



IN BRIEF



Spotlight Initiative
To eliminate violence against women and girls



DELIVERING AS ONE: UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM PROGRESS ON ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS (2019–2024)

Photo: UN Women/Norman Gorecho

The United Nations system plays a pivotal role in ending violence against women and girls

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) persists as a global human rights violation of pandemic proportions. It has significant impacts on the lives and well-being of individuals, communities and societies at large. Across a lifetime, **1 in 3 women** is subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence by a non-partner. This number has remained largely unchanged over the past decade. Worsening armed conflicts, climate change, technology-facilitated abuse, the COVID-19 pandemic and backlash against gender equality have all intensified the **risks of VAWG** over the past five years.

The urgency of action to end VAWG has never been greater. [Elimination is critical](#) to the realization of human rights and key to unlocking progress across all [Sustainable Development Goals](#), including for poverty eradication, food security, education, decent work, climate change, and peace and security. Ending VAWG requires a joined-up approach, involving entire societies and governments. As such, it is a cross-cutting priority across all United Nations mandates.



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In 2025, the world marked the [80-year anniversary of the United Nations](#) and the [30-year anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#). The current moment presents a valuable opportunity to take stock of how the United Nations system has contributed to eliminating VAWG. This brief presents a summary. It looks at how the United Nations has helped to advance normative standards; coordinated action with women's rights organizations, governments and other stakeholders; and delivered programmes grounded in best practices and strong evidence. The brief also identifies remaining gaps to close to accelerate progress towards ending VAWG by 2030, the endpoint for the Sustainable Development Goals.

About this brief

This brief draws on submissions made to the [Inventory of United Nations Activities to End Violence against Women](#) by 36 United Nations entities, financial institutions and inter-agency mechanisms, covering 2019 to 2024. Thematic analysis of data identified key patterns in actions by institutions and joint programmes. Progress reflected results from close partnerships with Member States, civil society and women's rights organizations, whose leadership and local ownership are fundamental in pushing forward and sustaining impacts.



On December 4th in the shadow of the temples of Angkor Wat, and in the margins of the 16 Days campaign, attention was focused towards the need to end violence against women. Hundreds of people joined the Siem Reap Running Race, saying no to violence against women. Photo: Niels den Hollander

Progress and achievements between 2019-2024

Setting new normative standards on VAWG

Over the past five years, the United Nations system has advanced the adoption of global norms and standards to end VAWG through advocacy, knowledge production, expertise, policy changes and dialogue facilitation. Landmark conventions have set binding obligations to act on [violence and harassment in the world of work](#) and [cybercrime](#). Treaty bodies have issued further guidance on implementing existing conventions, notably on [trafficking in persons](#), the rights of [Indigenous women and girls](#), and [equal, inclusive decision-making](#). Through inter-governmental mechanisms, countries reached agreements on [VAWG in the digital environment](#); links between ending VAWG and [climate change](#), [innovation](#) and [financing](#); and [survivor-centred approaches to conflict-related sexual violence](#).



The task now is to **translate these norms into action** and transformation at scale.

These gains were led by Member States and informed by women's rights organizations and advocates. They were advanced by United Nations independent bodies, including special rapporteurs, working groups, special representatives, and entities with normative mandates acting as penholders for reports and legal instruments. The task now is to **translate these norms into action and transformation at scale**. This requires coordinated and joint programming, pooled and predictable financing, and strengthened accountability.

Leveraging resources and expertise through coordination and joint programming

Coordination enables the United Nations to leverage the specialized expertise of individual entities and harness synergies. This process accelerates the delivery of comprehensive, high-impact strategies to end VAWG. Coordination occurs through joint programming, informed by shared guidance and supported by internal mechanisms for collaboration.

Joint programming

From 2019 to 2024, the United Nations deployed joint mechanisms to mobilize resources and scale up results, notably through the Spotlight Initiative, United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, and Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund. Additional joint programmes focused on specific forms of VAWG or pillars of work at the global, regional and country levels. They included the Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation, the Joint Global Programme on Essential Services and the Joint Programme on Gender-Based Violence Prevention in South-East Asia, among many others.

Joint programming has jump-started efficient crisis responses and rapid adaptation in humanitarian contexts. For example, in 2024, through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the United Nations supported access to multi-sectoral services that responded to and prevented gender-based violence in crises in 46 countries.



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Shared guidance

United Nations entities have collectively produced guidance to support the implementation of global norms and standards, based on robust evidence. Such guidance, covering the main pillars of work to end VAWG and thematic issues, helps to uphold quality standards and advance survivor-centred policies and programmes across a range of settings.

