

# A Sustainable Legacy

Insights and evidence from **seed investments** to end violence against women and girls

**SUMMARY**

**December 2025**



**Spotlight Initiative**  
To eliminate violence against women and girls

# Background

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is one of the world’s most widespread human rights violations, affecting at least one in three women in their lifetime.<sup>1</sup> It is a global public health crisis that impacts people of all backgrounds and has lasting effects on survivors’ physical, economic and psychological well-being. VAWG limits the full and equal participation of women and girls in public spaces and is a major barrier to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In 2017, the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) launched Spotlight Initiative - the largest global, targeted effort to eliminate all forms of VAWG and advance gender equality –a precondition to achieving the SDGs. Through its comprehensive theory of change and its whole-of-society, whole-of-government approach, the Initiative was designed to tackle the root causes of VAWG and ensure that women and girls, particularly the most marginalized, could live free from violence. With a € 500 million investment from 2017 to 2023, the Initiative delivered significant results across 26 country programmes, 6 regional programmes and 2 civil society grant-giving programmes in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Pacific and the Caribbean. Programmes were guided by six programming pillars: Laws and Policies; Institutional Strengthening; Prevention; Quality Essential Services; Data; and Women’s Movements.<sup>2</sup> Through its first phase, the Initiative had a transformative impact on women’s safety, empowerment and rights — doubling conviction rates in 13 countries, strengthening more than 540 laws and policies, reaching 3 million women and girls with gender-based violence (GBV) services, and boosting the influence of over 5,000 women’s rights groups. Twenty-one million women and girls are expected to have been prevented from experiencing violence as a result of the Initiative.<sup>3</sup>

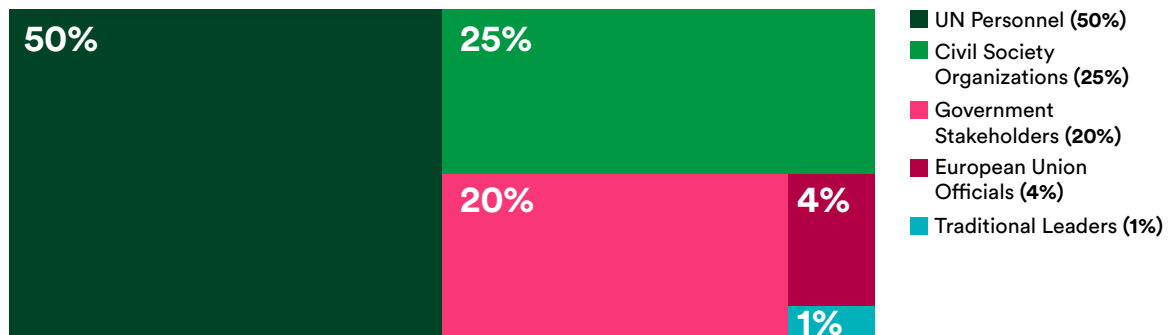
Examining the sustainability of the Initiative’s comprehensive model and results is essential to the success of its second-generation of programmes, which began launching in 2024. This sustainability report was thus designed with two main aims:

- to highlight best practices and drive sustainable approaches to end VAWG;
- to demonstrate the long-term value of investing in ending violence against women.

Conducted as a learning exercise rather than a formal evaluation, the report seeks to generate indicative insights and reflections to inform future programming.

The report explores the sustainability of Spotlight Initiative’s achievements and approaches two years after the closure of its first phase of programmes. It draws on insights from virtual interviews and surveys that included 106 stakeholders from governments, civil society organizations (CSOs), the UN, the EU and other partners. All Spotlight Initiative programmes implemented between 2017 and 2023 were included in the data collection process.<sup>4</sup>

## Interview breakdown



Citation: Spotlight Initiative. (2025). A Sustainable Legacy: Insights and evidence from seed investments to end violence against women and girls.

Data was analysed using an iterative coding approach to identify themes, sustained achievements and enabling factors. Findings were triangulated by cross-checking stakeholder perspectives, reviewing secondary documentation and validating results to ensure accuracy. This summary highlights key findings from the main report. The summary focuses on sustained achievements, enabling factors and programmatic examples, as well as recommendations relevant to all EVAWG, gender equality and development practitioners.



**Defining sustainability:** Sustainability refers to the extent to which the net benefits of an intervention continue, or are likely to continue, over time.<sup>5</sup> In this report, sustainability is understood as the ability of a Spotlight Initiative programme to reportedly maintain positive impacts and outcomes in preventing and responding to VAWG over the medium to long term. Evidence of sustainability was identified through qualitative data gathered two years after programmes closed, when data collection occurred.

## Spotlight Initiative's approach to sustainability

Spotlight Initiative's comprehensive theory of change lays the foundation for sustainable achievements. By working across interconnected pillars and partnering with governments, CSOs and women's rights organizations (WROs), programmes promote national ownership, strengthen systems and embed EVAWG activities within sustainable structures, policies and plans. Grounded in UN Reform, the Initiative is designed to move beyond piecemeal and small-scale EVAWG interventions towards a coordinated, One UN approach with lasting impact.

During the first phase of programmes, many activities were designed with sustainability in mind. While the immediate pressures and uncertainties of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) Pandemic shifted focus away from sustainability in the early stages of programme implementation, stakeholders reported that teams developed sustainability strategies to inform approaches in the longer term.

## Spotlight Initiative's sustained achievements

**Sustained achievements, outcomes, activities and ways of working were reported by stakeholders from nearly all country and regional programmes (97 per cent)<sup>6</sup> and across all six programming pillars.**

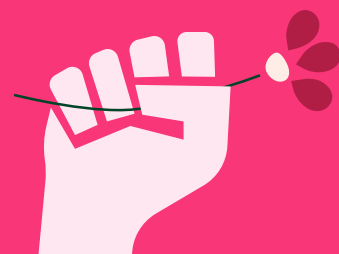
The consolidated analysis revealed sustained gains in essential services (Pillar 4), laws and policies (Pillar 1) and women's movements (Pillar 6), among others.

