

UN-wide Funding Framework for Women's Organizations and Civil Society Organizations



WHAT IS THE FUNDING FRAMEWORK?

The UN-wide Funding Framework is a system-wide roadmap to strengthen how the UN channels resources to women's organisations (WOs) and other civil society groups. Led by the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and Girls and the Spotlight Initiative, and guided by an Interagency Taskforce, it sets out six principles to make UN funding more accessible, flexible, predictable, and transformative.

WHY IS IT NEEDED?

Amidst a rising backlash against women's rights globally, WO/CSOs are more essential than ever, yet less than 1% of global gender-equality aid reaches women's organisations directly, with most resources flowing to large INGOs.

The UN plays a vital role in upholding women's human rights and supporting civic space, but its current funding architecture often fails to deliver resources equitably or predictably to WO. Pockets of good funding practice demonstrate what is possible, but systemic issues and restrictive requirements - often imposed by donors and Member States - mean these good practices remain the exception rather than the rule. Fragmented, short-term, and risk-averse UN funding practices mean resources bypass grassroots and structurally excluded groups—precisely when they need it most.

WHAT WILL IT CHANGE?

The UN-wide Funding Framework introduces a coherent, system-wide approach that transforms fragmented good practice into a new norm — one where women's movements are resourced, resilient, and able to drive the change the world urgently needs.

WHY NOW?

Three factors create an especially pivotal moment for the UN to reconsider how it resources WO/CSOs:



1. The UN80 Reform agenda seeks to increase coherence, improve efficiency and reduce transaction costs and the Funding Framework is designed to operationalize these ambitions and strengthen trust with civil society, especially WO.



2. The 2030 SDG deadline, for which chronic underfunding of women's organizations threatens progress on gender equality (SDG 5) and related goals.



3. The UN Gender Equality Acceleration Plan commits to internal transformation, including increased funding of at least \$300 million for WO.

SIX PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE UN FUNDING PRACTICE

- Principle 1 – Prioritize and set targets for funding to women's organisations:** Funding must deliberately centre WO, especially those led by and serving structurally excluded groups. This requires inclusive eligibility definitions, measurable funding targets, and dedicated windows for WO in pooled funds. WO must be treated as strategic partners and movement leaders, not simply as project implementers.
- Principle 2 – Reduce administrative burdens to accessing funding:** Complex applications, burdensome reporting and disproportionate due diligence requirements exclude grassroots organisations. The Framework calls for



streamlined and harmonised processes, plain language tools in local languages, proportionate compliance based on grant size, and alternative reporting formats such as oral or visual storytelling. The goal is to ensure accountability without compromising accessibility.

Principle 3 – Leverage the UN’s role as convener, amplifier, and strengthener: The UN’s unique legitimacy, convening power, and presence in fragile contexts position it to strengthen the broader funding ecosystem. This principle emphasises standing in solidarity with WOs and human rights defenders in advocacy towards donors and states, connecting WOs to decision-making spaces, amplifying their voices in global fora, and providing wraparound support beyond grants — such as technical assistance, accompaniment, and visibility.

Principle 4 – Provide core, flexible, and longer-term funding: To build sustainable movements, funding must include multi-year commitments, institutional/core support, budget flexibility, and coverage of care and wellbeing costs.

At least 25–30% of project grants should be flexible, with overheads recognised as essential. These approaches allow WOs to adapt to shifting contexts, sustain staff, and prioritise their own agendas.

Principle 5 – Reframe, redistribute, and share risk: The UN must rethink its approach to risk, shifting from viewing small or unregistered WOs as ‘high risk’ to recognising the risks of *not* funding them. Context-sensitive due diligence, tailored grant windows, pooled funding, and open dialogue on risks are key. Risk must be shared across agencies and donors, not pushed down the chain to local organisations.

Principle 6 – Shift power and ensure mutual accountability: True transformation requires embedding feminist accountability: WOs must help shape funding decisions, governance structures, and monitoring systems. This includes participation in funding decisions, transparent feedback on applications, safe feedback mechanisms, and spaces for collective reflection. Partnerships should be based on shared values and trust, not compliance alone.

FROM COMMITMENT TO ACTION

These six principles together set out a coherent roadmap for funding across the UN system that is accessible, equitable, fit-for-purpose and transformative. They demand both technical reforms — simplifying procedures, harmonising tools, embedding shared definitions — and normative change, including shifting power and recognising WOs as equal partners. But the UN cannot do this alone. Donors are called upon to fund in ways consistent with the principles and Member States are asked to uphold them in policy and decision-making that impacts UN funding practice.

WHAT THE UN WILL DO DIFFERENTLY

- Apply these six principles across all agencies, pooled funds, and programmes.
- Simplify systems, set targets, and integrate accountability.
- Value long-term partnerships over one-off projects.

WHAT IS BEING ASKED OF DONORS

- Align bilateral aid with these principles - avoiding restrictive earmarking or burdensome reporting demands.
- Incentivise coordination and support pooled funding mechanisms.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR WOS/CSOS

- Easier access to meaningful, long-term funding.
- More voice and influence in decision-making.
- Stronger, more sustainable movements able to defend rights and shape policy.

The interagency initiative is led by UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and Girls (the UN Trust Fund) and the UN Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate Violence against Women and Girls (Spotlight Initiative). It is guided by an Interagency Task Force chaired by the Trust Fund and Spotlight Initiative, with representatives from UN Women, UNHCR, UNICEF, OCHA, the Women Peace and Humanitarian Fund, UNFPA, UNDP, IOM and DCO.

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