

IN BRIEF

COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION AND AUDIT PAKISTAN

This report presents the main evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Country Portfolio Evaluation and Audit (CPE+A) of the UN Women Pakistan Country Office conducted between March and September 2021. The CPE+A was jointly led by the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service (IES) and Internal Audit Service (IAS). A Country Portfolio Evaluation (CPE) is a systematic assessment of the normative, coordination and operational aspects of UN Women’s contribution to development results relating to gender equality and women’s empowerment at the country level. A risk-based internal audit of a Country Office aims to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of governance arrangements, risk management practices and controls in planning and implementing strategic priorities, programme and project management, the organizational structure and control environment, and operational processes. The audit results are presented in a separate report to ensure that the results are adequately covered. At the same time, IEAS ensured the reports are complementary and aligned.

CPE+A purpose

The purpose of the CPE+A was to provide an independent and systematic assessment of the contributions made by UN Women to development results with respect to gender equality at the country level to feed into learning on what strategies work well and what needs strengthening. A secondary purpose was to identify UN Women’s comparative advantages in Pakistan and support decision-making for the Country Office strategy moving forward.

The evaluation also aimed to provide useful information to the evaluation of the Pakistan One United Nations Programme III (OP III) and insight on the strategic direction for UN Women Pakistan within the context of the repositioning of the United Nations development system, as adopted by General Assembly [resolution 72/279](#) on 31 May 2018. Given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this evaluation has taken steps to capture how UN Women is responding to the crisis and has analysed how UN Women can best support efforts in the country moving forward.

Pakistan country context



Pakistan is now the world’s **fifth most populous country** and the second among South Asian countries. Pakistan ranks **154 out of 189** countries in the **Human Development Index**



It ranks **151 out of 153** on the **Global Gender Gap Index Report 2020** and is placed at 150 in economic participation, 143 in educational attainment, 149 in health and survival and 93 in political empowerment



According to the 2017–2018 Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey, approximately **29 per cent of women** experienced **physical or sexual violence**.



The pandemic has further **compounded pre-existing gender inequalities**. the socioeconomic impacts can be seen through loss of income/ livelihoods and limited access to protection services and health care.

Intended users of the CPE+A

The primary intended users of this CPE+A are Country Office personnel and the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and relevant headquarters management and units.

The secondary intended users are the Government of Pakistan; development partners, such as United Nations agencies and bilateral/multilateral agencies; and civil society.

The United Nations Resident Coordinator/Resident Coordinator's Office in Pakistan would also benefit from understanding the value added and contribution of UN Women to achieving OP III outcomes, as part of the evaluation of OP III and planning for the new United Nations Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDF) 2023–2027 in Pakistan.

Intended uses of the CPE+A



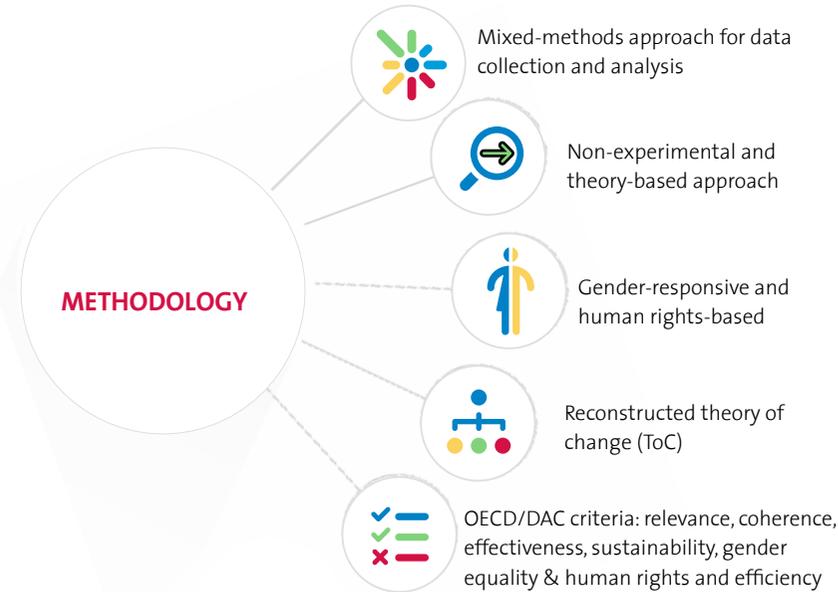
Learning and improved decision-making to **support the effectiveness** of the Country Office's work



