

Spotlight Initiative
To eliminate violence against women and girls

Investing in Civil Society Organizations and Movements – Driving Transformative, Sustainable Change

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Investing in Civil Society Organizations and Movements – Driving Transformative, Sustainable Change

The Importance of Engaging Civil Society in Ending Violence Against Women and Girls

Civil society organizations – and particularly feminist and women’s rights organizations – are at the forefront of efforts to end violence against women and girls. They are organizing and movement building, advocating for and demanding justice, and providing direct support to survivors of violence as first responders and essential service providers, including in contexts of crises. Civil society organizations

also play a vital role in ensuring that, in order to end violence against women and girls, the voices and perspectives of structurally marginalized groups are integrated into programmes and policies, including into recovery plans and emergency policies.

The partnership with civil society is a fundamental dimension of Spotlight Initiative’s structure and functioning. The Initiative has worked toward a transformative way of engaging with civil society, guided by the principle of leaving no one behind and the Sustainable Development Goal on partnerships, and rooted in broad-based national ownership.



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“Prevention and eradication of violence against women and girls is within our grasp, if feminist voices are amplified, feminist strategies are valued, and feminist leadership is integrated within decision-making spheres. The Global Reference Group of Spotlight Initiative embodies these principles to ensure that a world without violence is possible.”

- Krishanti Dharmaraj, Global Civil Society Reference Group member and representative to the Governing Body

Toward this end, the Initiative aims to ensure its partnerships are equal, inclusive and transparent, and underpinned by principles that are human rights-based and feminist, and that localize and shift power. This way of partnering is a unique “value add” of the Initiative, and helps to ensure the Initiative’s relevance, impact, and sustainability.

From governance and advisory roles to programme implementation and monitoring, this details the diverse and vital ways that civil society and movements have contributed to the Initiative, as well as Spotlight Initiative’s resourcing commitments to fuel their vital work.

1.1 Civil Society’s Role in Governing, Advising and Monitoring the Spotlight Initiative

Governance and advice

Representatives of women’s rights groups and human rights-based civil society organizations (including those representing groups facing intersecting forms of discrimination)¹ have been critically engaged in shaping the Initiative from its inception through governance and advisory roles.

Spotlight Initiative teams have established Regional, National and Global Civil Society Reference Groups, engaging diverse women’s rights and feminist activists as well as subject-matter experts and marginalized groups. Reference Groups advise on and monitor the implementation of the Initiative’s programmes, recommend changes and hold the Spotlight Initiative accountable to its commitments.

In addition to participation in Reference Groups, the Initiative ensures a full role in decision-making and representation of civil society within its governance structures: on National and Regional Steering Committees – the highest decision-making body at the programme level – and, at global level, the Global Operational Steering Committee and the Governing Body. In 2021, as a result, civil society partners were engaged in key decision-making related to programme and budget revisions, Phase II planning, COVID-19 response plans and annual workplans, which helped to improve the responsiveness of these plans to local contexts and to serve civil society’s needs. In **Kyrgyzstan**, for example, a number of recommendations from the National Reference Group were taken into consideration in the development of the Phase II proposal, including the integration of activities to increase awareness of duty bearers of the **Istanbul Convention**.

¹ These include, but are not limited to, women and girls living in rural communities, women and girls from ethnic minorities and indigenous communities, women and girls who are survivors of violence, women and girls living with HIV/AIDS, LGBTQI+ persons, women and girls living with disabilities, sex workers, domestic and informal workers, women of diverse sexual orientations, gender diverse women, etc.



Monitoring

Independent monitoring and reporting by civil society on the Initiative's contributions are critical to the legitimacy and relevance of the Initiative. In 2020, the **Count Me In! Consortium** and several members of Civil Society Reference Groups collectively developed a **Civil Society Monitoring Toolkit**. The toolkit includes a set of 26 indicators that Reference Groups can use to monitor the implementation of the Spotlight Initiative at country, regional and global levels. Indicators focus on three key areas:

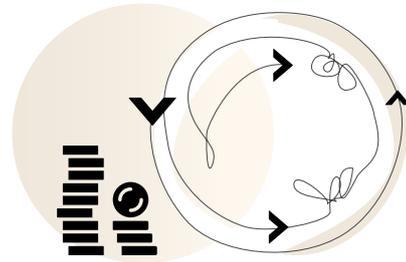
- Participation of civil society and intersectional feminist movements in governance, decision-making and programming
- Funding mechanisms and the disbursement of funds to feminist organizations and networks
- Implementation, including how well the Spotlight Initiative integrates the perspectives of feminist activists and constituency-led organizations.

Monitoring has resulted in the development of Advocacy Scorecards – a concrete tool to hold Spotlight Initiative accountable. In **Argentina, Belize, Niger** and **Zimbabwe**, the Reference Groups have produced such **scorecards**. Additional scorecards are in the pipeline for 2022.



Participation of civil society

and intersectional feminist movements in governance, decision making and programming



Funding mechanisms

and the disbursement of funds to feminist organizations and networks



Implementation

integrating the perspectives of feminist activists and constituency-led organizations



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The Global Reference Group's scorecard

In addition to programme level advocacy scorecards, noted above, the Spotlight Initiative Global Civil Society Reference Group (GRG) **also developed a scorecard**. The scorecard covered the period 2019 – 2020 and focused on assessing the participation, funding, protection and involvement of women's movements *at and from* the global level. Fully finalized in 2021, the scorecard takes stock of what works and what needs improvement. Regarding the latter, the Global Reference Group put forward a series of recommendations for future action, including: adding an additional civil society representative in the Operational Steering Committee; simplifying procedures and systems that impede grassroots organizations and women's movements from accessing and receiving funding; additional grant-based, demand-driven and flexible funding mechanisms; partnering with regional women's funds and other grant-making women's organizations; and additional resources and efforts for training in, and the full implementation of, the Spotlight Initiative's Specific Integrated Protection Approach in Spotlight Initiative countries and regions.

The Global Reference Group coordinators were able to present the results of their analysis and their recommendations to all Secretariat staff in December 2021. The Secretariat's civil society engagement team is committed to including them in its workplan for 2022.

More informal monitoring of the operations of the Spotlight Initiative and its engagement with civil society took place in March 2021, when the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat held its annual civil society consultation on the side-lines of the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The consultation highlighted gaps in the Initiative's engagement with civil society, particularly the need to: 1) better reach grassroots organizations; 2) remunerate Reference Group members; and 3) provide flexible and demand-driven funding during crises and beyond. Concrete action points for improvement were made, including the development of a strategy proposal on how the Initiative will concretely improve on flexible funding. The strategy is currently being developed by the Secretariat, with the guidance and support of the Global Reference Group.