Notable examples include the [RESPECT prevention framework](#), the [16 Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for GBV in Emergencies Programming](#) and the [Statistical Framework for Measuring the Gender-Related Killing of Women and Girls \(Also Referred to as "Femicides/Feminicides"\)](#).

Coordination mechanisms

The United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on VAWG, led by UN Women, fosters coordination and collaboration among 18 entities. Further coordination occurs through specialized working groups, including [UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict](#), which involves 26 entities addressing conflict-related sexual violence. The [Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility](#) guides responses in humanitarian settings. The [Generation Equality Forum](#) Action Coalition on Gender-Based Violence has mobilized collective commitments by governments, United Nations entities, civil society, youth organizations and the private sector.



Philippines - women migrant workers rebuild lives, advocate for each other. Photo: UN Women/Norman Gorecho.



18 entities are involved in the United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), led by UN Women.



26 entities participate in UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, addressing conflict-related sexual violence.

BOX 1

Spotlight Initiative

Spotlight Initiative is the United Nations high-impact initiative to end violence against women and girls. Launched in 2017 in partnership with the European Union, with EUR 500 million in seed funding, the [Spotlight Initiative](#) is the United Nations' most ambitious effort ever to eliminate VAWG. It involves over a dozen United Nations entities coordinating comprehensive, evidence-based programmes. They operate under United Nations Resident Coordinators and the leadership of national governments, and in partnership with 1,250 civil society organizations.

Emphasizing inter-agency collaboration, shared frameworks and feminist civil society leadership, Spotlight Initiative demonstrates that coordinated action combined with flexible funding and strong national ownership can drive sustainable, system-wide changes to end VAWG.

Implemented across 25 countries and 5 regions through a combination of country- and regional-programming. Since 2019, Spotlight Initiative's investments ensured that:

- The overall conviction rate for gender-based violence doubled across 13 countries.
- More than 540 laws or policies were signed or strengthened to end violence against women and girls.
- USD 195 million was delivered to civil society organizations (49 per cent of activity funds).
- More than 5,000 local and grassroots women's rights organizations reported having greater influence and agency.
- Close to 3 million women and girls accessed gender-based violence services, including long-term recovery services
- Nearly 8 million young people participated in in- and out-of-school programmes promoting gender-equitable attitudes and behaviours.
- Close to 6 million men and boys were educated on positive masculinity, respectful family relationships and non-violent conflict resolution.
- Campaigns to prevent violence against women and girls reached an audience of nearly 384 million.
- 50 countries strengthened their National Action Plans to eliminate violence against women and girls.

Embedding best practice standards through programming

Strong laws and policy frameworks, including national action plans, [are foundational in ending VAWG](#). Comprehensive laws on VAWG are survivor-centred, include provisions for all forms of violence, and address prevention, protection, responses and accountability.

The United Nations supports Member States and partners to implement global norms and standards at the regional and national levels. This takes place through localized legal frameworks aligned with global commitments, and monitoring to uphold accountability for implementing laws and policies. In the past five years, the United Nations has made gains by providing technical support and resources to draft and revise laws and policies, and by monitoring implementation and increasing institutional accountability.

Support for legal reforms has focused on domestic violence, harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriage, and emerging concerns, including technology-facilitated VAWG. Policy assistance has emphasized strengthening national action plans, strategies, sectoral protocols and gender-responsive budgeting to end VAWG. Many reforms have required sustained advocacy and strategic litigation led by civil society organizations, often in coalitions with women's rights groups and survivors.

Despite significant progress, persistent gaps remain in legal protection and accountability, resources, coordination, civil society engagement and enforcement. Resistance from anti-gender movements continues to undermine the effective implementation of laws and policies to end VAWG.

BOX 2

Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation

The [UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation](#), active in 17 high-prevalence countries, has supported legal reforms in more than a dozen contexts. Through the influence of the programme, at least 19 countries have adopted or strengthened laws banning FGM. The programme provides technical assistance to governments while also engaging traditional and religious leaders and community advocates to promote enforcement and accountability.

Comprehensive service provision for survivors involves coordinated, multisectoral, survivor-centred health, social, police and judicial services guided by [international standards](#).

The United Nations has supported coordination and survivor-centred services through direct service provision and capacity-building for front-line actors. It has also helped to institutionalize and integrate activities to end VAWG in development and humanitarian contexts. These efforts have expanded access to health, psychosocial, legal and protection services.

Service delivery interventions have improved reach, integration, inclusivity and accountability in multiple sectors. Related efforts have improved judicial system responsiveness, fostered local innovations to reach marginalized groups and embedded service quality standards in national policies. Adapting services during COVID-19 maintained their reach by expanding remote delivery and case management.