# Most frequently reported sustained achievements across programmes



**20** programmes strengthened and/or sustained gender equality laws, policies and frameworks

**21** programmes strengthened and/or sustained provision of essential services for survivors of violence



**17** programmes strengthened and/or sustained collective action through women's movements and civil society

**15** programmes strengthened and/or sustained institutional coordination, collaboration and engagement on EVAWG



**14** programmes sustained and/or scaled up prevention strategies which promote positive social norms

# Key sustainability-enabling factors

The following enabling factors emerged from analysis of stakeholder interviews. They look across country and regional programmes and demonstrate key enabling factors reported by multiple stakeholders during or after programme implementation.



## Enabling factors during programme implementation

		Creation of formal <b>coordination mechanisms</b> between government, the UN and CSOs to support long-term collaboration	Meaningful engagement of <b>civil society</b> in programme implementation and governance	Fostering high-level <b>political engagement</b> , including with presidents, prime ministers and diverse ministries
Developing clear, budgeted and accountable <b>strategies</b> for programme activity handover	Embedding programme activities within <b>existing</b> health, education and social service structures	<b>Capacity strengthening</b> of staff and local actors, including in gender-responsive budgeting, policymaking and service delivery	Strengthening <b>locally led</b> approaches that engage multiple sectors	Building on and amplifying <b>existing efforts</b> to end VAWG
		Engaging <b>diverse stakeholders</b> in sustainability and transition processes	Developing a <b>sustainability strategy</b> from the outset and updating this frequently	Building CSO capacity to <b>monitor and track</b> political commitments

## Enabling factors after programme closure

Governments, UN agencies, CSOs or WROs taking over <b>ownership</b> of programme activities	Sustained <b>government funding</b> for EVAWG activities			
Sustaining and scaling up <b>training programmes</b> and use of EVAWG guidance and tools	Sustaining and scaling up <b>multi-stakeholder coordination</b> and joint implementation	Continued collaboration and coordination between <b>UN agencies</b>	Sustained engagement of <b>traditional leaders and community members</b> , including men, boys and youth	Mobilizing <b>new funding</b> for EVAWG efforts

# Sustainability results



**Pillar 1 - Laws and Policies:** Spotlight Initiative's theory of change places policy reform at its core, recognizing the role of governance in creating an enabling environment for EAWG. Stakeholders from **20 programmes** reported that gender equality and EAWG laws, policies and frameworks established or supported by the Initiative continued to be implemented following programme closure. Sustained achievements also reportedly included the ongoing influence of CSOs and WROs in policymaking and accountability processes.

Success was driven by multilevel and multisectoral government engagement; inclusive policymaking that involved a broad set of institutions beyond government (e.g. universities, schools, private sector); leveraging political momentum and engaging high-level decision makers; and building the advocacy, skills and networks of CSOs.

**“In the initial meetings around Spotlight Initiative, when we said the word ‘sexual’ or ‘gender-based violence’... the government were wary... but now the use of that term has become easier. Spotlight Initiative had a profound impact on GBV work.”**

↳ UN colleague in Tajikistan



**Programme example:** In **Mexico**, Spotlight Initiative contributed to reforms of federal and state laws while simultaneously strengthening national and local institutions to implement activities that advance equality for survivors in the long term. Between 2019 and 2023, the Initiative supported reforms to more than 31 federal and 45 state laws addressing issues such as femicide, sexual violence and enforced disappearance. Spotlight Initiative also provided technical assistance for drafting legislation, supported CSO advocacy, and helped institutions implement reforms. These laws continue to be enforced, offering lasting protections to survivors. Government institutions strengthened by Spotlight Initiative, including the National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence Against Women, the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic and the National Institute for Women continue to operationalize the survivor-centred laws and policies developed during the programme.



**Pillar 2 - Institutional Strengthening:** Spotlight Initiative aims to ensure that national systems and institutions prioritize EAWG beyond programme lifecycles. Stakeholders from **15 programmes** reported stronger institutions and governance structures, improved coordination and enhanced capacity of service providers across justice, police, health and social sectors. Sustained achievements also reportedly included continued public and political discourse, and continued gender-responsive budgeting.

From the outset, Spotlight Initiative embedded domestic resource mobilization into its model, recognizing that sustainability depends on long-term domestic public investment. In four countries (Ecuador, Liberia, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uganda), the Initiative's efforts can be reliably tied to new budget allocations totalling nearly US\$ 50 million.<sup>7</sup> Success in this pillar was supported by effective and

empowered EVAWG taskforces; working concurrently on policies and coordination mechanisms to support policy development and delivery; fostering government ownership of tools and training; and well-trained staff and leaders with the skills to deliver.

**“The strengthening of community by-laws on GBV, as I am speaking, is still continuing. Why? Because all the local structures which we managed to establish during Spotlight Initiative are still in existence.”**

↳ CSO representative in Malawi



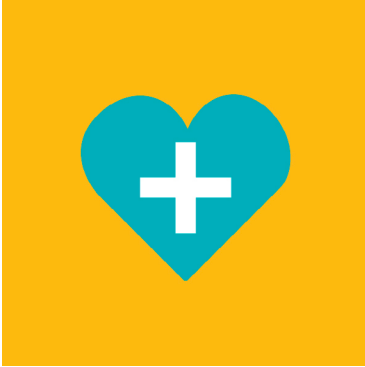
**Programme example:** In **Papua New Guinea**, Spotlight Initiative advanced groundbreaking gender-responsive budgeting processes, helping to secure the country’s first national budget allocations dedicated to EVAWG.<sup>8</sup> In 2022, the government allocated US\$ 2.24 million, rising to US\$ 2.53 million in 2023 for GBV activities.<sup>9</sup> As a result of continued momentum and advocacy, after the closure of the programme, national and provincial stakeholders convened to develop Papua New Guinea’s first comprehensive Gender Policy (2024–2034). Spotlight Initiative laid the groundwork by building political will, facilitating high-level UN visits, enhancing national capacities on gender-responsive budgeting and strengthening government systems to enable long-term delivery on commitments.



