and Investigation Services (IEAIS). 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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# UN WOMEN IS THE UN ORGANIZATION 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 ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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