Civil society organizations are often the first point of contact for survivors, providing trusted, survivor-centred, community-based health, psychosocial and legal support. United Nations partnerships with national and local organizations have been essential in extending survivor-centred services, particularly in humanitarian settings and among marginalized groups.

BOX 3

Essential Services for Women and Girls Subject to Violence

The [Essential Services Package](#), co-led by UN Women, UNFPA, UNDP, WHO and UNODC, has strengthened multisectoral services globally. By promoting common standards and survivor-centred care, it has improved the quality and impact of health, judicial, policing and social services for survivors and people at risk of violence.

In 2022–2023, 55 countries scaled up essential services aligned with international standards, 54 countries strengthened service coordination, 66 countries shifted towards gender-responsive and women-centred judicial and police services, and 24 countries improved the quality of social service provision for VAWG survivors.

Preventing VAWG requires multi-level, long-term interventions to transform unequal gender power relations and address intersecting inequalities. Core measures include community engagement, education, social norms change, economic empowerment programmes and support to women's rights movements, as outlined in [the RESPECT framework](#).

In the last five years, the United Nations has expanded evidence-based prevention efforts, scaling up what works in a range of settings. It has emphasized transforming harmful norms, engaging men and boys, supporting youth leadership, and embedding prevention in national frameworks and multiple sectors, including education.



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Prevention initiatives rely heavily on civil society leadership. Youth organizations and grass-roots women's groups often drive changes in norms. Partnerships with traditional and faith leaders help to foster local accountability. State endorsement and integration of these community-led approaches into national frameworks have been critical to their sustainability.

Yet fragmented programming, limited resources, weak monitoring and insufficient political will all hinder the potential to scale up, sustain and institutionalize evidence-based prevention. These challenges risk undermining the effectiveness and scope of long-term norm transformation.

BOX 4

EU4Gender Equality Initiative

Through joint programming by UN Women and UNFPA, the [EU4Gender Equality initiative](#) in the Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) reached over 41 million people with messages promoting gender equality, challenging stereotypes and urging the prevention of VAWG. As part of promoting positive fatherhood, 3,672 men participated in 49 "Papa Schools". These provided parenting skills and encouraged violence-free relationships.

High-quality, gender-disaggregated data from diverse sources are essential for designing, monitoring and improving policies, programmes and services to prevent and respond to VAWG.

The production of reliable, quality data on violence against women has received increased attention in recent years. The United Nations has sought to improve data quality, fill data gaps, develop monitoring and accountability frameworks, and generate knowledge and learning to inform policies to end VAWG.

Collectively, the system has advanced global methodologies, promoted cross-sector data coordination, and encouraged knowledge generation and learning through research, evaluations and South-South collaboration. Under the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Inter-Agency Working Group on Violence Against Women Estimation and Data produced the first [global, regional and country estimates of intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence as well as global and regional estimates of non-partner sexual violence](#). [Annual global and regional estimates](#) are produced on femicide based on the related [statistical framework](#) endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 2022. The UN system is addressing evidence gaps on the intersections across violence against women and violence against children notably through [guidance](#) to organizations that care for children, recognizing that women's safety and autonomy are essential to the children's wellbeing.

United Nations support has also been crucial in advancing [information management systems on gender-based violence](#). These back effective, coordinated responses to cases and survivor needs, including in periods of crisis. A substantial push on knowledge resources and evidence production and sharing has included developing platforms, such as the Spotlight Initiative's [Learning Centre](#), that can support comprehensive programming to end VAWG.



Sustained investment in integrated, disaggregated, ethical data systems would strengthen policy, service delivery, accountability and inclusion.



Ardo Djibo Fadimatou speaks to UN Women staff during a meeting at the Social Cohesion space. Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

Challenges remain in generating, coordinating and using high-quality, harmonized VAWG data. Barriers include fragmented data systems, limited analytical capacity, uneven use of data for decision-making, inconsistent ethical adherence, and gaps in data capturing the experiences and needs of marginalized groups. Sustained investment in integrated, disaggregated, ethical data systems would strengthen policy, service delivery, accountability and inclusion.

BOX 5

Joint Programme on Violence Against Women Data

The [Joint Programme on Violence Against Women Data](#), led by UN Women and WHO, has strengthened national capacities to collect, analyse and use VAWG data for policymaking and tracking targets under the Sustainable Development Goals. The programme has developed global technical guidance, supported prevalence studies in over 20 countries, promoted ethical and survivor-centred approaches to institutionalizing VAWG data in national statistical frameworks, and encouraged the use of monitoring data for policies and programmes.

Women's rights organizations and feminist movements play key roles in VAWG prevention and responses. They elevate the voices and experiences of survivors, shape policies, design and implement programmes, champion accountability and mobilize communities.