**Pillar 3 - Prevention:** Spotlight Initiative prioritizes the transformation of social norms, behaviours and attitudes to address the root causes of VAWG. Stakeholders from **14 programmes** reported sustained or scaled up prevention strategies that promote positive social norms. Sustained outcomes also reportedly included increased public awareness on EVAWG, heightened engagement of community leaders, integration of comprehensive sexuality education into national systems, and sustained women’s economic empowerment and resilience initiatives. Success was driven by strong WRO and CSO leadership; piloting prevention strategies with well-documented evidence for scale up; and collaboration with traditional leaders.



**Programme example:** In **Timor-Leste**, Spotlight Initiative supported the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion (MSSI) to expand the “Hametin Familia” parenting programme to new, pilot locations, combining group sessions and home visits which equip parents with the skills to support child development and prevent violence. Unique in its focus on addressing the root causes of violence within families, the programme piloted and adapted approaches to local needs. Since Spotlight Initiative’s closure in Timor-Leste, Hametin Familia continues to operate under the MSSI with government funding. It is staffed by people trained through Spotlight Initiative and continues to use materials developed under the Initiative. The programme’s evidence base, adaptability and community-centered design have made it a lasting, scalable, government-led model for violence prevention.



**Pillar 4 - Quality Essential Services:** Strengthening the availability, accessibility and quality of essential services for survivors of violence is a priority for all Spotlight Initiative programmes. Stakeholders from **21 programmes** reported lasting improvements in services, sustained operations, increased access to VAWG services and strengthened staff capacities. Stakeholders reported the continued use of protocols, referral pathways and case management systems developed during programmes. Success in this pillar was driven by strong government leadership; strengthened expertise in survivor-centred services; the collaborative development of tools and skills; private sector partnerships in service delivery; and the integration of pilot initiatives into national systems.

**“We do not say the programme has ended because we still continue all the service provision.”**

↳ Government official in Mozambique



**Programme example:** In **Tajikistan**, Spotlight Initiative partnered with the Ministry of Health to establish 15 victim support rooms within health facilities, providing survivors with access to medical and psychosocial support, and short-term shelter. Over 300 health professionals and 90 teachers were trained by the Initiative to support service delivery and implement newly developed protocols. Following the closure of the programme, all 15 victim support rooms have been fully maintained and integrated within Tajikistan’s national health system and trained staff reportedly remain active. The government conducts regular monitoring visits and provides refresher training to sustain knowledge and uphold service quality. This lasting achievement stemmed from strong collaboration between the UN and government ministries, alongside the integration of protocols into Tajikistan’s health system to ensure they became part of standard practice.



**Pillar 5 - Data:** Spotlight Initiative’s commitment to strengthening data systems has supported progress in addressing VAWG in the long term. Investments reportedly led to sustained improvements in data collection, harmonization and management systems across **12 programmes**, supporting evidence-based policymaking, transparency and accountability. Stakeholders reported the continued use of knowledge, evidence and tools generated by the Initiative to inform EVAWG advocacy, policy and programming. Key enablers of sustainability included building tools and skills for diverse stakeholders; developing and piloting scalable data systems; integrating VAWG data goals into national plans; and generating flagship research which resonates with broad stakeholders.





**Programme example:** In **Malawi**, Spotlight Initiative supported the launch of the National Observatory Hub, alongside capacity building for district officials. Following programme closure, the Hub has grown into a central component of Malawi's GBV response. It now links data from community support units, police and courts, has been expanded from 6 districts to 12, and there are plans for nationwide coverage. New features have also been introduced to further strengthen the capacity and responsiveness of the Hub. Built on secure government servers and aligned with national plans, the Hub has recorded almost 16,000 GBV cases. It was recognized publicly at the World Summit on the Information Society as a global digital innovation. The Hub continues to thrive thanks to strong government ownership, integration into national GBV systems, and ongoing support from the UN and donors. Its proven impact, scalability and international recognition make it a model for sustainable, data-driven VAWG prevention and response.



**Pillar 6 - Women's Movements:** Spotlight Initiative strengthens women's and feminist movements as drivers of sustainable EAWG efforts. Through country and regional programmes, in addition to grant-giving programmes with UNTF and WPHF, the Initiative supported more than 5,000 women's rights organizations with funding, capacity-building and technical assistance. Across **17 programmes**, stakeholders reported stronger collective action on gender equality and EAWG. Others reported sustained achievements related to greater skills and visibility for diverse CSOs and WROs; sustained youth-led networks, including youth parliaments; and closer collaboration between the UN, government and civil society after programmes closed.



**Programme example:** Spotlight Initiative's **Central Asia Regional Programme** strengthened regional collaboration among CSOs working to end VAWG. In 2022, the Initiative supported the creation of the Ray of Light CSO Network, the region's first mechanism of its kind, uniting human rights advocates, feminist groups and CSOs across five countries. The Network was supported to facilitate national consultations and online discussions, and played a pivotal role in establishing additional EAWG focused groups, including the Central Asian Alliance. Today, the Ray of Light Network still serves as a regional network, providing legitimacy and political weight to its members, and creating a space for joint advocacy for gender-responsive reforms. Its membership has now reached 600. Members continue to conduct regional forums, workshops and conferences online and offline. The Central Asian Alliance also continues to operate, building on the momentum and skills built during the programme.

