

Synthesis Review on Advancing Gender Equality in the United Nations Secretariat

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INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

Function *“The Office shall evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the programmes and legislative mandates of the Organization. It shall conduct programme evaluations with the purpose of establishing analytical and critical evaluations of the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, examining whether changes therein require review of the methods of delivery, the continued relevance of administrative procedures and whether the activities correspond to the mandates as they may be reflected in the approved budgets and the medium-term plan of the Organization;”* ([General Assembly Resolution 48/218 B](#)).

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Summary

Advancing gender equality is a top priority for the United Nations. As mandated by several General Assembly resolutions and emphasized by various Secretary General reports, the Organization has committed to implement gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes to achieve gender equality goals.

This synthesis review provides an overarching summary of gender mainstreaming practices and contributions to gender equality undertaken by United Nations Secretariat entities. It was developed as part of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) mandate to enable adaptation and transfer of evaluation information on topics of strategic importance to the Organization. Its main objective is to facilitate a learning process by sharing trends and insights around gender issues that can be helpful to senior leaders and programme managers.

A total of 157 evaluation reports published by Secretariat entities between December 2019 and December 2021 were analyzed for this synthesis review. The review was guided by two key questions:

- 1). What are the good practices and lessons learned in mainstreaming gender at the programme and project level? (addressed by 147 reports)
- 2). How have Secretariat entities contributed to gender equality and women's empowerment? (addressed by 81 reports)

Regarding gender mainstreaming, the review found that more than half of the evaluations showed that Secretariat entities had taken steps to incorporate gender equality issues at the planning stage of their projects and this was enabled by the entities' institutional gender policies and tools. However, less than half of the evaluations found that gender had been sufficiently mainstreamed into specific programmes and project activities, with a few examples showcasing projects that were gender-responsive and gender-transformative. Also, almost half of the reports identified effective mainstreaming practices such as increasing gender representations in project participating and engaging relevant local stakeholders. Nonetheless, capacity and resource constraints were major factors impeding the progress of gender mainstreaming in the Secretariat programmes and projects.

The review also found that, overall, there was limited evaluative evidence on outcomes achieved on gender equality and women's empowerment, primarily due to the lack of mechanisms to monitor, report and assess gender-related results and outcomes.

Regarding Secretariat contributions to gender goals, just over half of the evaluations found that Secretariat entities had contributed to gender equality and women's empowerment through capacity building, partnerships and knowledge sharing, advocacy and normative support actions.

Programme managers should consider the following six actions to strengthen their work in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment:

1. Mainstream gender equality more systematically across all areas of work of the Secretariat
2. Explicitly integrate gender into project design, including, where appropriate, developing concrete gender-targeted and gender-related activities and outputs
3. Increase financial and human resources devoted to gender equality and explore opportunities for mobilizing resources through partnerships
4. Engage relevant stakeholders in gender-targeted and gender-integrated activities

5. More rigorously assess and report results and outcomes on gender
6. Further harness the added value of the normative and advocacy work of the United Nations

I. Introduction

Background

1. Advancing the gender equality agenda is a top priority for the United Nations (UN). As mandated by the General Assembly in [A/RES/50/203](#), the Organization has committed to implementing gender mainstreaming in all its policies and programmes to achieve gender equality goals. More recent Secretary-General reports and General Assembly resolutions¹ have continued to call for enhancing efforts to address gender inequality and accelerate gender mainstreaming across the Organization's work.
2. The United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) [Norms and Standards for Evaluation](#) further requires the explicit inclusion of gender equality in UN evaluations. In alignment with the UNEG guideline on *Integrating human rights and gender equality in evaluation (2014)*, many Secretariat entities have incorporated gender considerations in their evaluation scope.
3. This report has been drafted as part of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) mandate to enable 'adaptation and transfer of evaluation information' in the Secretariat on topics of strategic importance to the UN.² It provides a better understanding of progress on gender mainstreaming and the Organization's contribution to gender equality by synthesizing evaluative evidence and noting areas for improvement on gender issues.³ It is meant to facilitate a learning process by sharing emerging trends and key insights that can be helpful for senior leaders and programme managers.

Objective

4. The objective of this synthesis report is to provide an overarching summary of key results and recommendations from 157 Secretariat evaluations from December 2019 to December 2021 on: 1) gender mainstreaming and 2) contribution to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Approach

5. The following definitions were used for the purpose of the synthesis review:
 - **Gender equality** – refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys.⁴
 - **Women's empowerment** – concerns their gaining power and control over their own lives,⁵ which involves the expansion of choice and the strengthening of voice through the transformation of power relations.
 - **Gender mainstreaming** – as defined in the [ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions, 1997/2](#), is '...the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making

¹ [E/2020/50](#); [E/2021/52](#); [A/RES/74/128](#); [A/RES/76/142](#).

² Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (PPBME).

³ Including internal evaluations conducted by Secretariat entities themselves and OIOS evaluations.