Accountability for UN Women's interventions in terms of providing technical support to the Government of Pakistan and other activities related to gender equality and women's empowerment



Lessons learned and good practices for national, regional and other stakeholders working on gender equality and women's empowerment



77 stakeholders interviewed

49 Females
28 Males

2 focus group discussions and 2 case studies on capacity-building and sub-office architecture

+100 documents reviewed

Analysis of more than 100 documents

Evaluation objectives

Assess **effectiveness and organizational efficiency** in progressing towards the achievement of results in gender equality and the empowerment of women

Assess the **relevance and coherence** of the UN Women programme vis-a-vis the United Nations system, the added value of UN Women, and the contributions of UN Women to United Nations system and OP III outcomes

Analyse how a **human rights approach and gender equality principles** are integrated in the design and implementation of UN Women's work in Pakistan and contribute to the sustainability of efforts

Provide **actionable recommendations** to support UN Women's strategic positioning moving forward

Internal audit objectives

Assess the effectiveness of the Pakistan Country Office's **governance arrangements, risk management and control processes** relating to the following areas

Planning and implementation of strategic priorities, including processes related to advocacy and communications, coordination, work planning and resource mobilization, field programme implementation and monitoring, and project management

Governance and risk management in relation to the Country Office structure and resources, roles, responsibilities, authority, risk-focused decision-making, control environment, and knowledge management from prior oversight reports

Operational processes related to implementing partners, procurement, human resources and travel