Throughout 2021, the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat also rolled out its newly-developed [Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation \(PME\) Strategy](#). During the reporting period, 15 countries implemented participatory monitoring and evaluation strategies in their programme, adapting the global strategy to their local context and needs. Through country-level pilot projects and global peer-to-peer dialogues, the Spotlight Initiative contributed to enhanced dialogue with, and participation of, rights-holders in monitoring and evaluation processes, ensuring alignment with the principle of leaving no one behind.

1.2 Facilitating Meaningful Engagement with Reference Group Members

Fostering dialogue and exchange

The Secretariat, in close collaboration with Reference Group members, developed a [Guidance Note on achieving meaningful engagement and partnership with Civil Society Reference Groups](#), providing concrete guidance on meaningfully engaging Reference Group members on workplan development, budgeting, and monitoring. To track implementation of this guidance note, and further strengthen communication, collaboration and community between programme teams and

Reference Groups, and among Reference Groups, two surveys of Reference Group members were conducted. The surveys gather information on the programme's adherence to the principle of leaving no one behind, civil society's influence in decision-making bodies, the level of support provided to develop and implement a costed workplan, and coordination and communication with other Reference Groups. The survey results are shared with programme teams and Reference Groups, and this allows the Secretariat to provide targeted support where needed, informing guidance to strengthen engagement and partnership with civil society as well.

To further foster knowledge exchange, cross-regional meetings were also held in February and November 2021. Held twice-annually, these meetings serve as a platform for feedback and exchange of experiences across Reference Group members and Spotlight Initiative colleagues, ensuring that members' advice is regularly reflected in the Initiative's work. The Global Reference Group launched a focal point system across Reference Group members at global, regional and national levels. Focal points meet on a quarterly basis, and aim to further strengthen communication channels, conduct joint advocacy and facilitate the sharing of best practices among all Reference Groups.

Finally, the Secretariat hosts a set of diverse online platforms to facilitate communication among Reference Group members, including a Civil Society Reference Group Community of Practice page on Facebook with over 230 members and a [dedicated page on the Spotlight Initiative website](#).



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Resourcing Reference Group members

As the Civil Society National and Regional Reference Groups became increasingly operational, it was clear that members needed – and wanted – to allocate significant time and effort to make their membership impactful. Reference Group members called for financial compensation for members’ time and expertise, recognizing and valuing the engagement of civil society with the Spotlight Initiative and more broadly to ending violence against women and girls.

In April 2021, the Deputy Secretary-General made a strong recommendation to Resident Coordinators to improve their engagement with Reference Groups by looking into appropriate modalities to compensate members’ engagement. In response, the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat engaged in wide ranging stakeholder consultations at all levels, developing a **Guidance Note on Compensation of Civil Society Reference Group Members** that sets out key parameters for compensation of Reference Group members while leaving room for programme teams to determine context-based solutions. Though the Secretariat’s guidance is intended to help facilitate compensation where appropriate and beneficial,

the decision on whether to compensate Reference Group members ultimately lies with the Resident Coordinator and the UN Country Team, in line with established practice in each country.

Costed and budgeted workplans

In addition to compensation, to further ensure meaningful engagement, Reference Groups are encouraged to develop a costed workplan that resources the activities the Civil Society Reference Group plans to undertake (what is planned is up to the individual Civil Society Reference Group members, as captured in the box below). Notably, in 2021, the workplan now allows members to budget for their financial compensation, as described above.

In 2021, the Civil Society National and Regional Reference Groups budgeted a total of USD 745,229 for their workplans,² ranging from USD 4,000 to USD 115,000.³ The Global Reference Group budgeted USD 250,000 for a two-year workplan. Spotlight Initiative’s commitment to allocate resources to this represents an important step in the international development sector, valuing the time, expertise and contributions of civil society.

² This total budget includes both annual and multi-year workplans.

³ While three Reference Groups (Nigeria, Central Asia and Afghanistan Regional Programme and Safe and Fair) had not budgeted their workplans in 2021, two programmes (Afghanistan and Africa Regional) had not yet established a Reference Group and therefore did not have a workplan.

Budgeting the workplan: Supporting Civil Society Reference Group engagement in Belize

To ensure relevance and alignment with the specific contexts in which they work, individual Reference Groups decide on the activities they will undertake and reflect these in their workplans. In **Belize**, for example, the budget was utilized to contract a technical consultant to develop a two-year workplan (2022–2023), an advocacy strategy, a monitoring and evaluation tool and a Civil Society National Reference Group scorecard. These documents will enable the Reference Group members to undertake regular oversight visits and ensure that the activities being implemented reach the most marginalized groups and persons. Furthermore, the Civil Society National Reference Group's ICT capacity was strengthened through the establishment of three technical and ICT hubs to support greater functionality of the Civil Society Reference Group. Members can communicate and work online together more effectively, and the Civil Society National Reference Group can support actions under Pillar 6 geared towards strengthening civil society organizations and women's movements to advocate, design, implement, monitor and evaluate programmes on family violence.

2 Investing in Feminist and Women's Movements: Why it Matters

Civil society organizations have pushed for a bold, transformative feminist response to violence against women and girls, and other (intersecting) global crises. Their policy demands, which are directed to

international organizations, donors and governments, include the need to promote a paradigm shift when it comes to resourcing civil society organizations: greater flexibility and long-term, core funding so that civil society organizations – and particularly feminist and women's rights groups, and local and grassroots organizations – can continue promoting and protecting women's and girls' human rights.



We are dealing, right now, with an organized transnational movement, whose goal is the advancement of an anti-gender agenda that is attacking the rights of women, especially of LGBTQI+ people. And, paradoxically, these movements are better funded than women's rights advocates and women's rights movements. I am therefore calling for a paradigm shift from a vertical donor-grantee mentality to an equal partnership with more honest and humble conversations and a deep desire to learn together."

- Shamah Bulangis, Global Civil Society Reference Group member, 18 March 2021

2.1 Leveraging Quality Funding to Resource and Sustain Civil Society and Women’s Movements

Background on the analysis

Each year, country and regional programmes submit self-reported data on their formal funding-based partnerships with civil society organizations (that is, the civil society organizations contracted by a Recipient UN Organization as implementing partners, grantees or vendors of services). The reported data enables an analysis of how well the Initiative is meeting its targets on funding civil society, while also showcasing global and regional trends.

The results presented here are cumulative from the start of the Spotlight Initiative, underscoring that funding commitments are for the programme as a whole, and in its entirety (and will not necessarily follow a linear or proportional increase year-to-year). The analysis presents funds “allocated” as funds budgeted and planned for civil society partners in a particular Spotlight Initiative programme. “Awarded” or “delivered” funds are any financial grant, contract, or partnership agreement legally signed with a civil society organization. The funds that are directly attributable to implementing the programme’s

activities are referred to as “activity funds”. The following chapter has details on the methodology used to calculate this.