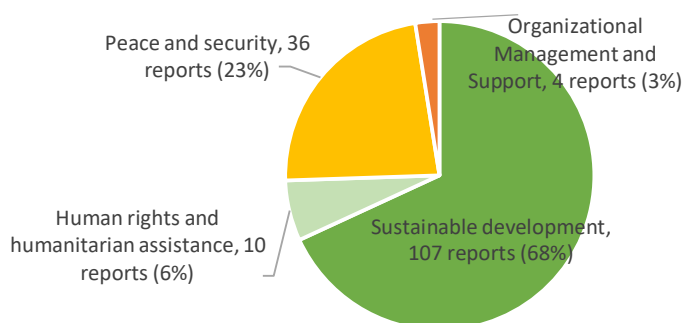
⁴ [UN Women Gender Equality Glossary](#). While gender equality emphasizes equal rights for both women and men, the Secretariat evaluation reports that were analysed focused more extensively on women rights, as women are generally excluded and disadvantaged in decision-making and access to economic and social resources.

⁵ [UN Women Gender Equality Glossary](#).

women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated.’

6. The synthesis was guided by the following two over-arching questions:
 - What are the good practices and lessons learned in mainstreaming gender at the programme level and project level?
 - How have Secretariat entities contributed to gender equality and women’s empowerment?
7. To answer these questions, the synthesis utilized an analytical approach comprised of the following five steps:
 - 1) **Identify relevant evaluations conducted by OIOS and other Secretariat entities.** A total of 160 evaluations published between December 2019 and December 2021 were originally identified. All of the evaluations passed a quality review of OIOS-IED. After a screening process, 157 evaluations were considered relevant⁶ and included in the synthesis.⁷
 - 2) **Create a database of the 157 evaluations.** A database was created with each of the 157 evaluations input as the unit of analysis. The 157 evaluations covered four thematic areas of work of the Secretariat (as shown in Figure 1) and 21 Secretariat entities, including OIOS (as shown in Figure 2). They included thematic evaluations, programme, and project evaluations at the country, regional and global levels and spanned all five geographic regions. Among the 157 evaluations, only 7 specifically assessed gender as the main evaluation objective.

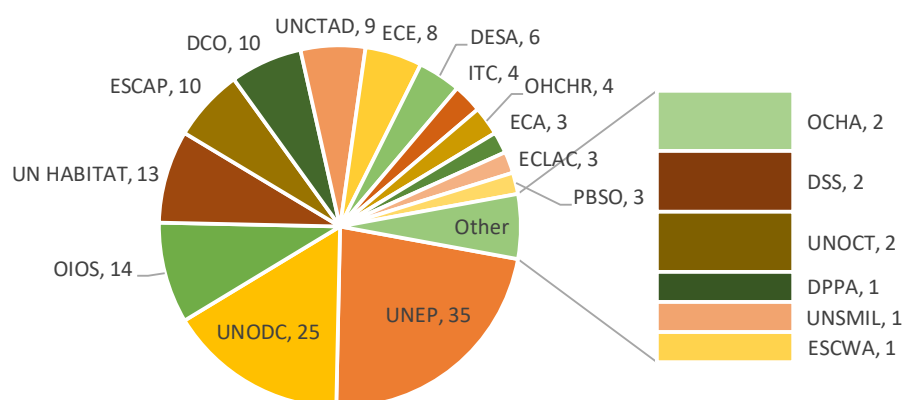
Figure 1: Number and percentage of Secretariat evaluations by thematic area



⁶ Three evaluations with no relevant content on gender were excluded in this review.

⁷ The 157 evaluation reports assessed in this synthesis are available on the [OIOS Evaluation Knowledge Management Platform](#).

Figure 2: Number of Secretariat evaluations per entity



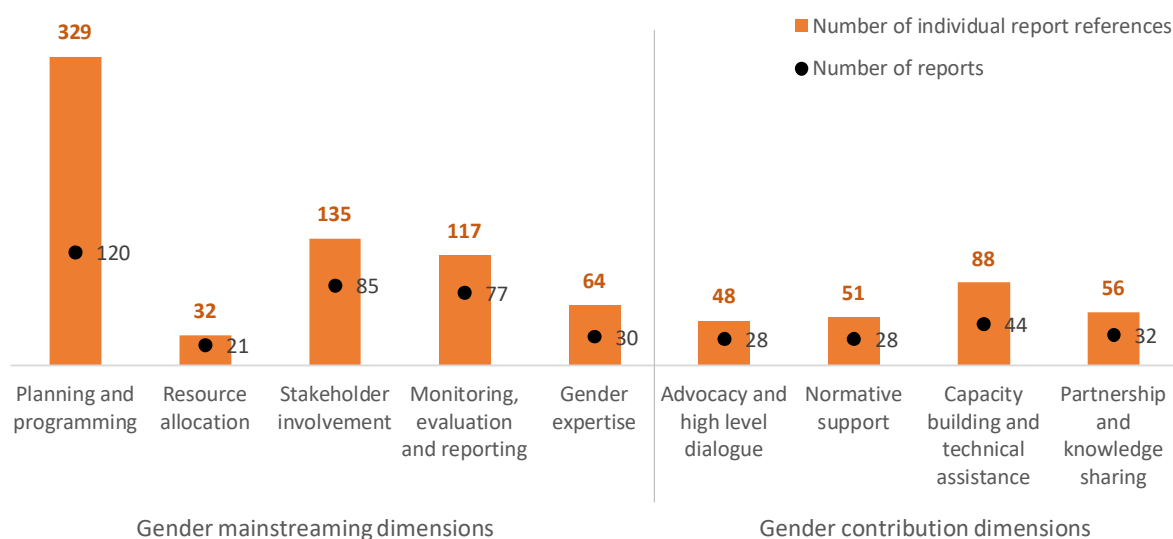
- 3) **Develop a list of key dimensions to guide the review of evaluations.** In alignment to the two synthesis questions, key dimensions on ‘gender mainstreaming’ and ‘contribution to gender equality’ were developed and used to conduct the review (as shown in Table 1). These dimensions were initially adapted from the [UN Women Gender Mainstreaming In Development Programming Guidance \(2014\)](#) and further refined and finalized during the initial phase of the synthesis review.