# Jamaica Case Study

2020-2023

Duration

US\$ 10.7 million

Total investment

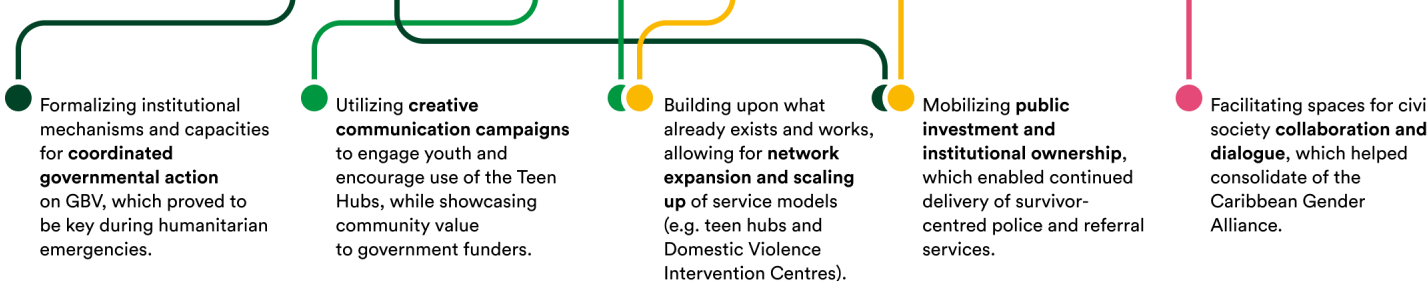
22,260 people

Direct reach

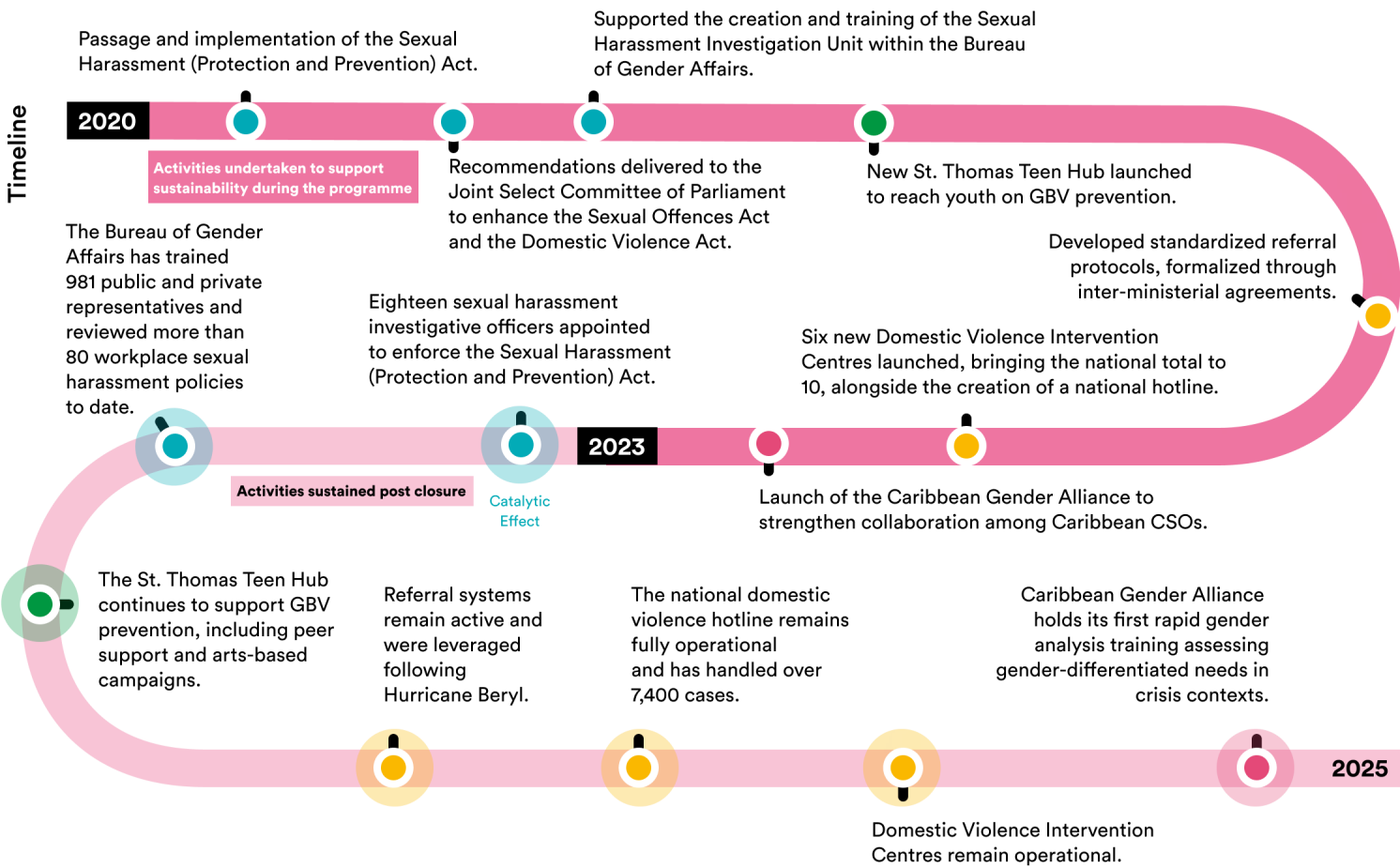
Pillars



Enabling Factors



Timeline



Catalytic After-Effects

Spotlight Initiative in Jamaica served as a springboard for the launch of a new programme – the ‘So-Just’ Project - a 7-year, US\$ 8.8 million initiative led by the Ministry of Justice, UNDP and Global Affairs Canada. Building off Spotlight Initiative’s work to strengthen access to justice for survivors, the programme aims to promote the broader human rights of GBV survivors, persons with disabilities, and residents of rural and vulnerable communities, while improving their access to justice.

The project builds on the strengthened legislative landscape fostered by Spotlight Initiative and aims to expand public awareness of legal reforms, while sustaining community sensitization activities. It incorporates a small grants fund for civil society organizations, continuing the Initiative’s emphasis on civil society support, multi-stakeholder collaboration and inter-ministerial coordination.