The power of funding feminist movements and civil society

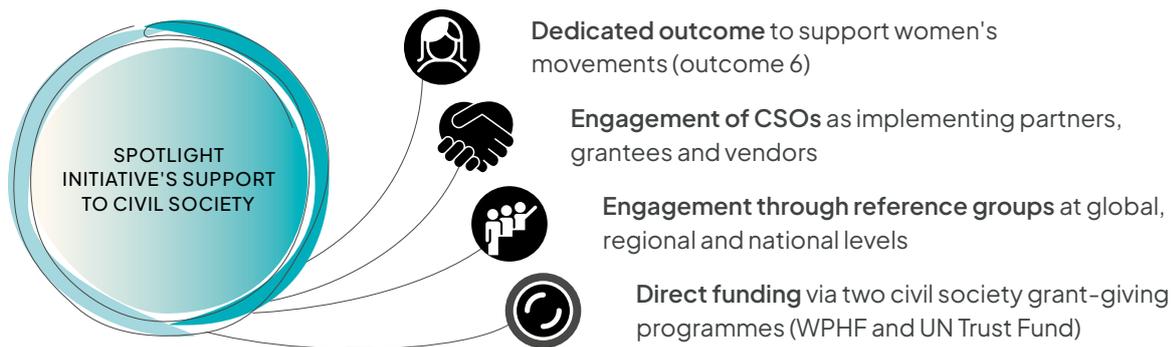
Evidence demonstrates that the autonomous mobilization of feminists in domestic and transnational contexts is a critical factor accounting for policy change to eliminate violence against women and girls. The active presence of feminist movements in countries was associated with states where legal reforms on violence against women and girls had occurred, pointing to the fundamental importance of activism and a vibrant civil society.⁴ Despite this evidence, women’s rights organizations and autonomous feminist movements remain severely underfunded. As a fund that aspires to integrate feminist principles, the Initiative aims to close the resource gap by channelling significant funding to civil society organizations, and in particular, women’s organizations at national and local levels.

In order to contribute to transforming the funding landscape, Spotlight Initiative aims to address deep-rooted power imbalances (often reproduced by international development programming) by working towards an inclusive, human rights-based.



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4 S. Laurel Weldon & Mala Htun, [Feminist mobilisation and progressive policy change: why governments take action to combat violence against women.](#)



and feminist funding ecosystem that shifts money and decision-making power to grassroots and local women's organizations and supports feminist movements. To do this, the Initiative invests in civil society through a twin-track approach: directly through its Pillar 6, focused on supporting autonomous women's movements; and through mainstreamed support across all other Pillars of the programme, partnering with civil society to deliver programming. The Spotlight Initiative's Civil Society Grant Giving Programmes complement this approach in partnership with the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund.

The Spotlight Initiative continues to meet and exceed the funding commitments to civil society and women's organizations (as seen below).

Resourcing the key drivers of change: Funding civil society

In 2019, the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat launched the **Grassroots Action Plan**, which includes concrete recommendations on how programmes can simplify partnership processes and make them more inclusive, to be able to go beyond the "usual suspects" and reach new partners.

As of December 2021, cumulatively Spotlight Initiative programmes **allocated 49 per cent**, or

about **USD 179 million**,⁵ of activity funds to civil society organizations, achieving its commitment to delivering 30–50 per cent of Spotlight Initiative programme funds through civil society organizations. This is an increase of approximately USD 33 million from the previous year. All five regions in which the Initiative works are exceeding the minimum target of 30 per cent, with Central Asia⁶ leading at 60 per cent. Of the allocated civil society funds, a total of **USD 144.5 million** was already **awarded** to civil society organizations, an increase **of close to USD 48 million from 2020**. This means that programmes have now delivered about 81 per cent of the total allocated funding for civil society organizations.

In all regions, the high and increasing implementation rate of funding through civil society organizations demonstrates Spotlight Initiative's strong commitment and sends an important signal to other donors on the importance of investing in autonomous women's movements and in national, local and grassroots civil society organizations as essential partners to eliminate violence against women and girls.⁷ The Spotlight Initiative is committed to continuing on an upward trajectory in supporting civil society organizations, with additional civil society organization allocations to be confirmed in 2022 for the **Caribbean, Central Asia** and the **Pacific** regions as they enter into their second phase of programming.

5 This includes USD 36.7 million allocated to CSOs by the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund.

6 For the purpose of this analysis, Afghanistan is included in the Central Asia region.

7 See the regional allocation table further in this chapter.

USD 179 million allocated to civil society organizations as of December 2021

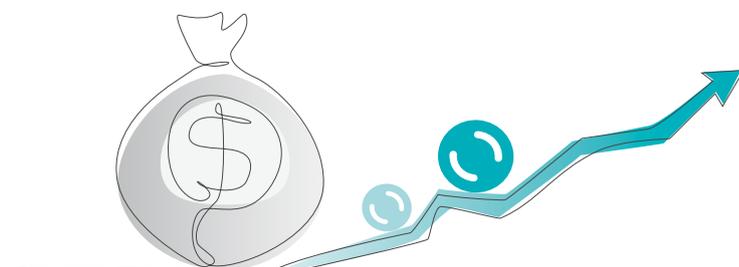
(49% of activity funds)

Of this, USD 144.5 million has been already awarded



30%
minimum commitment

Support to grassroots organizations



USD 25 million
directly awarded to local
and grassroots groups

as implementing partners, grantees
and vendors

Funding national, local and grassroots organizations

In line with feminist funding principles and the Initiative's Theory of Change, Spotlight Initiative believes civil society organizations and movements anchored in local communities are best placed to advocate for and pursue sustainable solutions to end violence against women and girls. As of 2021, the Initiative has exceeded its target of delivering 50–70 per cent of civil society organization funding to national, local and grassroots organizations, with 78 per cent of the USD 144.5 million delivered to civil society organizations channelled to national, local and grassroots organizations,⁸ which is over a USD 40 million increase from 2020. All regions are significantly exceeding the minimum threshold of 50 per cent ranging from 67 per cent in the Pacific to 87 per cent in Central Asia. Of the funding delivered

to civil society organizations, USD 25 million went **exclusively to local and grassroots organizations**.⁹ This is an additional USD 12 million compared to the previous reporting period, demonstrating the sustained and increased focus of the Initiative's support to local actors.

The impact of investing locally: Amplifying grassroots groups' advocacy

In **Nigeria**, the Spotlight Initiative partnered with local and grassroots organizations and provided opportunities to strengthen their capacities for advocacy on issues surrounding violence against women and girls, sexual violence, harmful practices, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. Through grants allocated to these organizations, at least two platforms of local and grassroots organizations were established and included women and girls living with

⁸ In contrast, 6.5% of the delivered funds were channelled to regional civil society organizations and 15.9% to international civil society organizations.