Table 1: Key dimensions for gender mainstreaming and contribution to gender equality and women’s empowerment

Theme	Key dimensions
Gender mainstreaming	Planning and programming
	Resource allocation
	Stakeholder involvement
	Monitoring, evaluation and reporting
	Gender expertise
Contribution to gender equality and women’s empowerment	Advocacy and high-level dialogue
	Normative support
	Capacity building and technical assistance
	Partnership and knowledge sharing

- 4) **Review evaluations and code relevant content.** A systematic review extracting relevant qualitative data was undertaken by coding evaluation findings and recommendations from the 157 evaluations using Nvivo software. The evidence for gender mainstreaming (147 reports in total) was greater than the evidence for gender contribution (81 reports in total). Figure 3 below shows the number of reports and individual report references coded for each dimension. Annex 2 provides additional information on coding results.

Figure 3: Number of reports and individual report references coded per dimension



- 5) **Summarize overarching findings and key take-aways.** The coding extracts were summarized and aggregated to develop the synthesis findings and key take-aways presented in Sections II and III of this report below.

Limitations

8. The synthesis review encountered two main methodological limitations. First, the synthesis is limited to the evaluations conducted by 21 Secretariat entities, including OIOS, and therefore does not cover the entire Organization. Second, given the different approaches used by different entities in assessing gender mainstreaming and contribution to gender goals, some interpretation was needed to code and analyse findings.

II. Synthesis Results

Gender Mainstreaming

9. Of the 157 reports reviewed for this synthesis, 147 referenced one or more dimensions of gender mainstreaming. Results A, B, C and D presented below are based on the review of these 147 reports.
- A. Many Secretariat entities have taken steps to incorporate gender issues at the programme and/or project planning stage

Gender policies, gender markers and other institutional strategies have enabled gender to be addressed during planning

10. Most evaluation reports (88 of the 147 reports that addressed gender mainstreaming) identified some mainstreaming practices during the planning stage as a result of development and implementation of gender policies and strategies. Of these, 30 indicated that gender criteria were included as part of the project approval process and seven further reported that

gender focal points or advisors were often tasked with reviewing the inclusion of gender considerations in concept notes or other project documents, such as project proposals and needs assessments. Some evaluations (14) noted the development of entity-level gender mainstreaming guidelines for programme managers, as well as specific guidance notes and tools for mainstreaming at the programme or project design stage. Evaluations from the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), and UN Environment Programme (UNEP) also found that project documents frequently used their internal standards as a reference point to determine the required proportion of female participants during implementation.

11. Five evaluation reports from UNEP, UN-Habitat, Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Development Coordination Office (DCO) and Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) demonstrated the effective use of a 'gender marker'⁸ in supporting project planning and budgeting. As an integral part of the project approval process, the gender marker has provided a score for the extent of its 'gender focus' and at times prompted the project to seek opportunities for further mainstreaming gender considerations.
12. There were notable examples where gender was thoroughly considered during the process of planning. Eight evaluations of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) and an OIOS Evaluation on the Resident Coordinator System found that gender was systematically integrated into country framework planning. The governance architecture in the UN Country Team (UNCT), which often included a 'Gender Theme Group', played a key role in mainstreaming gender equality as a cross-cutting issue in different programmatic areas, such as social cohesion, rule of law and economic growth. An evaluation from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) also found that gender mainstreaming had been increasingly integrated in the planning of humanitarian response, with dedicated efforts on gender analysis and consultation with women and girls.
13. Evaluation findings from 42 reports further identified that gender had been referenced in relation to the attainment of development, peace and security objectives, albeit not always with sufficient depth. 11 of the 42 reports found that such recognition tended to be limited to including standard text on 'gender equality norms' or referring to institutional gender guidelines in project documents. For example, in one UNODC evaluation, the project assessed made limited reference to gender equality in its project documents, despite a number of entity-level guidelines, tools and checklists being available on gender mainstreaming. Additionally, two evaluations – from UNEP and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) – noted that projects with insufficient attention on gender were still approved as long as a generic reference to gender was included. Four other evaluations also pointed out that the project review by gender focal points did not always improve the quality of gender considerations in project planning, due to the great amount of review requests and the often-limited capacity and expertise of focal points. In 13 evaluations that found that gender was not mainstreamed as a result of programme managers and stakeholders considering gender as not being relevant, the evaluations also identified missed opportunities where a gender lens or strong gender considerations could have been applied during the design stage.

⁸ 'Gender marker' is a tracking and reporting tool to collect information on expenditures related to gender equality and record activities aimed at promoting gender equality objectives.