# Niger Case Study

2019-2023 Duration	US\$ 27.4 million Total investment
447,502 people Direct reach	

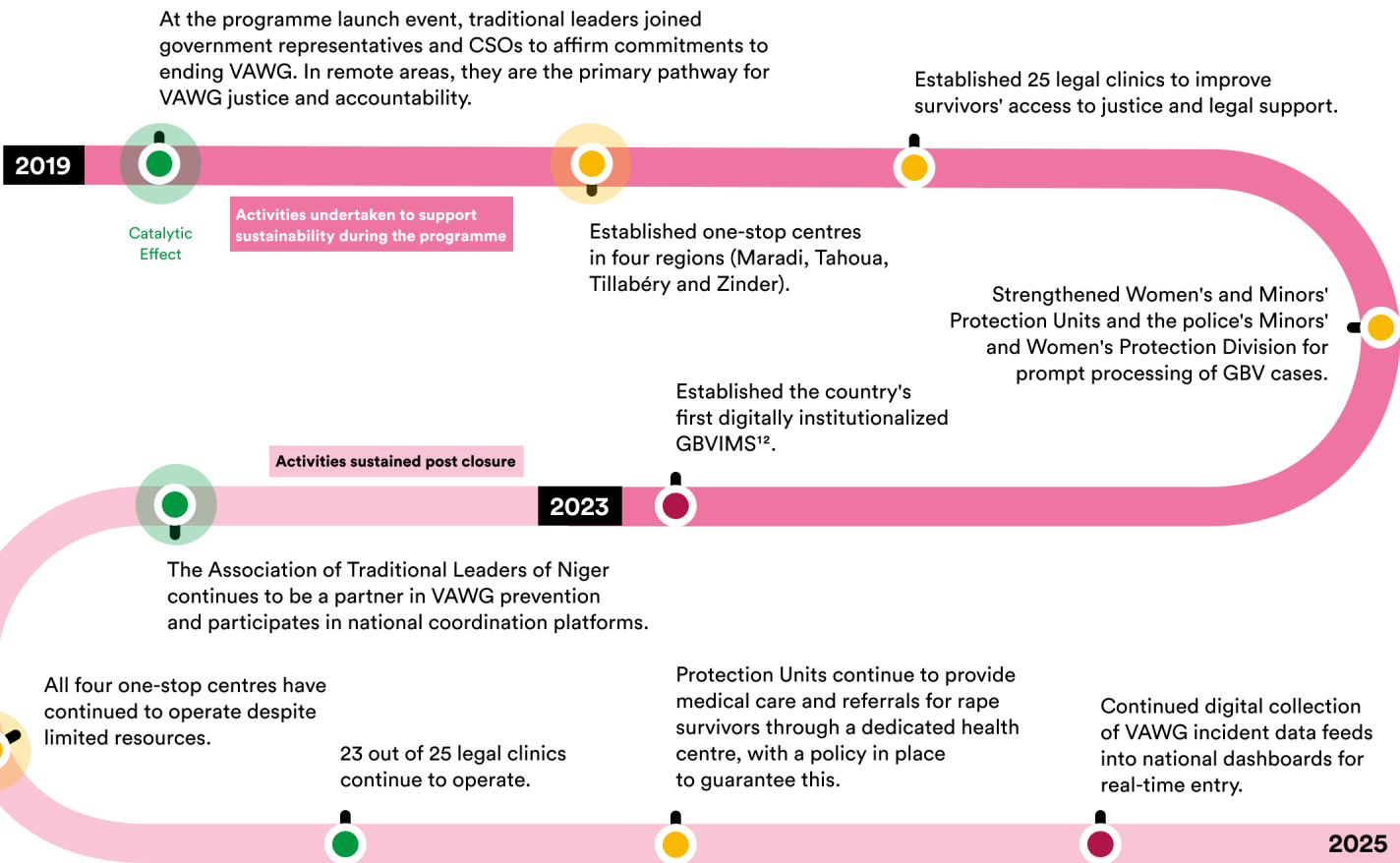
Pillars



Enabling Factors



Timeline



Catalytic After-Effects

- For the first time in the history of traditional leadership in Niger, some traditional chiefs have appointed women within their courts as focal points to address GBV issues, child marriage and girls' education.
- Médecins du Monde and Plan International established additional one-stop centres in the Konni and Madawa regions.

