

# Evaluation of UNFPA support to gender equality and women's empowerment 2012-2020



Key results and recommendations

UNFPA Evaluation Office

2021



# Evaluation objectives and scope

## Temporal scope

2012-2020

(3 strategic periods)

## Geographical scope

Global

Regional

Country

## Thematic scope

Fit for purpose

Mainstreamed support

Dedicated support

- Assess UNFPA support to gender equality and women's empowerment across **development, humanitarian and peace contexts**
- Inform the next strategic planning cycle including the strategic direction, gaps and opportunities for UNFPA work on gender equality and women's empowerment
- Provide learning inputs to inform the strategic positioning of UNFPA in this area of work, reflecting the changing development environment, including the UN reform and alignment with the 2030 development agenda

# Methodological implications of COVID-19

## Adjustments made:

- New indicators have been added to the evaluation matrix to contextualize results during the pandemic
- Interview guides were revised and included questions on COVID-19
- After the outbreak, all interviews at global, regional and country levels have been conducted virtually implying a new planning effort; more time for data collection and greater flexibility; interpretation; internet connection an issue for stakeholders at the national level
- In-country visits by international team were cancelled and instead:
  - Conducted virtually in Côte d'Ivoire, Colombia and Panama for the Latin America and the Caribbean regional case study, including virtual focus group discussions with UNFPA gender staff in country offices
  - National consultants hired to facilitate/collect data at country level (Cote d'Ivoire and Colombia). Data collection has been conducted virtually by national and international consultants

# Data collection and data sources

**2**

In-country case studies

**2**

Virtual country case studies

**1**

Survey of UNFPA regional and country personnel

**70**

Meta-review of Country Programme Evaluations using GRES

**10**

Desk-based case studies

**1**

Regional case study

Stakeholders consulted at global, regional, and country levels

**641**

**700+**

Documents reviewed

**14**

Meta-review of UNFPA corporate evaluations using GRES

Review of UNFPA database and data sets



# Key findings



## Alignment

- Country programme alignment with government policies, plans & strategies related to GEWE
- UNFPA has demonstrated its support to the target populations of its mandate but has been challenged in reaching population groups at risk of being left behind. Adolescent girls have been gaining prominence in UNFPA programming

## Strengths and limitations of approaches

UNFPA often has to navigate tensions in the intersection of culture, gender equality and rights, particularly with the focus on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights:

- Engaging men and boys is part of UNFPA programming, YET they are engaged most often as gatekeepers and allies to women and girls' rights
- Good models for more transformative approaches that address harmful masculinities or unequal gender power relations are gaining visibility



## Dedicated support to GEWE

*UNFPA has contributed:*

- to strengthening national policies, accountability frameworks and legal normative frameworks, including laws on GEWE
- to civil society organizations engagement in advocacy, awareness raising, and policy change but to a lesser extent to movement building around GEWE
- to preventing, responding to and eliminating gender-based violence in particular with its rise during the COVID-19 pandemic
- through its dedicated work on harmful practices, to behaviour change at community level and policy change at national level

*Mainstreaming gender equality across UNFPA:*

- UNFPA has made notable progress on institutional mainstreaming. The UN-SWAP has been a key lever in that process, bringing more focused discussion in the organization to areas such as gender parity and financial benchmarking
- Mainstreaming efforts have led to inconsistent gendered results across programmatic outcomes





## Fit for purpose

- Support for GEWE has been affected by the amount and quality of financial resources made available for dedicated programming and mainstreaming, and by the ability to make strategic investment choices at country level
- UNFPA's gender architecture provides a foundation for gender work YET it is stretched in its capacity to support a more gender-transformative approach to different areas of the UNFPA mandate
- Institutional systems and policies reflect a long-standing commitment to gender equality
  - Closing the gap in parity at the P4 and D2 levels and among regions
  - UNFPA planning, monitoring and reporting systems limit its potential to track and learn from progress towards outcome-level results on GEWE
- UNFPA advances collaborative work across UN agencies towards SDG 5
  - UNCF modality is promising in elevating the level of complementarity towards gender mainstreaming in country programmes



# Conclusions



**Conclusion 1:** UNFPA has made important contributions to gender equality since 2012 through the different roles it plays at global, regional and national levels; this is clearly evidenced at country level where the change occurs

- Evidence on contributions to GEWE reflects all levels of delivery and both development and humanitarian settings
- Changes in policy development, legislative reform, and alignment with normative frameworks
- Lead role in gender-based violence Area of Responsibility in humanitarian settings; a systemic improvement in gender-based violence response and prevention
- Gender dedicated outcome area more clearly gender-transformative; gender mainstreamed outcome areas, gender-targeted
- Progress in adopting Leave No One Behind principles but needs a stronger focus on data and disaggregation to support this work and an intersectional approach
- Challenges: adverse social norms, COVID-19

**Conclusion 2:** The mandate of UNFPA positions it to address GEWE through the focus on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. The strength of the positioning lies in the integration of interventions on gender-based violence/sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights/family planning/harmful practices and the agency's ability to programme from an understanding of the interlinkages

- Women and girls' bodily autonomy and respect for their choices as central to its mandate on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights is a key pivot for such integration
- Evidence of increasing integration at service level – sexual and reproductive health, family planning, HIV, gender-based violence and youth
- Evidence of conceptual integration and research to establish the interlinkages (intersectionality of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights issues; links between harmful practices and sexual and reproductive health)



**Conclusion 3:** Partnerships serve both operational and strategic purposes in UNFPA but the absence of partnership strategies that incorporate GEWE concerns has limited UNFPA ability to sustain the momentum on the more challenging gender-related aspects of its agenda

- Partnerships serve different purposes (operational and strategic)
- Collaboration with UN agencies, state actors and civil society organizations takes place but leveraging partnerships for the broader spectrum of gender equality and women's rights, to support sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights outcomes, deserves more attention
- UNFPA valued for its positioning vis-à-vis Member States
- Civil society organizations well placed for holding state actors accountable. CSO important in the partnership landscape to complement UNFPA's direct line with Member States
- UNFPA has not yet conducted a strategic analysis of the bottlenecks it faces in achieving sustainable change in GEWE, which would serve as a basis for a partnership strategy for gender-transformative programming

**Conclusion 4:** The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharper focus the importance of building resilience, breaking down silos and embracing interagency collaboration to ensure more enduring solutions to addressing gender inequality and intersectional inequities in access to quality services that are inherent to development, humanitarian, and peace contexts



- Resilience of population groups at risk of being severely affected by the pandemic
- Population groups already affected by a humanitarian crisis
- Information sharing across teams, through the COVID-19 portal led to greater coherence in addressing gender inequalities and building resilience in humanitarian-development-peace contexts
- Collaboration with United Nations Country Team - Gender working group and state actors especially on gender-based violence response led to new ways of connecting and new patterns of cooperation

## Conclusion 5: Over the last decade UNFPA has taken leadership for gender-based violence in both the humanitarian and development arenas. It has made notable contributions to capacity development, service provision and systems strengthening with evidence of a gender transformative approach in response and prevention

- Continuing progress in performance and capacity as gender-based violence Area of Responsibility lead in humanitarian sphere
- GBVIMS and Primero the global standard for gender-based violence survivor data management
- In development settings, significant strides in putting in place the infrastructure and capacity as well as the policy frameworks
- Overall, a more embedded gender-transformative approach; addressing intersectional inequalities affected by gender-based violence variable
- Prevention a continuing challenge requiring a whole system approach



**Conclusion 6:** UNFPA work on harmful practices has brought needed attention to the complexity and multi-faceted aspects of addressing practices such as child marriage, female genital mutilation and gender-biased sex selection. Much progress has been made to establish a firm foundation upon which to build further. Now is the time to reflect on what the good models are and to develop a robust research agenda



- In collaboration with UNICEF, UNFPA has made progress in addressing child marriage and female genital mutilation but implementation of laws, clearly articulated pathways for social change, and the monitoring tools and processes require more focused attention
- The aspect of complexity in addressing harmful practices – puts greater emphasis on defining UNFPA niche within an ecosystem of stakeholders

**Conclusion 7:** UNFPA programming in sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, including family planning, has contributed to the provision of services, systems strengthening, and capacity development, with positive effects on global trends. These are accomplished through an inherently gender-targeted approach

- Important progress done in the provision and accessibility of services to women, girls and youth, as well as improved policy environment for sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights services and rights
- Demand side of sexual and reproductive health and family planning has been less consistent and extends to services for youth
- Gaps noted in reaching stigmatized and underserved populations
- Gender-equality and women and girls' empowerment approach to service delivery are opportunities to be strengthened across the different areas of work. Use of a survivor-centered approach in GBV in emergencies is a good example of an empowerment approach



**Conclusion 8:** UNFPA has many institutional processes and systems that help to make it “fit for purpose” for a GEWE agenda in both development and humanitarian settings. It has, for the most part, recognized the need to accelerate those aspects that will increase gender equality and gender-based violence capacity within UNFPA

- Good performance on UN-SWAP and many corporate processes are being fine-tuned (gender marker)
- More attention needed on incentives and accountabilities to improve a supportive organizational culture for women and intersectional groups
- More attention needed on capacity and competencies of staff to mainstream gender
- Senior managers need to show more consistent modelling of the behaviors
- A gender-transformative approach demands a higher level of commitment



# Recommendations



**Recommendation 1:** As the UN agency that addresses sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights in support of GEWE, UNFPA should strengthen its positioning by leveraging its areas of expertise to develop a more integrated, coherent approach that joins up the different areas of its mandate. This would be supported by a broader conceptual framework on GEWE that gives prominence to the social norm change work required for sustainable change in GEWE and that facilitates an understanding of gender-transformative approaches

**Urgency: High    Impact: High**

- Develop a systems approach to situate UNFPA within a wider landscape of partners, each addressing aspects of GEWE
- Build staff capacity for gender-transformative approaches and social norm change work, particularly across gender mainstreamed areas
- Articulate expectations of and support for gender transformative programming in next gender equality strategy
- Identify or build on good models for countering harmful masculinities, scaling them up and linking them to promoting access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights/family planning/HIV services
- Invest in high-quality research partners for key areas of work around GEWE, interconnected topics that embrace complexity, and the social norm change work at the heart of longer-term change
- Continue to invest in demand generation activities and in addressing social norms, in particular men engagement in sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, fatherhood, domestic and reproductive care work, and positive masculinities. Engagement with men and boys should be designed with accountability to women and girls

**Recommendation 2:** To amplify its leadership and positioning in gender-based violence response and prevention, UNFPA should prioritize investment in staff working in development and humanitarian contexts and consider scaling up UNFPA role as a convenor in this programmatic area, which will enable UNFPA to help drive a change process

- Leverage data expertise as it pertains to violence against women prevalence surveys and the Spotlight Initiative
- Continue strengthening gender-based violence coordinators in emergencies
- Prioritize gender-based violence prevention strategies and consider whether UNFPA is positioned to assume a convenor role, even if it means sharing that space with UN Women
- Pay more attention to an intersectional approach to gender-based violence response and prevention

**Urgency: High    Impact: High**

**Directed to:** Humanitarian Office, Technical Division, Regional Offices

**Recommendation 3:** UNFPA should strengthen capacities on gender-transformative approaches and intersectionality internally, building on the momentum that has already been demonstrated

- Reward senior managers for championing GEWE; introduce incentives at senior management level
- Update knowledge of gender advisors and focal points on gender-transformative approaches and intersectionality
- Emphasize convening role at regional level and leading on research and advocacy agendas
- Prioritize recruitment of gender-based violence coordinators
- Strengthen identification of population groups at risk of being left behind with an intersectional approach; identify data gaps and disaggregation gaps to inform Leave No One Behind strategy and targeting

**Urgency:** Medium    **Impact:** Medium

**Directed to:** Technical Division, Division for human Resources, Regional Offices (Country Offices)

**Recommendation 4:** UNFPA should continue engaging Member States and donors in the discussion on the importance of adequate levels of predictable funding for the Strategic Plan that can be flexibly utilized by country offices to support longer-term programming capabilities on GEWE and gender mainstreaming. Although UNFPA is investing in this area with institutional resources, more is needed

- Continue identifying non-traditional donors, particularly for humanitarian settings, to fund prevention, social norm work, and resilience building
- Identify innovations in fund raising to allocate a larger share of funding to the gender architecture to enable them to develop longer-term strategies in addressing harmful practices and dedicate time to support mainstreaming

**Urgency:** Medium    **Impact:** High

**Directed to:** Policy and Strategy Division, Resource Mobilization Division

**Recommendation 5:** In developing partnership strategies beyond its engagement with implementing partners, UNFPA should consider which partners can complement UNFPA expertise and resources within an ecosystem approach that is essential to resolving the more complex and deeply rooted drivers of inequalities with a view to achieving sustainable change in GEWE