From 2019 to 2024, the United Nations prioritized engagement with women's rights organizations and feminist movements by providing flexible funding and capacity-building, and creating new opportunities for their participation in governance, multilateral spaces and knowledge-sharing platforms. Regional and local collaborations strengthened feminist movements by enhancing organizational sustainability and enabling activists and organizers to expand their skills and networks.

Through Spotlight Initiative, more than 5,000 local and grass-roots women's rights organizations worldwide reported increased influence and agency. This suggests that the United Nations has helped grass-roots actors become better positioned to influence national policies and hold governments accountable to human rights commitments in relation to VAWG and gender equality.

Persistent barriers, such as low-quality funding, short-term support and shrinking civic space, limit the scope and impact of women's rights organizations in responding to and preventing VAWG. United Nations priorities should therefore include promoting equitable partnerships, providing sustainable core funding, prioritizing activist safety, and creating an enabling environment for inclusive movement-building that is centred on marginalized groups and community needs.

BOX 6

UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women and Girls

The [United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women and Girls](#) has supported hundreds of women's rights organizations. It provides flexible funding, capacity-building and innovative platforms to sustain services, increase feminist organizing and advance evidence-based strategies. From 2019 to 2024, the Trust Fund provided grants of USD 102 million to 213 initiatives to prevent and address VAWG in over 70 countries and territories across five regions. Its impact is evident from Mexico to Nigeria and the Horn of Africa, where it empowered grass-roots groups to improve legal support for survivors, amplify marginalized voices and shift harmful norms.

A commitment to deliver as one

Eliminating VAWG by 2030 is only possible if all parties, including the United Nations system, stand together with a shared vision and bold leadership, while recognizing the key role of women's rights organizations in driving change. Amid overlapping crises and intensifying backlash, the system recommit to delivering as one, working with greater coherence, efficiency and resolve across its diverse mandates.

Moving forward, the United Nations system will:

1) Stand together to turn commitments into concrete actions

It will closely monitor the translation of global, regional and national commitments and policies into investments in systems, services and institutions that make the right to live free from VAWG a reality. Coordinating support to Member States, in close partnership with women's rights organizations, will help to secure the necessary expertise, knowledge and resources to achieve the bold commitments to zero violence by 2030 that were made in the [Beijing+30 Action Agenda](#). The United Nations will resist backlash, defend hard-won gains, and anticipate and respond to new and emerging forms of violence and risks.

2) Coordinate to achieve evidence-based impacts at scale

The costs of VAWG are enormous. The latest estimates suggest that they could amount to around [2 per cent](#) of global Gross Domestic Product. Needs are rising and global resources are shrinking. The United Nations will further develop evidence and modelling approaches to duplicate the most high-impact interventions at scale. Stronger coordination will maximize resources, further leverage United Nations expertise and avoid duplication through stepped-up joint programming. Integrating and elevating actions to end VAWG in joint programming and country-level processes, including Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, should help prioritize and embed these efforts in political engagement and programme planning. Improved tracking of financial contributions and results should demonstrate how the combination of actions by the different specialized United Nations entities enables to achieve transformative impact.



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3) Strengthen partnerships for sustainable, locally led transformation

VAWG exists in every country, community and context. Responses must be everywhere too – embedded across sectors, institutions and levels of society, both online and offline. Ending VAWG demands a whole-of-society approach. The United Nations system must continue deepening collaboration with governments, women’s rights organizations, civil society, the private sector and communities to prevent and respond at scale and with sustainable, meaningful impacts. Continued support to locally led and owned solutions is key. High-quality partnership with women’s rights organizations, including through multi-year and core funding, is essential. Women’s rights organizations are the first to respond to the impacts of VAWG on individuals and communities, and they remain engaged long after the headlines fade.



Young school girls organize themselves before the March to End Gender-Based Violence in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. One sign reads: "Refrain from using abusive language for Women and Children"
Photo: UN Women Tanzania/Deepika Nath



High-quality partnerships with women’s rights organizations, including multi-year and core funding, **are described as essential.**

This report reflects the contributions made by UN entities across the United Nations Systems to the UN Inventory for Ending Violence Against Women and Girls. They are: FAO, ILO, IOM, OCHA, OHCHR, Spotlight Initiative, UN Action, UN CEB, UNDP, UN DPKO, UN DPPA, UNECA, UNECLAC, UNESCAP, UNESCWA, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNITAR, UNODC, UNRWA, UN Trust Fund, UN Women, WFP, WHO, WTO, and WBG. Inter-agency and joint mechanisms contributing to this report include the IASC, GBV AoR, and the UN Action Multi-Partner Trust Fund on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence.