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EVALUATION REPORT

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE ARAB STATES STRATEGIC NOTE EVALUATION



BRIEF



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 principles¹ 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 GenTRACK², Track-it!³ and gender alerts, which informed humanitarian and development responses. ROAS also supported the increased visibility and 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

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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1

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.

2

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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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.”

4

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.



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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