# Zimbabwe Case Study

2019-2023  
Duration

US\$ 33 million  
Total investment

7.9 million people  
Direct reach

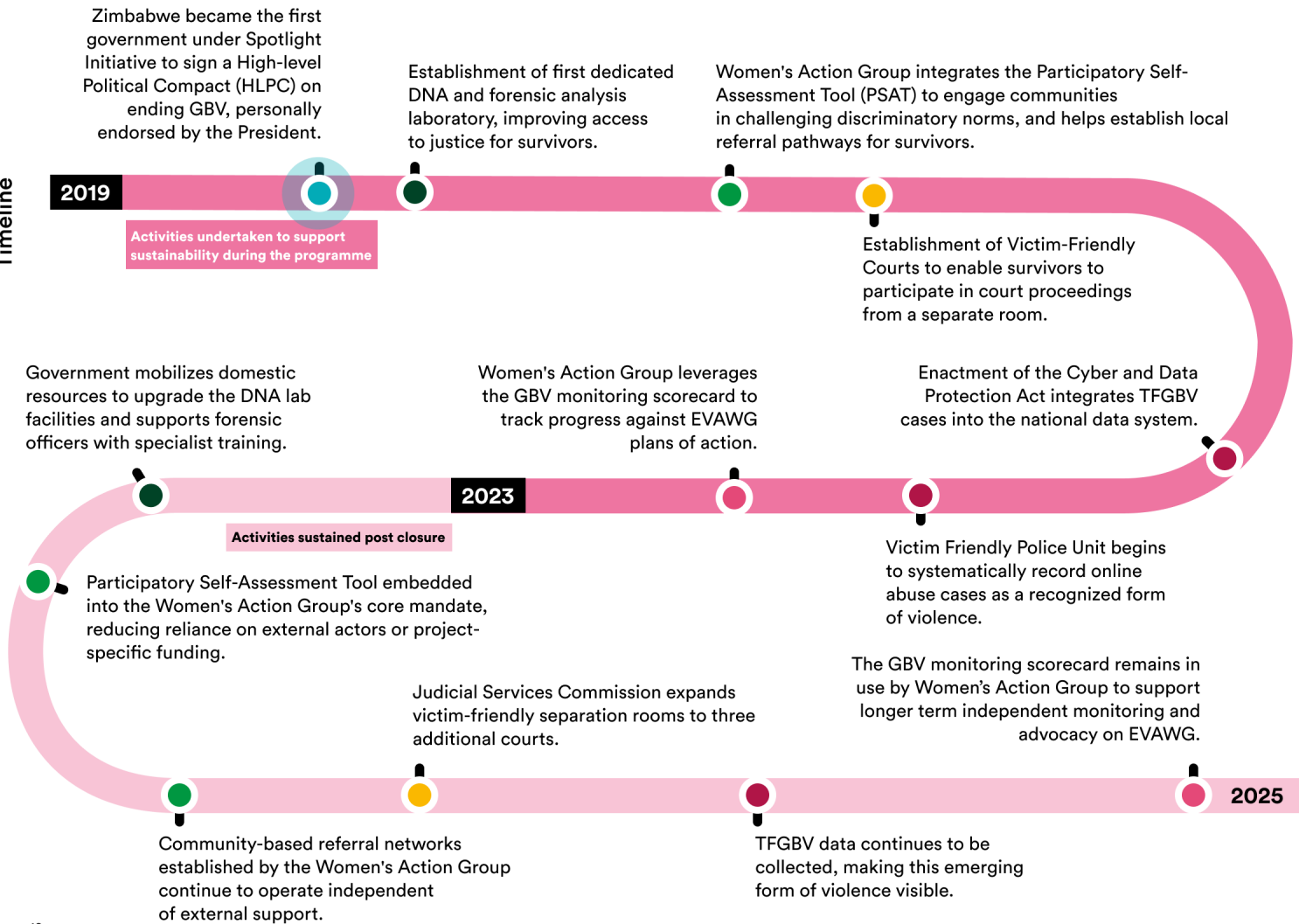
Pillars



Enabling Factors

- Institutionalizing commitment to EVAWG** within national policy frameworks such as the High-Level Political Compact, and leveraging this as a tool for gender-responsive budgeting.
- Integrating survivor support and justice services** into the core functions of public institutions, such as the the Judicial Services Commission and police.
- Collaborating with government institutions to expand their knowledge of emerging risks** such as tech-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), ensuring GBV response extends to digital spaces.

Timeline



Catalytic After-Effects

The HLPC has helped to secure an additional US\$4 million through the EU's Team Europe Initiative, co-financed by Switzerland. This follow-on joint programme builds on Spotlight Initiative's momentum, sustaining gains in institutional coordination and policy reform. It will reinforce prevention efforts by linking governance, health, and social protection with women's empowerment, while also expanding women's access to markets, resources and decision-making spaces.

## Lessons learned - what enables or blocks sustainability?

Stakeholders reported numerous enablers and challenges to sustainable EVAWG programming. Some enabling factors which occurred during programmes included: the institutionalization of programme activities within national structures; capacity strengthening of local actors; meaningful engagement of civil society; and high-level political engagement. Stakeholders also reported a broad set of enabling factors which occurred after programme closure, including: governments allocating budget for continued EVAWG action; transfer of activities to specific stakeholders; and the ongoing role of multi-stakeholder networks to sustain momentum. The vast majority of programmes – 28 in total – reported continued multi-stakeholder collaboration after closure. In some settings, this coordination declined as a result of insufficient resourcing or the absence of institutionalized coordination mechanisms. Sustainable coordination requires formalized frameworks, mandates and resources.

**“Transfer was built into the [programme] design. Things were designed to be sustained by government and informed by government capacity and knowledge around how they can be delivered. It wasn’t a handing over of services, it was a continuation.”**

↳ UN colleague in Kyrgyzstan

Political commitment proved vital to the sustainability of programme achievements - where governments embedded Spotlight Initiative programme activities into national plans and budgets, activities and results proved more resilient. Sustainability planning must, therefore, incorporate intentional strategies to maintain momentum and institutionalize national ownership of EVAWG. Institutionalizing civil society accountability mechanisms, such as community scorecards and shadow reporting, can help to uphold political commitments made by governments during programme implementation.

One of the most commonly reported barriers to sustainability was a lack of financial resources. Stakeholders described how reductions in global aid and low domestic investment restricted the continuation or scaling up of activities. Backlash and sociopolitical shifts, including restrictive laws and changes in government (including in leadership or institutional adjustments), also undermined long-term gains in gender equality and EVAWG. The belated development of sustainability plans within the programme cycle may have also weakened achievements for some programmes. Some stakeholders said sustainability was also hindered by shortages in human resources, technical capacity gaps and staff turnover in national institutions. Long-term workforce development was identified as crucial for preserving the institutional knowledge and expertise required to maintain progress.



**New funding for EVAWG programming:** Spotlight Initiative reportedly catalysed new funding for EVAWG programming, including a second generation of Spotlight Initiative programmes which build on the lessons learned and seek to scale up gains. Six programmes have been launched, in both former and new contexts (Africa Regional Programme, Ecuador, Liberia, Uganda and Zambia). In addition, stakeholders reported that the Initiative has indirectly catalysed funding amounting to approximately US\$ 80 million for new UN EVAWG programming in 10 countries. By inspiring new programmes, new donors and follow-on investments, the Initiative has seeded a broader ecosystem of support for EVAWG in the long term.

# The sustainability of UN reform strategies

Spotlight Initiative is a demonstration fund for UN reform. Programmes are designed to move beyond piecemeal, disconnected and small-scale EAWG interventions to a whole-of-UN approach that orients action around on-the-ground capacities and needs, under the leadership of UN Resident Coordinators (RCs). The Initiative's first phase leveraged several key strategies of UN reform and stakeholders reported lasting impacts stemming from these approaches.