⁹ See definition in the Methodology note on page 23–24

Funding commitments

ACHIEVED AS OF DECEMBER 2021



disabilities and women and girls facing intersecting forms of discrimination. Through these platforms, at least 15,000 direct participants have benefitted from second-chance education opportunities and livelihood support to minimize their vulnerabilities to gender-based violence, harmful practices, and sexual and reproductive health rights violations. The section below on “sub-granting and subcontracting” has more information on how the Initiative is funding local and grassroots organizations.

Funding women-led, women’s rights and feminist organizations

Most bilateral and multilateral funding does not reach the women’s rights organizations that are driving transformative and sustainable social change, particularly in the Global South. Studies show that 1 per cent of gender-focused aid from governments goes to autonomous women’s organizations¹⁰ and only 5 per cent of total bilateral aid goes to advancing gender equality as the principal priority.¹¹ Most gender

¹⁰ OECD, (March, 2019). *Aid in Support of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: Donor Charts*.

¹¹ *OECD Development finance for gender equality and women’s empowerment: A 2021 snapshot*.

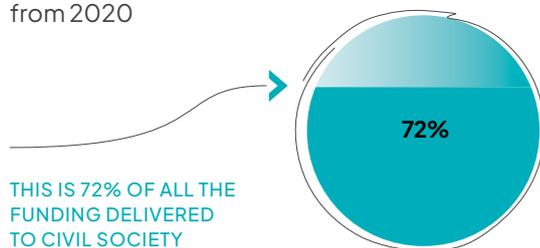
equality funding tends to be invested in international organizations based in donor countries rather than grassroots feminist organizations leading their own, context-specific solutions.¹² To address this funding gap, the Initiative delivered **72 per cent (USD 104 million) of the awarded funds to civil society organizations that are led by women, feminist and women's rights organizations.**¹³ This is an additional USD 28 million compared to the end of 2020 and ranges from 61 per cent in **Africa** to 81 per cent in the **Caribbean**, and 94 per cent by the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) and the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women.

The Spotlight Initiative's intentional and deep investment in women's organizations accelerates change in the lives of women and girls and has a ripple effect across all of society. The Spotlight

Initiative in **Uganda**, for example, supported the national women's organizations lobby to successfully secure high-level appointments (ministers and vice presidency) for women in the 2021 election in the parliament. This shift towards more women in leadership is an important milestone for the status of gender equality and equal political engagement in the country more broadly. The Spotlight Initiative is optimistic that these women will serve as reliable, key government partners in maintaining political buy-in to eliminate violence against women and girls in the long term. To sustain the efforts of funding women's organizations across the **Central Asia** region, the regional programme worked towards the establishment of a regionally rooted grant-making mechanism, with a scoping study to map over 600 active women's civil society organizations and activists in the region and developed a grant-making manual to ensure alignment with local needs.

USD 104 million invested in women's organizations,

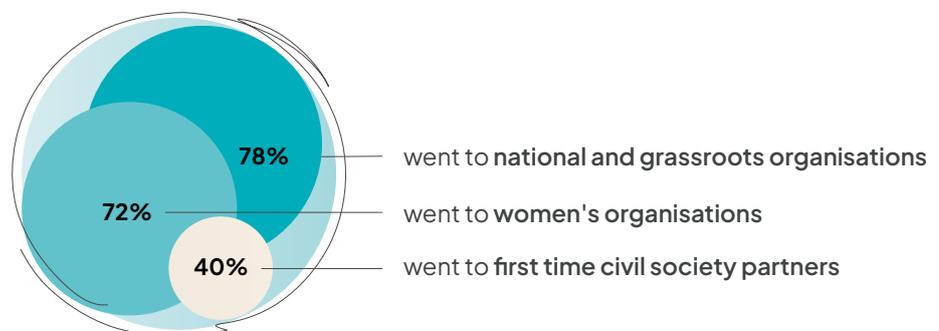
an additional 28 million from 2020



Funding new partners and broadening the ecosystem

Finally, Spotlight Initiative is continuously seeking to expand its pool of civil society partners to better reach groups, especially marginalized women and girls and those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, that are otherwise excluded from traditional funding and programming. **As of December 2021, Spotlight Initiative programmes delivered 40 per cent of the global civil society funding to new partners that had not previously worked with the respective United Nation agency – an increase of USD 15 million from the previous**

Of the **USD 144.5 million** delivered to CSOs so far



12 Foundation centre, *State of Global Giving by U.S. foundations the state of 2011-2015*, showing that of USD 4.1 billion that US foundations donated between 2011 and 2015, only 11.7 per cent went directly to local organizations based in the country where programming occurred.

13 See definition in the Methodology note on page 23-24

reporting period. This ranges from 16 per cent in the Pacific to 42 per cent in the Caribbean and 76 per cent by the two Trust Funds, and is the result of intentional work at programme level to diversify and

localize its partners, through mapping and targeted outreach as well as institutional strengthening of civil society organizations.

Civil Society National Reference Group partners to help diversify funding

In **Trinidad and Tobago**, the Civil Society National Reference Group actively participated in an activity that aimed to build the institutional capacity of grassroots organizations to overcome barriers in diversifying their funding streams and gaining access to international grants and opportunities to implement large-scale projects. This is part of a broader goal of the Spotlight Initiative country programme to shift ownership for sustainable development and gender equality from international agencies to national, and importantly, local and grassroots organizations. The Civil Society National Reference Group supported programme implementation and provided guidance to the capacity-building team on the mapping of civil society organizations with 51 organizations participating in a needs assessment from which a curriculum and capacity-building workshops were developed, supporting organizations to diversify their funding streams.

The new WithHer Fund: Mobilizing flexible financial support to frontline women's organizations The drivers of change

In partnership with the UN Foundation, and as part of a commitment made during the Generation Equality Forum, the Spotlight Initiative launched a funding vehicle – the **WithHer Fund**. Operating under feminist grant-making principles (flexibility, trust and transparency), the WithHer Fund works to channel flexible core funding to grassroots and women's organizations working to end violence against women and girls in their communities. The fund addresses the barriers to funding that small organizations usually face, by applying a streamlined application and reporting process and offering small-sized grants. The fund also aims to complement existing international grant-making mechanisms by raising money from new or untapped sources, such as the private sector and the general public.

The UN Foundation and Spotlight Initiative selected the first cohort of WithHer Fund grantees – working in Argentina, Belize, El Salvador, Malawi, Mali, and Trinidad and Tobago – based on certain criteria. The fund grantees were chosen based on: their track record in work in ending violence against women and girls in general and in the work place in particular; grassroots women's and feminist leadership; regional diversity; urgency of resourcing needs; and experience of historic barriers in accessing funding of this kind.