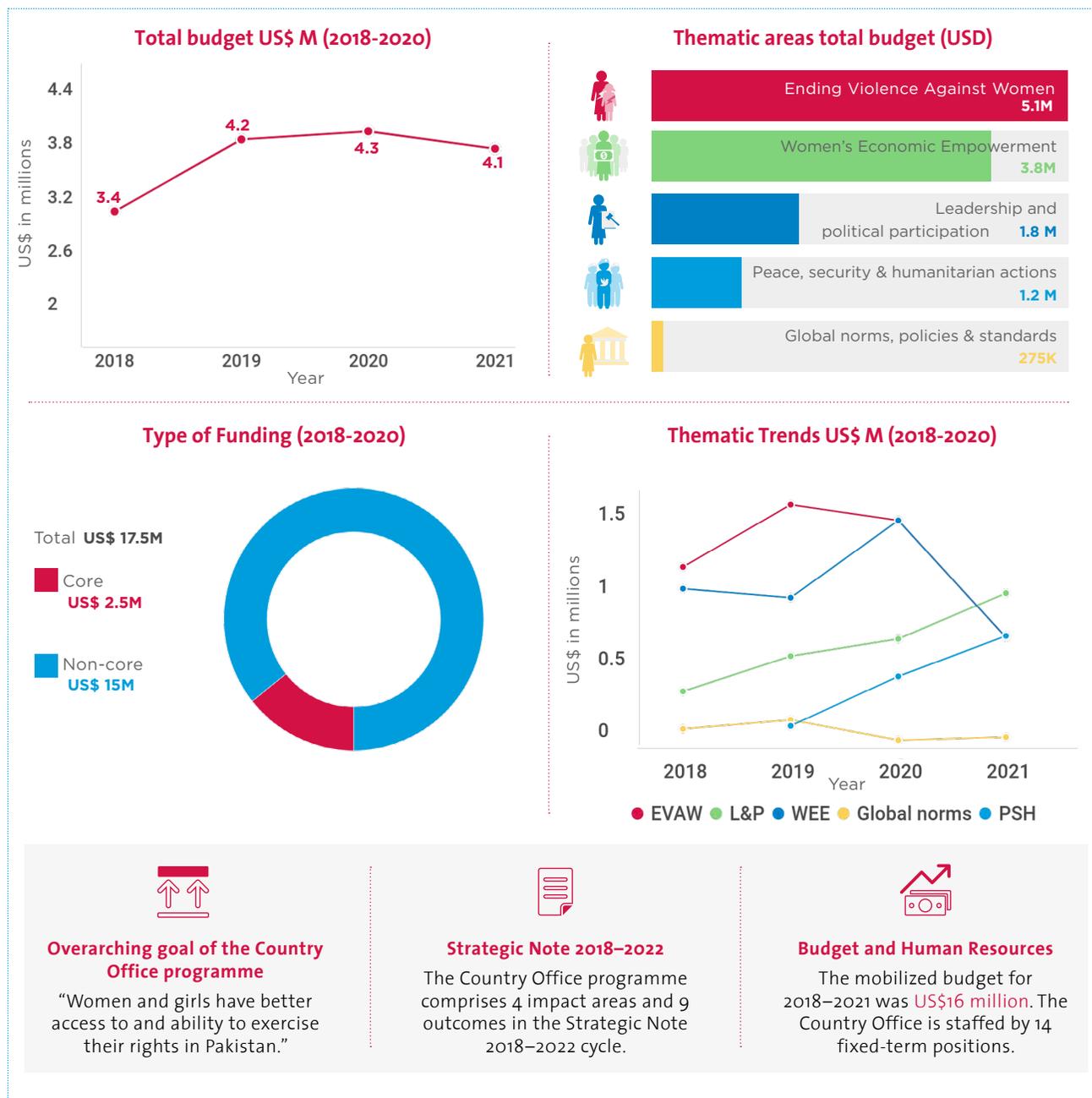
Background on UN Women in Pakistan

Gender inequality is of significant concern in Pakistan. It ranks 151 out of 153 on the Global Gender Gap Index Report 2020 and is placed at 150 in economic participation, 143 in educational attainment, 149 in health and survival and 93 in political empowerment.* Despite the Government of Pakistan’s stated policy and ongoing endeavours towards advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment in the country, the pace of progress remains uneven with constant challenges. Gender-based discrimination, harassment and violence occur at high rates. The global COVID-19 pandemic has further compounded pre-existing gender inequalities.**

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) preceded UN Women with an office in Pakistan since 2007. The Strategic Note is the main planning tool for advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment through UN Women’s support to normative, coordination and operational work and is designed to align with UN Women’s Global Strategic Plan, in addition to United Nations country-level outcomes and national priorities for development, gender equality and women’s empowerment. The Country Office Strategic Note 2018–2022 comprises four impact areas and nine outcomes with a mobilized budget of US\$16 million for 2018–2021. The Country Office work is focused in two areas, each managed by one portfolio manager: (1) Ending Violence against Women and (2) gender-responsive Women’s Economic Empowerment. Ending Violence Against Women has been the thematic and financial focus of the office, with US\$5.1 million, or 43.3 per cent of the total budget (Development Results Framework (DRF)) in the period 2018–2021, allocated to the implementation of several programmes and projects. Women’s Economic Empowerment has been the other key focus area of UN Women in Pakistan, with US\$3.4 million, or 28.9 per cent the total budget (DRF) in the period 2018–2021, allocated to these programmes.

* World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Index Report 2021. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf

** Pakistan Brief: United Nations Response to COVID-19 in Pakistan. 13 July 2020. Accessed online [here](#).



CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Pakistan country context for gender equality and women's empowerment is challenging, with deep-rooted patriarchal norms and high gender inequality and discrimination against women. As a small agency in Pakistan, and with only 1.1 per cent of the US\$461 million in expenditure of the United Nations system in 2020 allocated towards Outcome 8 (Gender, Equality and Dignity) of the One UN Programme, UN Women has huge scope for growth. The Country Office brings value through its strong technical expertise on gender and the production of research and evidence for decision-making and focus on the most marginalized voices. The Country Office worked with a diverse range of local and international partners, including United Nations partners, donors, the Government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society organizations (CSOs), and was active in engaging groups of women from ethnic minority communities, women with disabilities, women engaged in the informal sector, women in rural areas, home-based workers and transgender communities.

There is an immense need to change negative social norms and harmful practices, and UN Women's voice must continue to grow stronger in a crowded development space by leveraging partnerships that can amplify the collective message of gender equality and women's empowerment. The Country Office has demonstrated its ability to adapt and respond in times of crisis such as the global COVID-19 pandemic. Partners are looking to UN Women in Pakistan to provide strategic direction for gender equality and women's empowerment based on research and evidence that can contribute to their own programming efforts that can be taken to scale. The Country Office needs to clarify its niche in Pakistan and identify where it can maximize its influence and scale up efforts in gender equality and women's empowerment. The ability of the Country Office to be responsive and flexible in its approach is essential as it solidifies the trust and confidence of its partners.

Relevance and coherence

CONCLUSION 1

Overall, there is room for increased visibility and understanding among stakeholders of UN Women's niche within the gender equality and empowerment of women space.

The Country Office is emerging from a period of internal challenges related to management change and gaps in funding with a renewed sense of purpose and drive. This is an opportune moment for the Country Office to rethink its strategic priorities and sub-thematic focus to ensure relevance and coherence both internally and externally with the United Nations system and continue delivering relevant support during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Partners across stakeholder types identified the Country Office focus on gender equality and women's empowerment through integrated normative and policy support and research and evidence generation as an area of added value, noting that gender often gets sidelined in Pakistan, even by other United Nations agencies.

RECOMMENDATION 1



Based on consultations with key stakeholders, **continue refining the Country Office vision document** by aligning it with the UN Women Strategic Plan, and more **clearly identifying the niche of the Country Office** and communicating this to partners. Reduce the number of impact areas in the Strategic Note by mainstreaming key areas while maintaining a focus on strategic areas that are aligned with needs and opportunities to influence and scale up efforts in gender equality and women's empowerment in Pakistan, primarily through the United Nations system.

CONCLUSION 2

UN Women's success depends on its ability to influence the rest of the United Nations system to prioritize gender equality and women's empowerment within their own operations and programmatic work.

The Country Office has demonstrated a long-standing commitment to joint programmes and programming efforts in line with the One United Nations concept and United Nations reform principles. The lack of a UNCT-System-Wide Action Plan (SWAP) Gender Equality Scorecard, coupled with the evaluation team's assessment that the UNSDF indicators meet only the minimum requirements when it comes to measuring changes in gender equality, makes it evident that there is room to strengthen overall gender mainstreaming in the UNSDF. The newly established consolidated UNCT Working Group on Gender Equality has potential to move the coordination efforts in the right direction, i.e. beyond activities. However, an overall gender strategy, including roles and responsibilities with respect to coordination, should be clarified.

RECOMMENDATION 2



In close coordination with the Resident Coordinator's Office, **formalize and implement a UN Women coordination strategy**, aligning it with UNSDF, UNCT-SWAP and embedding it within its Strategic Note. Use UN Women's leadership role in the Gender Theme Group to coordinate efforts in potentially overlapping interventions and improve the platform for gender issues.

Effectiveness and sustainability

CONCLUSION 3

The Country Office influenced the drafting and adoption of key policies, strategies and frameworks aimed at advancing the rights of women.

The Country Office supported the national and provincial commissions on the status of women in monitoring compliance with international commitments under CEDAW and contributed to the UNCT's periodic confidential CEDAW report. The Country Office supported the Government in the preparation of the Beijing+25 review and in the conduct of the Voluntary National Review in 2019 and contributed to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights reporting in 2020. A combination of strategies, including evidence-generation, leveraging partnerships and relationships with key decision-makers and influencers, and providing technical support to drafting legislation, led to success in supporting the translation of international norms into domestic policy action. One of the most effective strategies of the Country Office has been its advocacy and communications campaigns. In terms of reach, and in combination with other efforts, contributions to policy-level change are notable.

Additionally, the CPE identified several strategies that contributed to sustainability including: 1) providing technical support to the establishment of frameworks and strategies;

2) embedding technical expertise within partner institutions; 3) generating and using research and evidence to advocate for institutionalization; and 4) establishing mechanisms to facilitate data collection and reporting on gender equality and women's empowerment. The CPE found more evidence of action and success with government partners than with civil society. There are examples of where the Country Office was able to influence the allocation of budget and the establishment of mechanisms to facilitate sustainability. However, follow-up and costing were not always achieved, which limited the potential for sustainability.

As the Country Office recognizes, implementation of policies and frameworks requires further attention. Greater impact could have been achieved and sustainability ensured through an overarching capacity-building approach linking its efforts across partners, thematic areas and projects through a long-term lens.

RECOMMENDATION 3



The Country Office should **develop a holistic capacity-building approach** or strategy and strategic partnership management that cuts across thematic areas and partners and becomes the Country Office signature service.

Human rights and gender equality

CONCLUSION 4

Achieving gender equality requires a whole-of-society approach that at its roots tackles the harmful social norms that sustain discrimination and disempowerment.

The Country Office has integrated the principle of leaving no one behind by engaging women with disabilities and transgender groups as well as women in the most marginalized areas of Pakistan who are without civil registration, providing opportunities for access to services and contributing to their empowerment. However, there is limited information about the results of these efforts.

The Country Office must dedicate itself to capacitating its partners to effectively apply these principles in their work and to ensure contextually relevant and sensitive approaches for each group. Likewise, partners must be supported to monitor, evaluate and learn from these efforts.

RECOMMENDATION 4



Define the social norms the Country Office will target and, in collaboration with civil society, establish a long-term strategy for building the women's movement, supporting grass-roots organizations and catalysing civil society to ensure that those representing the most marginalized voices are at the forefront of discussions to take forward gender equality and women's empowerment advocacy around these social norms.

Governance and organizational efficiency

CONCLUSION 5

Attention to Country Office governance has been initiated with a view to reducing silos and ensuring adequate capacity across thematic priorities and in the field, which may result in gaining efficiencies in delivery of results.

The Country Office has had several challenges, including the loss of major funding, issues around inclusive planning and transparency, and a period without permanent senior leadership. These events affected the Country Office's positioning and funding stability, contributing to inter-personal tensions due to uncertainties in personnel contracting and business continuity and affected the overall morale of personnel. The Country Office has also relied significantly on consultants, which resulted in a high turn-over and lack of institutional memory. While steps have been taken towards enhancing communications across teams and encouraging an inclusive planning process, structural issues need to be addressed to support the sustainability of these efforts.

RECOMMENDATION 5



Review and revise the existing staffing structure to ensure that the Country Office has adequate capacity and clear accountability to deliver its strategic priorities within its current thematic and geographical structure, with priority given in the short term to the delivery of remaining and newly funded projects and, in parallel, invest in a culture of care by adopting the transformative leadership capacity building approach **and institutionalizing mechanisms to support cross-team collaboration.**

CONCLUSION 6

The Country Office programme management frameworks were focused on activity level efforts and did not adequately capture outcome-level change, and limited attention to the monitoring and evaluation function has impacted the ability of the office to report confidently on results and limited the overall capability to ensure good use of resources to deliver results.

For example, while the social media and communications efforts related to child marriage have had wide reach, without an office-wide communications strategy that is aligned with the programmatic interventions of the Country Office, the potential to understand the results and their transformational potential is limited. Even for long-term projects such as the home-based workers programme, the cohort of beneficiaries was not engaged or tracked over the long term. New cohorts were engaged, which increased the total number reached, but there was no indication of the overall impact on home-based workers.

RECOMMENDATION 6



The Country Office, with support from the Regional Office, should **strengthen its overall results-based management**, including planning, monitoring, data collection, validation and reporting process and establish a holistic approach to strengthening the capacity of both UN Women personnel and its implementing partners in these areas.

CONCLUSION 7

The resource fluctuations and resource gaps experienced by the Country Office during the first half of the Strategic Note period indicate that a more proactive approach to managing relationships with donors and other partners and enhanced planning for resource mobilization are necessary.

The rationale for maintaining Sub-Offices is strong, however, diversification of resources to support sub-office operation should also be prioritized with a view to ensuring business continuity. Proactive thought leadership and strategic visioning for the office ahead of the development of the new Strategic Note should be continued.]

Partners and UN Women personnel also pointed towards UN Women's global mandate to work with civil society as an added value but saw room for strengthening this aspect in Pakistan. Stakeholders saw huge potential for UN Women to step in and leverage the already strong capacity of civil society in Pakistan.

RECOMMENDATION 7



Finalize and implement the resource mobilization strategy of the Country Office with realistic targets as a part of its advocacy vision and strategy (see Recommendation 1). Regularly monitor the strategy for effectiveness, revise if necessary and address any related implications.