**Urgency:** Medium    **Impact:** Medium

- Use criteria to assess partner capacity based on a strategic analysis of the bottlenecks UNFPA faces in achieving sustainable change in GEWE
- Ensure more consistent inclusion of women-led organizations to ensure their voices, positions and rights are integrated in all thematic areas
- Apply an ecosystem approach (multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder)
- Engage civil society organizations in challenging environments to mutually reinforce the roles that both play towards a policy change
- Conduct a review of collaboration with faith-based organizations
- At all levels, seek to clarify how UN Women can strengthen the GEWE effects of UNFPA mandate and present UNFPA priorities to UN Women as a basis for ongoing collaboration
- Include private sector partners as part of a response to overcoming resource and skill bottlenecks

**Directed to:** Technical Division, Regional Offices (Country Offices)

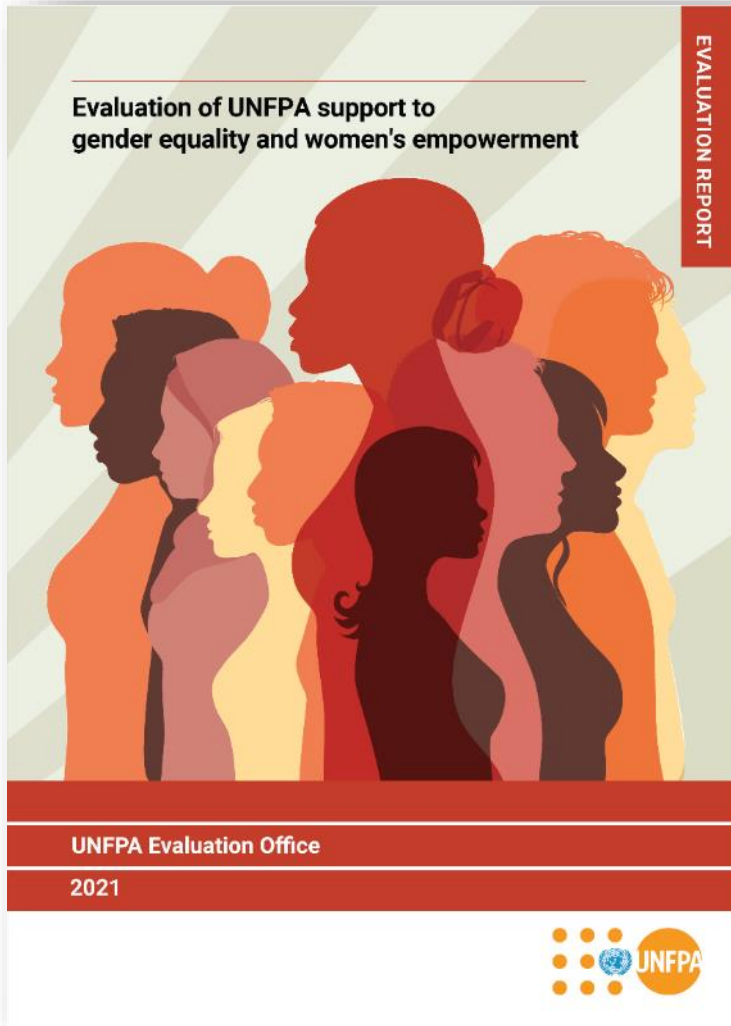
**Recommendation 6:** UNFPA should continue to build organizational strategic thinking on resilience from an intersectional gender perspective, drawing on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic

- Take stock of patterns of cooperation with UN agencies and internally that emerged as a result of the pandemic response
- Adopt an approach that centres on women as agents of change and promote their voice as rights defenders, belonging to different intersectional and age groups
- Promote women's and girls' participation in strategies for disaster preparedness and climate change risk reduction, in community-based approaches to resilience building, and in all risk-informed programming design
- Ensure preparedness in UNFPA support through gender vulnerability assessments, early warning system with sex-disaggregated data analysis, participation of women-led organizations in disaster management planning committees and promoting women's leadership at all levels, and timely preposition of medical supplies for reproductive health and gender-based violence early action.
- Build a focus on deconstructing harmful masculinities in conflict prevention and analysis of drivers of conflict
- Strengthen youth, peace and security programming as a platform for establishing clear role-modelling amongst youth in women and girls' leadership and non-violent, gender-equitable behaviours and aspirations

**Urgency: High    Impact: High**

**Directed to:** Technical Division in collaboration with Humanitarian Office and Regional Offices





# Thank you

The evaluation is available at [unfpa.org/evaluation](https://unfpa.org/evaluation)

## Evaluation materials

- Evaluation Report
- Evaluation Brief (En, Fr, Sp)

For any questions on the evaluation, please contact Alexandra Chambel, [chambel@unfpa.org](mailto:chambel@unfpa.org)

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