Seed funding for the first cohort of grantees was made possible with initial support from the UN Foundation, as well as The Estée Lauder Companies Charitable Foundation and the H&M Foundation. At the end of 2021, the WithHer Fund had been seeded with a total of USD 180,000. The UN Foundation and Spotlight Initiative plan to scale up this funding to reach more grassroots organizations in the months to come, continuing to mobilize resources with individual philanthropists, corporate foundations, private sector companies, **the general public** and other potential donors.



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Flexible funding – fuelling civil society, feminist and women’s movements

As noted above, local women’s rights and feminist organizations have for decades called for flexible, sustainable and long-term funding. In response, the Spotlight Initiative is continuously working to localize and decolonize resourcing by investing in grassroots women’s movements and organizations. The Initiative recognizes the institutional and systemic barriers that inhibit these groups and movements from accessing funding, and is pushing to change the way we fund feminist social change to be more flexible and locally driven.

Core institutional funding

Core institutional funding can be defined by what it is not: it is not funding earmarked for specific programmatic activities or overhead costs related to delivering. Rather, the purpose of core institutional funding is to support an organization’s overall institutional capacity. Core funding may cover general operations and core costs, such as paying staff salaries and office rent, purchasing equipment

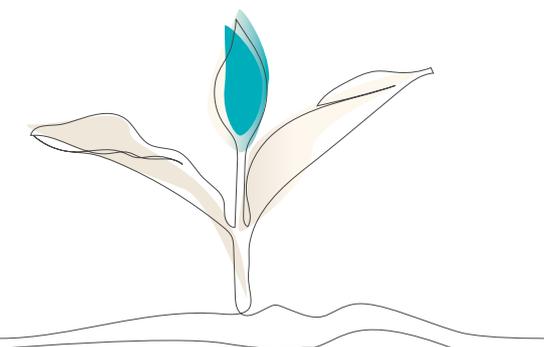
and ICT services. Institutional funding also provides psychosocial support and health insurance for staff to put in place new adaptive strategies and systems or even to raise staff awareness and develop their capacities in technical areas.

As such, institutional funding is essential to local women’s organizations’ survival and their ability to respond to changing circumstances and contexts; it is particularly helpful for local organizations working in complex and rapidly evolving environments. And it continues to be urgently needed: the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund 2021 annual civil society organization survey, which included 61 civil society organizations from 23 countries, revealed that nearly 91 per cent of civil society organizations feel that their organization’s existence is under threat, at moderate, high or very high risk, due to a lack of institutional funding or core funding in the women, peace and security (WPS) and humanitarian sphere. This is an increase of around 4 per cent from 2020. Another 20.5 per cent of organizations feel that this risk has substantially increased from 2020.

Core funding strengthens organizational capacity and learning, allows organizations to determine their

USD 22 million has been invested in core support to civil society

THIS IS 15% OF TOTAL AWARDED CSO FUNDING



own priorities, and recognizes them as the key drivers of change, ultimately enhancing their impact.¹⁴ Core support also widens democratic space, enhances accountability and supports the protection of human rights and peace.

As of December 2021, USD 22 million has been invested in core institutional funding globally, of which USD 10.5 million comes from country and regional programmes and USD 11.5 million from the two civil society grant giving programmes (through WPHF and the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women). This corresponds to approximately 15 per cent of the total delivered amount to civil society organizations globally. A total of 51 per cent of all awards to civil society organizations include core institutional support. This showcases the Initiative's dedication to intentionally support the resilience and autonomy of civil society organizations. That said, in the face of increasing and multifaceted crises (climate change, conservative backlash facing women's rights organizations and feminist organizations etc.) more funding should be channelled and earmarked for quality, long-term, core institutional support for civil society organizations to respond to their evolving needs and provide them with the adequate resources needed to strengthen their adaptation and resilience capacity.

Small grants: a rights-based funding modality for drivers of change

Small grants are a funding mechanism used by some United Nations agencies to deepen their reach to national, local and grassroots organizations, in

particular organizations that struggle to meet the selection requirements of the United Nations. The small grants have a simplified application process and usually range between USD 2,500 to USD 50,000 (depending on the United Nations agency) and may be applied for in relation to programmatic activities or to support and strengthen the institutional capacities of civil society organizations. During the reporting period, Spotlight Initiative programmes continued to apply the small grant mechanism as a means to channel core institutional funding to local women's organizations. In fact, 17 per cent of the awards that include a core institutional support component provide 100 per cent core support, for example in the form of small grants.

In **Jamaica**, seven civil society organizations received grant funding to support the scale-up of existing initiatives currently being implemented in advocacy, service delivery, programming and creating safe spaces. The simplified modality for the disbursement of grants has been crucial for civil society organizations that engage key and traditionally left-behind constituents to access funding. In Jamaica, through flexible grants, WE-Change was able to undergo crucial capacity building for their volunteer network to address the increase in violence against women and girls within the lesbian, bisexual and queer+ community during the COVID-19 pandemic. The organization's ability to advocate more meaningfully for lesbian, bisexual and queer+ women in Jamaica was strengthened and its ability to provide psychosocial support to members of the LBQ+ and ally community who are experiencing violence was increased. The grants

¹⁴ Angelika Arutyunova and Cindy Clark, *Watering the Leaves, Starving the Roots*, 7 October 2013. Page 25.

further enabled the **Jamaica Association for the Deaf** to host a series of workshops and consultation sessions engaging 51 deaf and hard-of-hearing girls and women and 77 members of staff from deaf schools and organizations. The workshop focused on building awareness around violence against women and girls, building confidence to report incidents of violence against women and girls and cultivating willingness to access victim support services.

The **Caribbean** and **Pacific regional programmes** ensured that the grant application processes involved fewer steps than other partnership mechanisms.

Organizations were invited to apply to a small grant funding opportunity, and a series of virtual town-halls were hosted to prepare potential applicants for the application process and to provide an overview of the requirements, guidelines in the development of proposals and budgets, and reporting and monitoring and evaluation requirements. In **Mexico**, as a direct response to the request of civil society organizations for increased funding to grassroots and local organizations, 23 civil society organizations and 5 women's shelters were supported, which ultimately benefitted over 24,000 women and girls.

Core institutional funds and mental health

Grantees of the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women used the core institutional funds to ensure the **self-care and resilience** of staff, which enabled organizations to continue to work productively in communities with women and girls. For example, in **Argentina**, Fundación Andhes (*Abogados y abogadas del Noroeste argentino en Derechos Humanos y estudios sociales*), a small organization training cis, trans and lesbian women in various organizations to become community legal advisers for survivors of violence, decided to use its self-care funds to hire a psychologist for the organization's staff who have been dealing with an increasing number of reports of violence. The HACEY Health Initiative in **Nigeria** engaged a therapist for its own staff's mental health well-being. Staff reported this benefitted the organization by enabling staff to improve their self-care and to cope better with challenges that they experience. Quarterly reports from this intervention have shown a general decrease in anxiety and depression among staff, as well as positive coping mechanisms to manage stress. Also in Nigeria, the Society for Life Changers and Good Parental Care enrolled all its staff into a health insurance programme, which ensured continued project implementation.