Stakeholders across **18 programmes** reported that UN agencies continued to collaborate and coordinate on EAWG after Spotlight Initiative programmes closed. In some contexts, the UN sustained multi-agency EAWG programming, and many stakeholders highlighted that the Initiative had strengthened attention to gender equality within UN Country Teams and helped elevate EAWG priorities into UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs).

However, despite evidence that comprehensive approaches yield stronger and more sustainable outcomes for EAWG, stakeholders also reported that, in several contexts, programming reverted to more fragmented or sector-specific models following programme closure. This represents a missed opportunity to consolidate the gains of the Initiative and to advance UN reform commitments toward joint, evidence-based programming. Without incentives, shared operating systems and dedicated resources to sustain joint work, agencies may default to single-agency implementation - an easier but ultimately less effective and less sustainable path towards transformation.

**“When they hear that it is the entire UN, they [the government] feel the necessity of coming together as partners.”**

↳ UN colleague in Liberia

Across programmes, the strategic oversight role of RCs has proved vital for lasting impact. Stakeholders provided examples of how RCs elevated VAWG issues to the highest levels of leadership within their countries. This is important because issues championed by senior leaders are less likely to be deprioritized or lost after a programme ends. However, outcomes varied depending on the level of RC engagement and capacity to prioritize EAWG.

Some stakeholders reported sustained cost-sharing and the use of common operational frameworks between UN agencies following programme closure, though in some cases, administrative blockages limited the long-term institutionalization of these approaches.

In several countries, the Initiative's multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms have reportedly evolved into enduring platforms for dialogue and coordination, maintaining partnerships and focus on EAWG beyond programme closure. Several stakeholders reported that the Initiative's Civil Society Reference Group model had been sustained, replicated or adapted by UN Country Teams, demonstrating recognition of CSO expertise and the value of the accountability pathways as a result of these structures.



**Sustaining the gains at the global level:** Launched in 2024 as a United Nations Secretary-General Fund, the Spotlight Initiative 2.0 Fund builds on the successes and lessons of the first phase to expand impact, strengthen partnerships, and catalyse new funding for EAWG. Developed through extensive collaboration among UN entities and a co-design process engaging over 600 civil society organizations, the expanded scope of the Fund reflects a strengthened commitment to comprehensive, rights-based approaches to EAWG.

Central to this effort is the HIVE Programme (High-Impact Programme for Violence Elimination), a joint UN–EU programme designed to sustain technical support to Spotlight Initiative programmes and scale up global knowledge sharing, networking and awareness on EAWG. A key focus of the HIVE Programme is enhancing programme sustainability through delivering capacity-building, disseminating the Initiative’s evidence and learnings, and revising its Global Results Framework to better capture and measure change. Resources developed under the first phase, including the [Spotlight Initiative Learning Centre](#), the [SHINE Hub](#) and the [Compendium of Innovative and Good Practices](#), continue to serve as enduring knowledge repositories for advancing survivor-centred and evidence-based programming.



# Conclusions

This report consolidates insights and evidence to support progress on EVAWG and seeks to illustrate the importance of developing sustainable interventions that deliver long-term benefits for women, girls and survivors.

**Spotlight Initiative offers a model for how comprehensive, evidence-based and feminist-informed EVAWG programming can strengthen institutions, mobilize sustainable financing and inspire broader systemic change.**

## Conclusion 1:

**Spotlight Initiative has delivered sustainable results, but their continuation depends on further commitment and investment.** Sustained achievements were reported by nearly all country and regional programmes. These examples show a model of development cooperation that builds durable systems, institutions and movements, and one that advances the UN's reform vision. It also demonstrates evidence of value for money, with evidence-based investments generating lasting results. Despite these impacts, challenges such as insufficient financial resources, social backlash and limited political commitment persist. Moreover, these achievements cannot be taken for granted. The global context has evolved significantly since the Initiative's inception: the aid sector faces increased pressures and civic spaces have narrowed. Severe funding shortfalls, compounded by a global economic slowdown, escalating humanitarian emergencies and conflict, mean that without a scaling up of political and financial support, even the most durable gains risk erosion.

## Conclusion 2:

**Long-term progress on EVAWG depends on a diverse set of enabling factors.** Sustainability does not happen by chance, but as the result of deliberate, long-term investments and planning and evidence-based action that targets the root causes of VAWG and inequality. Stakeholders highlighted a diverse set of enabling factors which promoted sustainability; transformed legislative, institutional and community systems; and fostered national ownership. Stakeholders highlighted the Initiative's governance model that places civil society at the centre as a key factor for lasting impact. Trusting relationships built through these structures have endured, leaving behind a strong community of EVAWG advocates and allies.

## Conclusion 3:

**The UN reforms can support gender equality, but long term implementation requires incentives.** Spotlight Initiative is a demonstration fund for the UN Development Reforms. Through the Initiative's One UN approach, inter-agency collaboration, joint programming and RC leadership, the Initiative elevated VAWG issues and demonstrated the practical value of the UN reform principles of alignment, coordination and collective accountability. The Initiative has also successfully catalysed new and diversified funding, including US\$ 84 million for second-generation Spotlight Initiative programmes. Evidence of domestic resource mobilization in several countries further underscores the Initiative's success in embedding EVAWG priorities within national agendas for the long term. Sustaining these approaches is not simple. Following programme closure, stakeholders in some countries explained that UN agencies reverted to siloed, single-programme approaches rather than maintaining integrated modalities. Additionally, administrative and funding structures fail to incentivize collaboration. The Initiative's integration into the UN Development Coordination Office (DCO) represents an important opportunity for further championing these principles and embedding gender equality into the UN core reform agenda.



# Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended for Spotlight Initiative programmes, UN agencies, donors, governments, CSOs and other partners committed to advancing gender equality ending VAWG and driving feminist transformation.