B. Fewer entities had sufficiently mainstreamed gender into specific programme and/or project activities

Programmes and/or projects often lacked explicit incorporation of gender in their results frameworks and robust gender analysis

14. A majority of evaluations (67 of 147 reports that addressed gender mainstreaming) indicated that gender mainstreaming at the project level was not fully satisfactory. Many of these evaluations (28 reports) found that gender equality was only referenced in the background of project documents but not reflected in specific project activities. Some identified missed opportunities to develop concrete activities to address the specific needs and challenges of women and men, while others determined that the gender perspective was not integrated consistently in different project outputs, especially in the case of normative work. For example, three evaluations of the Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), ESCAP and UNEP identified instances where projects could have incorporated gender-related elements into policy recommendations and case study reports. A few evaluations from UNODC and UNEP also found that projects often had a clear intent to incorporate gender at the planning stage, but insufficient funding to implement gender-responsive activities.
15. Other evaluations (24 of the 67 reports) identified the lack of gender issues in programme and project results frameworks as a major reason for not mainstreaming gender into concrete activities. Some indicated that there were no gender-related targets nor indicators in the results frameworks, which contributed to the absence of gender-focused activities or gender-mainstreamed outputs, while others found that when gender targets and indicators were incorporated, they often focused more on process rather than outcomes or results. For instance, three evaluations of UNEP, ESCAP and UNODC specifically pointed out that gender targets and indicators were limited to participation of men and women during workshops and training and were not linked to gender-specific results of the training.
16. The absence of robust gender analysis, as indicated in 23 reports, was further noted as another factor limiting gender mainstreaming in programme and project activities. The evaluations noted that undertaking a gender analysis was an essential step to understanding 'what' and 'how' gender issues could be addressed. An evaluation from UNODC specifically mentioned that the lack of knowledge and analysis on gender issues in the context of a specific project prevented programme managers from developing targeted operational interventions. Another two evaluations from the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and UNODC emphasized that gender activities could not be developed without a corresponding gender analysis. Some evaluations also identified that gender representation was not considered in the stakeholder analysis, which led to insufficient focus and targeting of women or men in project activities.
17. A few evaluations (6 of the 67 reports) observed a gap between the global and country levels with regard to gender mainstreaming. For example, an UNCTAD evaluation indicated that while gender was considered in the identification of programme priority issues at the global level, it was missing in country-level studies and analyses. An UN-Habitat evaluation noted that strategic-level gender dialogue and activities were relatively 'easier' to implement, while gender-focused activities at the local level required more resources to take account of specific local contexts.

Some evaluations provided examples of how projects could be gender-responsive and gender-transformative.⁹

18. A few evaluations (nine reports) highlighted notable examples of projects where gender was mainstreamed effectively to be gender-responsive – addressing the specific needs and concerns of women and men – as well as gender-transformative – tackling the root causes of gender inequality. As one example, an OHCHR evaluation indicated that one project went beyond encouraging women’s participation in project activities during implementation to also addressing inclusion issues of women, as well as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) individuals, within their own communities and organizations. Another International Trade Centre (ITC) evaluation assessed a project to be gender transformative by addressing the root causes of women’s limited access to business; this project continuously updated its related gender analysis and used the information to inform targeting of beneficiaries and capacity building activities on a rolling basis. However, the same evaluation also noted that this transformative approach was not present in similar projects implemented by ITC and recommended that the good practice be applied to other projects.
19. Six evaluations emphasized that mainstreaming gender should go beyond addressing women-specific issues, and should also be responsive to men, boys, girls and LGBTI persons. A few evaluations specifically pointed out concerns that a women-only approach might have negative spill-over effects, such as causing resistance from men and further contributing to women’s vulnerability.
20. Another five evaluations highlighted the importance of applying an integrated approach for understanding and addressing the needs and challenges of different gender groups. These evaluations recommended programme managers to:
 - recognize the complexity and intersectionality of issues affecting women as well as other marginalized and vulnerable groups, such as indigenous people, youth and persons with disabilities;
 - consider gender issues from a socio-economic perspective with linkages to other Sustainable Development Goals; and
 - enhance the alignment of approaches in addressing gender and other cross-cutting issues.

C. Increasing gender representation in project participation was an effective mainstreaming practice

There were deliberate efforts to promote greater participation of women in projects, although external factors limited the effectiveness of these efforts

21. Many evaluations (64 of the 147 reports that addressed gender mainstreaming) mentioned deliberate efforts to enhance the inclusion of female participants in project activities. These proactive measures included:

⁹ ‘Gender-responsive’ means addressing and responding to the different needs, aspiration, capacities and contributions of women and men. ‘Gender-transformative’ means challenging existing and biased/discriminatory policies, practices and programmes and affecting change for the betterment of life for all. [UNESCO, 2022, Glossary: Understanding concepts around gender equality and inclusion in education.](#)