Sub-granting and subcontracting

When Spotlight Initiative programmes' civil society organization partners sub-grant or subcontract a portion of the awarded funds, it allows local and grassroots organizations to access funding and capacity development opportunities that they may not qualify for under United Nations accountability and procedure standards. Indeed, the sub-grantor or subcontractor entity, often a larger or more consolidated national civil society organization, is often better placed to ensure greater support and flexibility and to open up opportunities for entities,

which by virtue of their closeness, are naturally positioned to better reach and serve marginalized groups. Spotlight Initiative programme teams continue to explore this modality as an effective way to expand the grassroots outreach of the United Nations.

As of December 2021, 12 per cent of awards to civil society organizations reported channelling some awarded funds through sub-granting or subcontracting mechanisms. Of those that reported this data,¹⁵ a weighted average of 36 per cent of the award's financial value is dedicated to sub-granting

¹⁵ 74% of awards to CSOs that have reported having a sub-granting or sub-contracting component have reported data on the share of the award's financial value dedicated to these modalities.

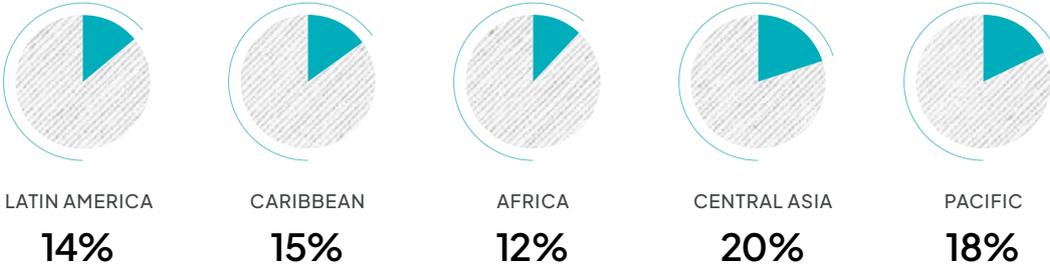
or subcontracting. For example, in **Nigeria**, local and grassroots civil society organizations received sub-grants to work directly with women and girls, schools and communities in the programme's focus states. The sub-grantees helped to form coordination mechanisms and effective monitoring of the intervention, thus ensuring ownership, local sustainability and, most importantly, that marginalized groups are not left behind.

While this is a step in the right direction, it is important to recognize the policy and process-related barriers that make it inherently difficult for local organizations, particularly those led by women and marginalized groups, to access quality funding. Spotlight Initiative is devoted to continuing its investments and partnerships with women's organizations and movements at an unprecedented scale and scope, while simplifying and adapting its processes to enhance access to small, grassroots and local women's and youth organizations.

Supporting women's movements through a dedicated outcome area

The recognition that women's movements are at the core of efforts to end violence against women and girls led, in 2017, to the expansion of the Spotlight Initiative's Theory of Change, with the inclusion of Pillar 6 focusing on strengthening women's movements. While civil society organizations and women's organizations are supported and engaged as programme partners across all Outcome Areas, this particular Outcome allows for deep and targeted support for autonomous women's movements, including network-building, capacity-strengthening, institutional funding of organizations and efforts to increase civil society organizations' influence and agency to work on ending violence against women and girls.

% of programme activity funds allocated to **Pillar 6 – Women's Movements**



Across all five regions, USD 41.5 million or 14 per cent of activity funds are currently allocated to Pillar 6, which falls on the high end of the Initiative’s target range of 10–15 per cent. This ranges from 20 per cent in Central Asia¹⁶ to 12 per cent in Africa. This is an increase of USD 8 million since December 2020. This investment aims to contribute to strengthening the movements and sustaining organizational resilience to continue their important work.

Civil Society Grant-Giving Programmes

To complement the civil society support efforts of country and regional programmes, the Initiative has committed to channelling 10 per cent of each of the five regional investment envelopes to Civil Society Grant Giving Programmes. These funds are aimed at reaching national, local and grassroots feminist organizations and supporting women’s movements. Since July 2019, the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund) has been allocating grants in Africa and Latin America, with the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) further supporting five African countries. Since 2020, the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund has also been granting funds in Afghanistan, Haiti and Papua New Guinea. For the Caribbean, Central Asia and the Pacific, the 10 per cent regional allocation for civil society grants was integrated into the regional programmes¹⁷ by adding a Pillar 6 that focuses on strengthening women’s movements,

including both programmatic activities and direct grants. Overall these grant giving programmes have allocated USD 36.7 million in grants to civil society to address violence against women and girls.

As of December 2021, the UN Trust Fund and the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund have jointly delivered USD 33.6 million¹⁸ to civil society organizations across all regions. This is an additional USD 5.5 million delivered compared to the previous reporting period. The Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund has remaining funds in Papua New Guinea and in Afghanistan that are yet to be granted, but these funds face uncertainties due to the political and security situation. Of the total funds delivered through the two UN trust funds with whom the Initiative partners, 79 per cent supports national, local and grassroots organizations, and 94 per cent supports partners that are women-led, women’s rights organizations and feminist organizations. Lastly, 60 per cent was awarded to new partners, which had not previously worked with the respective UN Trust Fund prior to the launch of the Spotlight Initiative.

In total, 37,761,857 people were reached by the 55 UN Trust Fund grantees funded under the Spotlight Initiative by 2021.¹⁹ Grantees specifically reached women and girls experiencing intersecting forms of violence and oppression and had the objective of leaving no one behind. As of 2021, grantees reached 9,935

The UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund allocated **USD 36.7 million** to civil society organizations

92% HAS ALREADY BEEN AWARDED



¹⁶ The Safe and Fair programme in the ASEAN countries has a different programmatic structure and, as a result, it lacks Outcome 6 and is therefore not included in this analysis.

¹⁷ Caribbean (USD 2,952,830), Central Asia (USD 1,773,584) and the Pacific (USD 2,952,830).

¹⁸ USD 24 million by the UN Trust Fund and USD 9.6 by the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund.

¹⁹ All numbers are based on self-reported data, and account for double-counting as feasible. In addition, this data is an aggregate of data collected through a survey sent to all grantees, of which the UN Trust Fund received a response rate of 95%.



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indigenous women and girls and 340 lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and girls.