## 1

### **Build EVAWG programmes with context-driven, collaborative sustainability strategies at their core.**

- EVAWG programmes should embed sustainability from the outset. Ideally, sustainability strategies should be finalized in the first year and updated regularly. Planning must be inclusive, and involve WROs, CSOs, rightsholders, survivors and government counterparts as co-creators.
- Inter-institutional, intersectoral coordination mechanisms should be utilized to ensure multi-stakeholder partnerships do not dissolve after programme closure.
- Gender-responsive risk analyses should be utilized in strategy development to navigate risks of backlash or the disruption of services for survivors.
- Sustainability strategies should prioritize the integration of programme activities within existing structures, such as government-led health and education services, to support long-term continuity.
- Planning should consider resource mobilization and include targeted partnership-focused activities, including donor roundtables, to identify additional investments.

## 2

### **Recognize civil society leadership, capacity and partnerships as amplifiers of sustainable and locally led EVAWG outcomes.**

- Provide multi-year, flexible funding and technical support to WROs and CSOs to foster institutional capacity and enable long term operations even in the absence of funding.
- Institutionalize structures for CSO coordination and engagement within government or UN systems to facilitate long-term collaboration. This could include expanding models such as the Civil Society Reference Group.
- Prioritize the co-creation of knowledge with feminist organizations, CSOs and traditional leaders, ensuring that EVAWG products, tools and resources remain accessible after programme closure.

## 3

### **Ensure a focus on accountability to support lasting, inclusive and impactful EVAWG action.**

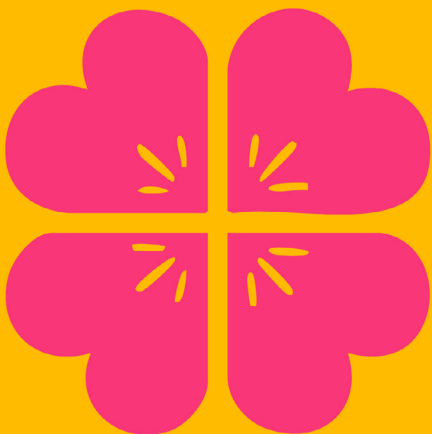
- Encourage governments to make high-level, publicly documented EVAWG commitments backed by domestic resources and transparent laws, policies and National Action Plans, while supporting CSOs and communities to monitor government budget and expenditure.
- Strengthen service provider capacity to undertake effective monitoring and reporting on service infrastructure and delivery. This will support planning, resourcing, and adaptations in the long term.

#### **4** Maximize partnerships with decision-makers and government at all levels to support sustained momentum on EVAWG.

- Establish interministerial EVAWG coordination mechanisms that go beyond the ministry which nominally leads on gender equality and have clearly defined roles, budgets and long-term mandates.
- Political economy analyses should be used to identify and engage champions across government, civil society and communities early in programme design and sustainability planning. Non-partisan engagement can help ensure sustained achievements in the face of political or leadership changes.
- Co-design and co-deliver targeted training and mentorship programmes which enable powerholders to deliver evidence-based EVAWG policies and programmes. Co-create EVAWG tools, modules and resources to support enduring utilization and future adaptation.

#### **5** Prioritize evidence-based, comprehensive approaches to ending violence, as opposed to siloed projects.

- Donors should fund evidence-based, comprehensive EVAWG approaches using a whole-of-society, whole-of-government and One UN approach. Investment should prioritize multi-stakeholder programmes which include feminist movements and build the enabling environment for ending violence. Furthermore, donors should incentivize UN reform strategies by funding joint programming which drives progress across multiple SDGs at once.
- Programmes should continue to capture, synthesize and disseminate knowledge, and foster opportunities for cross-context learning and collaboration to enhance evidence-based policy, programming and advocacy on EVAWG.



# Endnotes

- 1 UN Women (2024), [Global Database on Violence against Women and Girls](#).
- 2 For a full overview of results from the first phase, see Spotlight Initiative (2024), [Spotlight Initiative global final narrative progress report](#).
- 3 Dalberg (2022), [Imperative to invest: How addressing violence against women and girls today reduces violence over time, fosters peace and stability, and enables people to reach their full potential – all of which advances us toward the SDGs](#).
- 4 **Country Programmes:** Africa: Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda, Zimbabwe. Asia: Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan. Caribbean: Belize, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago. Latin America: Argentina, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico. Pacific: Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu. **Regional Programmes:** Africa Regional Programme, ASEAN Safe and Fair Programme, Caribbean Regional Programme, Central Asia Regional Programme, Latin America Regional Programme, Pacific Regional Programme. **Civil society grant-giving programmes:** UNTF in Africa and Latin America, and WPHF in different countries in Africa, in addition to Afghanistan, Haiti and Papua New Guinea.
- 5 OECD (2023), [Glossary of key terms in evaluation and results based management for sustainable development \(second edition\)](#).
- 6 Of the 32 consulted country and regional programmes, 31 programmes reported sustained achievements. Haiti was the only country without any reported sustained achievements in the two years following programme closure. Only one stakeholder was interviewed to represent the Haiti programme, which may have generated a limited view of the programme's achievements. In addition, the country has faced significant challenges during this period. As such, the absence of reported achievements does not necessarily indicate that no outcomes were sustained.
- 7 Spotlight Initiative (2025), [Why domestic public resources are key to ending violence against women and girls](#).
- 8 Spotlight Initiative (2025), [Why domestic public resources are key to ending violence against women and girls](#).
- 9 Spotlight Initiative (2023), [Spotlight Initiative Papua New Guinea final narrative report](#).
- 10 Spotlight Initiative (2023), [Niger programme summary](#).
- 11 Spotlight Initiative, 2024, [Civil Society Funding Dashboard - Niger](#).
- 12 The Gendarmerie Nationale in Niger is a paramilitary force responsible for law enforcement, particularly in rural areas outside the jurisdiction of the National Police.

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