- Organizing targeted awareness raising and outreach activities. For instance, a project of UN-Habitat organized a forum and a public awareness raising campaign in the targeted communities, which successfully engaged more women and girls.
 - Emphasizing gender equality principles in messages to stakeholders, including guidelines for a gender balanced selection of participants. As examples, some projects of UNEP, UNODC and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) required at least fifty per cent of female representation in their ‘calls for participants’ and consistently emphasized gender balance in different activities from the start.
 - Prioritizing women during the selection of project beneficiaries or stakeholders. For example, in some Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) projects, when multiple participants were nominated, female candidates would be preferred for selection.
22. Despite these greater efforts to achieve gender balance in project participation, some evaluations (27 reports) also noted that gaps in the ratio of female to male participants existed due to external factors, such as male dominance in certain occupations, groups and communities, and gender-related cultural norms and economic dynamics. These factors were outside the control of implementing entities, and often posed obstacles to ensuring adequate gender representation, especially when projects did not have full authority to select participants or had insufficient female candidates to select from.
23. Nonetheless, three evaluations noted that – even without reaching equal or desired representation of women – projects could still create positive dynamics and changes in gender roles. An evaluation from the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) highlighted that a mild increase in women’s participation in high-level political dialogues was already a ‘significant’ change in a male-dominated culture. Similarly, an evaluation from the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) noted that women participants, despite being in the minority, played a proactive and leading role in events, such as presenting and leading the discussion in a Voluntary National Reviews workshop.
24. A few evaluations (seven reports) further highlighted the importance of removing barriers to women’s participation, and the need for greater cultural sensitivity during the engagement process. These reports made the following recommendations to facilitate women’s engagement when implementing activities:
- ensuring a safe environment for women’s participation;
 - addressing cultural preferences and concerns of both women and men during the implementation of activities; and
 - when deemed culturally appropriate, having separate activities for women and men with a facilitator/moderator of the same sex.

Engaging relevant local stakeholders, although identified less frequently, was an additional effective gender mainstreaming practice

25. A few evaluations (13 reports) identified deliberate efforts to reach out to and engage relevant local stakeholders that supported gender equality and women’s rights, including the ministries of women affairs, women’s business associations, civil society organizations (CSO) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as an effective mainstreaming practice. These evaluations highlighted the local influence of these stakeholders in terms of knowledge dissemination, awareness raising, and decision-making played a key role in enhancing the

effectiveness of gender-focused activities. For example, an ESCAP project evaluation demonstrated fruitful collaboration with a women's university to provide targeted training to women entrepreneurs; with high motivation and adequate capacity of the university, the trainings were successfully delivered and further generated interest for duplicating the model to other campuses.

26. Furthermore, three evaluations also found that projects that integrated gender also benefited from engaging local partners to further improve the positive effects on women. For instance, one DESA evaluation highlighted how a project partnered with an NGO that worked on gender equality issues; this partnership had a strong impact on the inclusion of women and youth and resulted in an increased number of women creating micro-small and medium-sized enterprises. In another evaluation, a UNODC project engaged local actors to improve access to legal aid services. The evaluation found that community leaders and traditional associations of women effectively assisted with jurisdictional referrals of cases on gender-based violence due to their social legitimacy in the community.
27. Finally, some evaluations (10 reports) recommended that programme managers seek new partnerships with local actors working on gender equality and women's empowerment, and further strengthen the connection with local gender networks. Five evaluations specifically mentioned that the gender-based knowledge and expertise of CSO had not been sufficiently leveraged.

D. Capacity and resource constraints were key factors impeding the progress of gender mainstreaming, although there were some effective practices for bridging the resource gap

Gender funding was limited and often not sustainable

28. Several evaluations (21 of the 147 reports that addressed gender mainstreaming) reported findings on gender funding and budgeting; of these, half (11 reports) indicated that there was limited earmarked funding on gender, which hampered the capacities of projects and entities to mainstream gender issues. For example, an OCHA evaluation noted that gender-targeted projects tended to be disproportionately under-funded compared to general humanitarian response projects. The evaluations revealed that some entities, such as UN-Habitat, UNEP and the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), allocated targeted funding for gender activities; however, this funding was mostly voluntary funding from donors and thus could not ensure sustainability. Four evaluations specifically raised concerns that earmarked gender funding could not be sustained due to lack of interest or a change in donor priorities.
29. Eight evaluations highlighted the importance and need for using a more systematic approach to guide gender-specific resource allocation. These reports identified the following practices as useful:
 - developing a fundraising strategy to provide a framework for resource mobilization and allocation;
 - revising financial guidelines to standardize the inclusion of gender in budgets; and
 - introducing financial tracking systems to improve monitoring and reporting of gender expenditures.
30. Seven evaluations further recommended the mobilization and securing of funding for gender mainstreaming activities and gender staff posts. Although long-term earmarked gender

funding was considered ideal, several evaluations (six reports) also emphasized the need for various approaches to mobilize project-specific gender funding from donors. Some examples of these approaches included:

- in ESCAP, a gender-focused project on Information and Communication Technology mobilized its initial funding from the government through the national gender network;
- in UNODC, a project on prevention of trafficking in firearms mobilized earmarked funding from a donor to develop a women-focused pilot project with potential to scale up; and
- in DESA, a project on small and medium enterprises mobilized funding from the European Union (EU) by partnering with an EU-supported local NGO to conduct women empowerment activities.

Dedicated gender expertise was insufficient

31. Among the 30 evaluations that reported findings on gender expertise, 12 identified a lack of specific gender expertise and/or ineffective use of existing gender capacities as main obstacles to mainstreaming gender equality at key junctures of the programme cycle. Eleven evaluations recommended further enhancing dedicated gender expertise at the project design and implementation phases; two DPPA and UNSMIL evaluations specifically recommended deploying gender advisors in special political missions.
32. It was commonly noted in most of these evaluations (22 of the 30 reports) that gender experts have played an essential role in developing institutional mainstreaming guidelines and tools, as well as having input into gender-specific interventions. These evaluations noted that when a gender expert was included in the programme team or involved in programme design and implementation, gender mainstreaming usually went beyond ensuring a balanced gender representation. A dedicated gender post or gender unit was found to be particularly helpful in advancing institutional mainstreaming progress. For example, an OHCHR evaluation found that a specialized gender team strengthened the entity's capacity in collaborating with other agencies and reporting on gender issues. An OIOS evaluation highlighted that the presence of gender units and gender advisors in peacekeeping missions led to an improved awareness of gender issues; this included the establishment of women's working groups and female engagement teams among the staff.
33. Eleven evaluations also found that, in the absence of a specialized and dedicated gender team, the establishment of gender focal points and task forces was a common practice to support gender mainstreaming at project and institutional levels. However, another four evaluations questioned the efficiency and effectiveness of the focal point system, noting that the expected responsibilities of gender focal points were often not aligned to their seniority and workload, which limited their capacity to carry out their mandates effectively. Three evaluations specifically recommended that staff with gender responsibilities should have well-defined roles, sufficient time to fulfil their responsibilities and decision-influencing authority.
34. Lastly, several evaluations (eight reports) highlighted effective practices in mobilizing gender expertise in-house and from implementing partners when there was insufficient dedicated gender capacity. OHCHR and UNEP evaluations found that projects actively engaged and sought assistance from other teams with expertise in gender, including specialized Gender Units within their entities, and DESA and ECA evaluations identified examples when gender expertise from national partners was used to strengthen the gender component in the projects. Some of these evaluations recommended mobilizing gender expertise in the wider

UN system, particularly through inter-agency groups and networks on gender, as good practices.

There was awareness and demand for internal capacity building on gender mainstreaming among programme staff

35. Nine evaluations noted the need to enhance the knowledge of programme staff on gender mainstreaming as a collective responsibility. One UN-Habitat evaluation noted in particular that when programme managers were knowledgeable about gender issues, gender commitments were more likely to be translated into positive results. Seven evaluations highlighted the need to develop tailored entity-level gender training beyond the UN mandatory training and targeted capacity building materials to better link gender issues to entity's specific technical areas.
36. Twelve evaluations recommended developing training and capacity building events to further raise awareness of staff and enhance their technical skills and capacities on gender mainstreaming. Other recommendations made in this regard included developing entity-level mainstreaming tools and guidelines for programme staff and strengthening gender knowledge management by developing, compiling and disseminating best practices on gender mainstreaming.

E. Evaluative evidence on outcomes achieved on gender equality and women's empowerment was limited, primarily due to the lack of monitoring, evaluation and reporting

Mechanisms to monitor, assess and report on the progress of gender-related goals were lacking

37. More than half of evaluations (77 of the 147 reports that addressed gender mainstreaming) included findings on the monitoring, reporting and evaluation of gender results and gender mainstreaming progress, the majority of which (50 of 77) identified a lack of gender-disaggregated data, insufficient and inconsistent monitoring and/or reporting on gender. Many of these evaluations found that assessing projects' effects on women remained a challenge often due to limited data and monitoring capacities at the country level. Additionally, some evaluations (11 reports) found that projects still lacked basic gender-disaggregated data of participants or beneficiaries due to the absence of regular monitoring.
38. Some evaluations (20 reports) also highlighted the deficiency of robust indicators on gender, including gender-specific indicators for measuring gender results. Six of these evaluations raised further concerns that, when gender indicators were incorporated, they only focused on the participants' sex without further assessment of gender-related results. For example, two evaluations of UNODC and ESCAP found that project monitoring only looked at women's participation in workshops and meetings but did not gather data on the quality of gender content or gender-responsive outcomes.
39. Additionally, 22 of the 77 evaluations indicated that programme and/or project reporting was insufficient and inconsistent to document gender results and performance on gender mainstreaming. Half of these (11) found little or no mention of gender in reporting documents, although some of these projects did collect gender-disaggregated data. The other 11 evaluations found that the reporting exercise was often fragmented and non-systematic, hindering the consolidation of gender-related information at the corporate level. For example,

an UN-Habitat evaluation noted that annual project reports did not provide a comprehensive overview of gender activities and achievements, and similarly, an evaluation by the UN Department for Safety and Security (DSS) found difficulties in systematizing ad-hoc reporting from individual units and aligning them with the gender targets at the corporate level.

40. Other gender monitoring and reporting limitations reported by evaluations included the:

- lack of minimum standards for gender-sensitive monitoring and reporting;
- lack of harmonization of gender indicators between individual projects and the UN System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP)¹⁰
- inconsistent collection and reporting of gender-disaggregated data among activities and partners due to the absence of a common monitoring and reporting strategy; and
- ineffective utilization of gender-disaggregated data for making necessary adjustments to project activities during implementation.

Overall, there was limited evaluative evidence available regarding the outcomes achieved in gender equality and empowerment of women

41. As mentioned above, monitoring and reporting primarily focused on collecting participation data at the activity and output levels rather than gathering gender results at the outcome level. In general, the review of evaluation reports revealed a notable lack of evaluative evidence regarding the achieved outcomes in gender equality. Fourteen reports specifically pointed out that while some gender-disaggregated data existed, the overall outcome or impact of projects on gender equality remained unknown due to the lack of assessment. In that regard, a few reports (eight) noted the need for a more rigorous assessment of gender-related results.

Contributions to Gender Equality

42. Of the 157 evaluation reports reviewed for this synthesis, 81 referenced one or more dimensions of contributions to gender equality and women's empowerment. Result F is based on a review of these 81 reports.

F. Secretariat entities have contributed to gender goals through capacity building, partnership, advocacy and normative support actions

43. The review of the 81 evaluation reports which discussed contributions to gender equality and women's empowerment showed that UN Secretariat entities implemented a range of initiatives aimed at empowering women, promoting their rights and addressing gender-based violence. These contributions were made through the following four areas:

- Capacity building
- Partnership and knowledge sharing
- Advocacy
- Normative support

Each of these four will be discussed in greater detail below.

¹⁰ The UN System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) is a UN accountability framework composed of a set of indicators to benchmark performance and measure progress across entity's activities and gender-related results.

Capacity building

44. More than half of the evaluations (44 of 81 reports) found that capacity building work had supported gender equality goals. Capacity building activities consisted of and were targeted at two main levels: 1) training and education for women and girls to enhance their skills and knowledge in various sectors, thus promote their leadership and empowerment; and 2) building the capacity of institutions at the regional, national or local levels to improve their ability to address gender equality issues.
45. Results achieved through the training and education of girls and women included:
- Strengthening women's conflict resolution, leadership and peacebuilding capacities (DPPA);
 - Providing training on preventing young adults' and women's involvement with violent extremism leading to terrorism (UNOCT);
 - Providing training to women traders to develop entrepreneurial skills and enhance their awareness of customs and trade procedures (UNCTAD);
 - Enhancing access to justice for victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) through specialized trainings, workshops, and support for investigations and reporting (OHCHR); and
 - Enhancing women's knowledge on natural resource management, as well as promoting their participation in local conflict resolution committees related to natural resources (UNEP).
46. Results achieved through institutional capacity building included:
- Supporting networks and organizations managed by women to participate in planning and implementation of programs that address their needs and vulnerabilities in the HIV-prevention area (DCO – UN Country Team Tajikistan);
 - Building the capacity of municipal units on data collection methods in gender statistics focused on gender-based violence and human trafficking (UNODC);
 - Supporting coordination between indigenous and ordinary justice systems to address violence against women (OHCHR); and
 - Developing a civic education curriculum on gender equality and non-discrimination for school students (UNCT Kyrgyz Republic).

Partnership and knowledge sharing

47. More than one-third of the evaluations (32 of 81 reports) assessed how Secretariat entities had successfully engaged with different partners, including civil society, academia and the private sector, to share knowledge and advance their collective expertise in gender equality. Partnership and knowledge sharing activities involved knowledge sharing through reports, guidelines, and tools; organizing meetings and events; and building networks where expertise was shared. Knowledge was most commonly shared in areas such as violence prevention, law enforcement, human rights, the environment, as well as trade and urban development.
48. Results achieved through partnerships and knowledge sharing included:
- Developing global initiatives, such the Spotlight Initiative, focused on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls prioritizing coordination, collaboration, and leveraging technical expertise (DCO);

- Developing guidelines, manuals, and toolkits to create accessible, inclusive, and equal public urban spaces, ensuring the participation and safety of women, children, the disabled, and other marginalized groups (UN-Habitat);
- Developing toolboxes, guidelines, and manuals to evaluate the impact of trade reforms on women and gender inequalities (UNCTAD);
- Researching the gender and waste management nexus and formulating recommendations to better address gender issues in waste management practices (UNEP); and
- Reinforcing knowledge on gender-related crimes by developing lessons-learned publications, case studies, and toolkits to enhance the understanding of international standards on gender-related crimes and facilitate access to justice for victims (OHCHR).

Advocacy

49. One-third of the evaluations (28 of 81 reports) found that Secretariat entities effectively advocated on behalf of strengthened institutions to support gender equality, addressed gender-based violence and empowered marginalized groups. These advocacy activities involved engaging stakeholders, raising awareness, convening and facilitating dialogues, promoting public statements and supporting justice-seeking efforts.

50. Results achieved through advocacy included:

- Awareness-raising on gender equality in justice systems and convening dialogues with governments to discuss these concepts (UNODC);
- Advocacy for gender-responsive land security and property rights (UN-HABITAT);
- Convening dialogues on LGBTI concerns, facilitating dialogue among regional and national stakeholders (OHCHR);
- Public awareness and advocacy on SGBV (OHCHR);
- Advocacy campaigns focusing on the intersectionality of human rights violations and multiple forms of discrimination, including indigenous women and youth (OHCHR); and
- Supporting justice-seeking efforts for women, such as advocating for overcoming shortcomings in the investigation of femicide crimes and adopting protocols to improve investigations (OHCHR).

Normative Support

51. One-third of the evaluations (28 of 82 reports) also found that the Secretariat had effectively provided normative support by contributing to strengthened gender-related policies and laws and advising on the development of national strategies in support of women as well as prioritizing the rights of women and girls.

52. Results achieved through normative support included:

- Strengthening national gender-related policies and laws, such as the State Program on Education, the National Plan for Combatting Human Trafficking, and the State Instructions for the Prevention, Elimination, and Response to Domestic Violence (DCO – UN Country Team Tajikistan);
- Conducting strategic litigation that triggered policy changes in favor of women rights (OHCHR);
- Supporting the development of the Minamata Convention on Mercury, which integrated the effects of mercury releases on women and the need to establish strategies to prevent the exposure of vulnerable population to mercury (UNEP);

- Providing guidance and support for mainstreaming gender in national ageing policies (UNECE); and
- Supporting women's networks to propose legislation to prevent domestic violence (DPPA).

III. Take Aways for Programme Managers

53. Considering the findings of this synthesis analysis, there are several actions that programme managers at the Secretariat should consider in order to strengthen their work in contributing to gender equality and women's empowerment. These include:

54. Mainstream gender equality more systematically across all areas of work of the Secretariat

The evaluations assessed found that gender mainstreaming efforts varied significantly among entities. Many projects did not sufficiently mainstream gender issues during design and implementation, particularly when gender equality and women's empowerment was not a primary focus. Programme managers should more deliberately and systematically mainstream gender across all areas of work, including in the development, humanitarian assistance, peace and security, human rights and management pillars.

55. Explicitly integrate gender into project design, including, where appropriate, developing concrete gender-targeted and gender-integrated activities and outputs

The evaluations also noted that, overall, projects focused more on improving gender representation than on developing specific gender-related activities or outputs. While achieving gender balance in participation is an important step in gender equality, it is not enough to advance gender equality. Programme managers should more explicitly incorporate gender equality into project design, by conducting a robust gender analysis, formulating gender-specific results, and translating gender commitment into concrete activities and outputs.

56. Increase financial and human resources devoted to gender equality and explore opportunities for mobilizing resources through partnerships

Evaluations demonstrated that adequate funding and gender expertise were crucial for achieving gender equality objectives but that resource and capacity gaps were key obstacles to the progress of gender mainstreaming. Programme managers should continue advocating for financing gender equality and mobilize existing gender expertise from both the UN system and external partners, where possible, to bridge the resource gap.

57. Engage relevant stakeholders in gender-targeted and gender-integrated activities

The evaluations further highlighted successful partnerships with various stakeholders, such as government, women's organizations, civil society, and academia, which contributed to effective gender results. These evaluations noted that involving relevant stakeholders not only enhanced the effectiveness of gender initiatives, but also fostered better coordination and created synergies in financing. Programme managers should continue engaging and supporting the involvement of a diverse range of stakeholders, including through UN inter-agency groups and local networks, to work collectively towards achieving gender equality.

58. More rigorously assess and report results and outcomes on gender

Most of the evaluations assessed noted deficiencies with regard to the monitoring, assessing and reporting of gender results and outcomes achieved. Programme managers should strengthen their monitoring and evaluation systems to capture gender results, by developing robust indicators, standardizing monitoring and reporting requirements and conducting evaluations that assess not only the outputs but also the outcomes achieved in the gender equality front. These efforts will enhance learning and accountability around gender.

59. Further harness the added value of the normative and advocacy work of the United Nations

Evaluations demonstrated that the work in norm setting and advocacy for gender equality, positively influenced policy decisions at the local, country and regional levels. The UN is uniquely placed to continue influencing norms and policies that have the potential to improve the lives of women and girls. Programme managers should continue to exploit their particular norm-setting and advocacy roles and capitalize on their unique positioning to engage policy-makers to produce long-lasting policy changes.

Annex 1: Additional synthesis coding: evaluations findings and recommendations

Figure 1: Percentage of positive, neutral/mixed and negative individual report references on gender mainstreaming dimensions (N =147 reports)

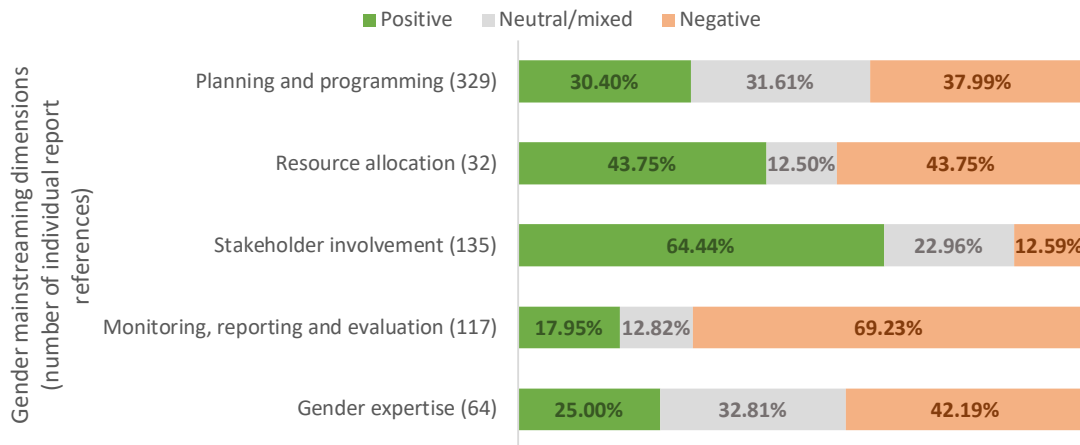


Figure :2 Number of individual report recommendations per associated dimension (N=147 reports)



Figure 3: Number of individual report references on gender contributions, by theme (N= 81 reports)