Similarly, the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund focuses on resourcing local and grassroots women’s organizations, with grants ranging in size from USD 2,500 to USD 200,000. During the reporting period, 74 partners reached 126,223 direct right-holders, of which 73 per cent were women and girls. An estimated 2.5 million indirect right-holders were also reached. Overall, roughly 20 per cent of grantee projects work with women who are forcibly displaced, 41 per cent with women and people living with disabilities, 27 per cent with child mothers, single mothers and widows, 8 per cent with indigenous and ethnic minorities, nearly 3 per cent with women and girl sex workers, and over 1.0 per cent with LGBTQI communities.²⁰

Flexible funding through the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund

In 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact the work of grantees in numerous ways, including the sustainability of their organizations.²¹ The Initiative supported two UN trust funds – the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund – to continue adopting more flexible funding mechanisms for the resilience of grantees and their capacity to adapt to the new, continuing and reinforced challenges that the pandemic has brought for women and girls.

The two Trust Funds invested a total of **USD 11.5 million²² in core institutional support**, with an average of 34.3 per cent in all awards. This is likely to increase in 2022 as the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund will award the remaining grants in Papua New Guinea and Afghanistan.

²⁰ Data reported by WPHF aggregated grantee projects working with LGBTQI communities and female sex workers at 4%; in the running text above, the data is disaggregated (with roughly 1.0% of projects working with LGBTQI communities, and roughly 3% with female sex workers).

²¹ The Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund’s annual CSO survey in 2021 included 61 CSOs from 23 countries. It revealed that 90.7% of CSOs feel that their organization’s existence is under threat, at moderate, high or very high risk, due to lack of institutional funding or core funding in the women, peace and security and humanitarian sphere, an increase of around 4 per cent from 2020. Another 20.5% of organizations feel that this risk has substantially increased from 2020.

²² UN Trust Fund channelled USD 11,227,353 and the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund channelled USD 315,990.



“I had never used a smartphone before and when our organization received the tablets, I had no idea what to do with it... Today, I am able to surf the internet, manage the Omprakash platform and attend all trainings on zoom without any difficulties. I will use my new acquired skills in looking for further collaboration and networking. I am more confident in my abilities than I was 6 months ago”

– Masauko Jafali, Young Women Rise, Chiradzulu, Malawi (UN Trust Fund)

The **UN Trust Fund’s** grantees used funds from the influx of COVID-19 institutional funding²³ to continue adapting to the ongoing crisis and innovating as necessary to deliver services. The 44 grantees receiving **COVID-19-related funding in sub-Saharan Africa reached at least 15,244,263 people** and a minimum of 190,725 women and girls were directly supported to exercise agency for change in their own lives. Grantees reported that the infusion of resources for organizational resilience in the COVID-19 response strengthened their ability to respond to and cover the basic and emergency needs of women and girls. Institutional strengthening also extended to ensure self-care, resilience and remote working for staff with at least **1,206 staff enabled to work from home effectively** in order to continue to work productively in communities with women and girls.

The **Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund** included a new funding stream for institutional support to the calls for proposals in **Afghanistan, Papua New Guinea** and **Haiti**.²⁴ This allowed local women’s rights organizations to receive both institutional and programmatic funding to strengthen their capacity and cover the costs of adapting to COVID-19. Simultaneously, grantees had resources to focus on their advocacy and train their staff in proposal-writing to ensure future funding and sustainability

of their actions. Organizations could apply to one or both streams, individually, with formal registration being mandatory only for the lead organization. During the reporting period, new adaptive strategies, tools and systems were adopted for continuity of their operations, including in **Haiti** where 3 women’s rights organizations developed risk management and contingency plans or strategies. This funding has also helped organizations sustain themselves during crises, with 221 staff and volunteers in Haiti retained during the reporting period for the continuity of their operations.

Regional funding snapshot: Distribution of civil society funds awarded by Spotlight Initiative programmes

The table on the next page provides a consolidated snapshot of the above information. It details the percentage of funding, by region, that is directed to various types of civil society organizations from the start of the Initiative.

23 In July 2020, the Spotlight Initiative Operational Steering Committee re-allocated USD 9.1 million, as a COVID-19 response, from the UN Trust Fund planned envelope for Africa for institutional funding support to existing grantees in sub-Saharan Africa. A total of 44 grantees in sub-Saharan Africa received funding for institutional strengthening through the 2020 COVID-19 window. The re-allocation included USD 500,000 to create a practitioner-based online collaboration platform to enhance the exchange of knowledge and information on the intersection of crisis response, organizational strengthening and ending violence against women and girls.

24 The programmatic funding stream ranged from USD 30,000 to USD 200,000, and an institutional funding stream ranged from USD 2,500 to USD 30,000.

Region	Percentage of activity funds allocated to CSOs	Percentage of delivered funds to national, local and grassroots organizations	Percentage of delivered funds to local and grassroots organizations	Percentage of delivered funds to women-led, women's rights and feminist organizations	Percentage of delivered funds to new partners to the UN agencies
Africa	43%	79%	11%	61%	27%
Latin America	44%	74%	14%	69%	44%
Pacific	39%	67%	16%	70%	16%
Caribbean	36%	77%	29%	81%	42%
Central Asia	60%	87%	27%	74%	33%
WPHF and UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women	100%	79%	30%	94%	76%
Safe and Fair	36%	68%	0% ²⁵	71%	27%
Global Total	49%	78%	17%	72%	40%

The impact of core institutional funding through the UN Trust Fund and the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund

In **South Africa**, Gender Links used institutional funding from the UN Trust Fund to implement a fundraising strategy and establish a "sustainability hub" to ensure its organizational sustainability. As a result, Gender Links has raised additional funding towards its future work and sustainability of women's rights work over the next three years. In **Somalia**, the International Solidarity Foundation reported that the institutional resilience of local CSOs improved by engaging 75 people from community organizations on capacity assessment and capacity development activities. In addition, to maintain and adapt planned interventions, laptops were distributed to women's associations. Grantees also utilized this funding to respond to emerging needs in their communities. In **Cameroon**, the Rural Women Centre for Education and Development invested the grant to scale up its services by establishing 13 counselling centres in 13 villages in Ngoketunjia Division, which provided trained counsellors to support survivors of violence. Project initiatives saw an increase in reporting of violence (285 cases were reported in the 13 counselling centres) and improved access to justice and services, including for indigenous women and girls.

In **Papua New Guinea**, five Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund grantees used the institutional funding to develop risk management and contingency plans to strengthen their organizational resilience in crises. The funding was also invested in strengthening their operational and technical capacity through staff training on referral and case management and acquiring transportation to enhance their reach within local communities. In **Haiti**, the grantee MOFEDGA was able to adapt to the crisis by adopting remote-working modalities, and sustain its operations by retaining staff and equipping them with new technology to continue their work. This flexible funding not only contributed to rebuilding part of the destroyed premises following the earthquake (electricity with solar panels, windows, IT equipment), but also allowed the organization to more efficiently and quickly respond to women and girls' urgent needs on the ground.

²⁵ Safe and Fair is a regional programme in the ASEAN region. Due to the nature and regional focus of its activities, the programme engages international, regional and national CSO partners, including grassroots and community groups at the local level.

Methodology

The analysis is based on two types of data: as stated in approved programme budgets and self-reported by programmes. All data are as of 31 December 2021. Data referred to as “**allocated**” are funds budgeted and planned for civil society partners in a particular Spotlight Initiative programme. Funds referred to as “**awarded**” or “**delivered**” to civil society are any financial grant, contract or partnership agreement legally signed with a CSO, and the data thereof are self-reported by the respective Recipient UN Organizations as of 31 December 2021. This may be in the form of grants, engagements as implementing partners or as vendors – providers of specific services to the programmes. Finally, percentages of funds allocated by programmes are calculated off the total programme outcome budgets and are referred to as “**activity funding**”. These are the funds that are directly attributable to implementing the programme’s activities, for ease of understanding.

The results presented in the analysis are cumulative from the start of Spotlight Initiative. The fulfillment of funding commitments is expected for the programme as a whole and will not follow a linear or proportional increment year to year. Programme funding allocations increase annually with the approval of new programme phases, and therefore proportions of funding are calculated over new increased totals of dollar investments. Moreover, the programmes are at various stages of their implementation cycles – some are implementing Phase I while others have progressed to implementing Phase II, together with varying start dates.

Programmes in Africa and Latin America (excluding the Africa Regional Programme and Ecuador) received Phase II budget allocations and have started implementing Phase II of programming in the second half of 2021. This includes additional activity funding and thus more funding allocated to civil society in 2021 as compared to 2020.

Spotlight Initiative programmes in Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific will be considered for additional Phase II funding in 2022. This will further expand the budget allocations for civil society and complete the programming of the Spotlight Initiative Fund’s current funding window.

Some programmes have different start dates as well as expenditure patterns (such as grant giving programmes vs country or regional programmes) and have for previous reports been excluded to ensure data was comparable.¹ This year, it was decided to include and show the results for all programmes, as most programmes, despite different implementation cycles, have advanced implementation sufficiently to be considered comparable. Any relevant nuances will have been detailed in the narrative and footnotes. For the purpose of this overall CSO funding analysis, Afghanistan is included in the Central Asia region.

The Safe and Fair programme in ASEAN countries has a different programmatic structure, and as a result, no information on the allocated funds planned for civil society is directly available. Therefore, the Recipient UN Organizations’ self-reported data on funds awarded to CSOs as of December 2020 was used as a proxy for the information on allocated funds.² Given its specific structure and geographical scope, the Safe and Fair programme is not included in any regional disaggregation for Central Asia throughout the analysis, such as in the data on Pillar 6 funding. Awards, as any financial grant, contract or partnership agreement with a CSO, are counted as self-reported data of engagement of CSOs by programmes per Spotlight Initiative programme output; a small amount of double counting in the number of awards may occur as some awards can be reported across several programme outputs and activities.

1 The following were excluded from the 2020 report: 1) Programmes with a recent start date from July 2020 onwards: Africa Regional Programme; Central Asia Regional Programme; Caribbean Regional Programme; Ecuador Country Programme; Afghanistan Country Programme. Afghanistan is also removed from Central Asia regional percentages due to its significantly later start date, and 2) Programmes with different expenditure patterns, notably the Civil Society Grant Giving programmes through the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund in Papua New Guinea, Haiti and Afghanistan.

2 For consistency of the analysis, the data used as the allocated amount for CSOs in the Safe and Fair programme is from 2020, as no more recent data from Recipient UN Organizations was available.

In data on sub-granting and sub-contracting, only 74% of awards to CSOs that have reported having a sub-granting or sub-contracting component have indicated the share of the award's financial value dedicated to these modalities. Therefore, the weighted average of the share of the financial value of the award channeled through sub-granting and sub-contracting is calculated using data only from these awards.

Definitions

As part of the self-reporting exercise, the following definitions have been provided to Spotlight Initiative programmes to disaggregate their funding by type of CSO partner.

International CSOs: International CSOs operate in two or more countries across different regions.

Regional CSOs: Regional CSOs operate in two or more countries within the same region (i.e. Africa, Latin America, Asia, Caribbean, Pacific). In this case, a regional CSO is not one that operates in a particular region within one country.

National, Local and Grassroot CSOs:

- National civil society organisations operate only in one particular country.
- Local and grassroots organisations focus their work at the local and community level, and do not have a national scope. They tend to have a small annual operational budget (for example, under USD 200,000); to be self-organised and self-led; and to have a low degree of formality.

Woman-Led and/or Women's Rights Organisation (WRO)/Feminist CSOs:

- For an organisation to be a "Woman-led CSO," the organisation must be headed by a woman.
- For a "Women's rights or feminist organisation," the organisation's official mission and vision statements must reflect its commitment to addressing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and advancing gender equality and women's rights. The organisation should aim to address the underlying drivers, systems and structures, including patriarchy and gendered power dynamics, that perpetuate violence against women and girls and gender-based violence and work to transform these.

New or Existing Partner:

- For a "New partner", the Recipient UN Organization has not engaged the CSO in any partnership modality, prior to the start of the Spotlight Initiative Programme.
- For an "Existing partner", the Recipient UN Organization has engaged the CSO in any partnership modality, prior to the Spotlight Initiative Programme. The rationale behind this is to understand the extent to which Recipient UN Organizations are expanding their outreach to CSOs beyond usual partners and giving opportunities to new CSOs.

Modality of Engagement

- **Implementing Partner (IP):** Programmes may contract out particular activities for a CSO to implement.
- **Grantee:** Programmes may issue a broad Call for Proposals to which CSOs submit proposals for grant funding.
- **Vendor:** Programmes may engage with CSOs through a procurement process, such as purchasing services from a CSO or hiring a CSO for a training or other activity.

Primary Vulnerable/Marginalised Population Supported by Award: Under the principle of Leave No One Behind, Spotlight Initiative UN Programme Teams are expected to ensure the representation of vulnerable and marginalised groups, including by engaging with CSOs that service or advocate for these groups.

Core Institutional Funding: The purpose of core institutional funding is not to finance the delivery of a programmatic activity and is distinct from the overheads related to delivering said programmatic activity. It is usually used to support an organisation's overall institutional capacity covering general operations and core costs, such as paying staff salaries and office rent, buying equipment and ICT services, providing psychosocial support and health insurance for staff, paying to put in place new adaptive strategies and systems or even paying to raise staff awareness and develop their capacities in technical areas. Institutional funding is multifaceted and constantly evolving based on the organisation's needs.

Sub-Granting: When a CSO issues grants to other CSOs who have submitted their own proposals for grant funding.

Sub-Contracting: When a CSO contracts another CSO to carry out part of its own contract with a Recipient UN Organization as part of a pre-defined Terms of Reference.