

UN-Women Executive Board

First regular session 2021

Background note: Draft Strategic Framework for UN-Women's Strategic Plan 2022 – 2025

1. Introduction

UN-Women supports Member States, coordinates the wider UN system, and mobilizes partners including civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders to ensure the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), other normative frameworks for gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In its decision 2020/3, the UN-Women Executive Board commended UN-Women for leveraging its mandate as a composite entity in assisting Member States, and reaffirmed UN-Women's importance in leading, coordinating and promoting the accountability of the UN system to gender equality and women's empowerment. Between 2011 and 2019, UN-Women's programmes grew by 78 percent with presences in more than 122 countries and territories and increasing impacts for women and girls around the world.

Ten years after UN-Women's creation, the global context demands urgent acceleration of progress and reaffirmed commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. UN-Women's Strategic Plan 2022-2025 outlines the Entity's vision to increase the scale and impact of its work, including by more strongly leveraging its triple mandate in an integrated manner; expanding its recognition as a global thought leader, advocate and knowledge hub; and through the continuous widening and deepening of partnerships for the achievement of joint results.

2. Context and background

The UN-Women Strategic Plan 2022-2025 is the first Strategic Plan developed since the global Beijing +25 review and appraisal, and the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325. It will span four years of the Decade of Action launched by the United Nations Secretary-General in 2020 to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Early lessons from implementing the 2030 Agenda highlight the imperative of further embedding gender equality and women's empowerment in the sustainable development agenda and fully leveraging the UN Development System (UNDS) reform process to this effect.

The Beijing+25 review reiterated many persistent and emerging challenges to the full realization of women's rights, gender equality and women's empowerment, including structural and institutional barriers, discriminatory social norms and practices, and the persistent gender poverty gap. Regressive economic policies, sluggish legal and policy reforms, insufficient financing and the hollowing out of key gender equality institutions, violence against women, shrinking civic space and pushback against gender equality, and policies that undermine women's sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, all threaten to reverse hard-won gains, with particular impact on women and girls experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. As the

proportion of the world's population living in fragile settings grows, women in conflict-affected countries, and women peacebuilders in particular, face unprecedented threats. Furthermore, new challenges have emerged, including those related to climate and environmental change, large-scale migration and displacement, protracted humanitarian crises and fragile states, growing economic inequalities within and between countries, and uneven access to social protection and new technologies, all of which affect women and girls disproportionately and exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities.

Against this backdrop, the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to further reverse development gains and deepen inequalities. UN-Women has highlighted that the pandemic's impacts on health, economy, security and social protection are all compounded for women and girls, and that women need to be equally included in decision-making for response and recovery. The global crisis threatens to exacerbate long-standing barriers to the full enjoyment of women's human rights, including by increasing the loss of livelihoods and job security, the unequal burden of care, and violence against women. UN-Women and UNDP estimate that an additional 47 million women and girls will be pushed into poverty as a result of the pandemic. Women's rights organizations have played critical roles as essential service providers and advocates for a more equal post-COVID-19 future. However, while demand for their services and support has increased, diminishing funding, closure of civic space and restrictive work conditions hampers their work. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to exacerbate insecurity and community violence in crisis countries and fragile states, with disproportionate impacts on women and girls, and limiting their participation in peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

3. UN-Women's value proposition in a post-COVID-19 world

SDG 5 and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development

In addition to the Beijing Platform for Action and above-mentioned normative frameworks, the guiding vision of the new Strategic Plan is the fulfilment of the promise of SDG 5 to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. As the SDGs form an integrated policy agenda, accelerating progress under SDG 5 is both dependent on, and a precondition for, all other goals' full realization. The need for further focus on the nexus between SDG 5 and those on health, climate action and ending poverty, is now more apparent than ever. Otherwise, deep-rooted structural barriers that women and girls face in all aspects of their lives, will make progress on these goals impossible. The gendered impacts of crises, be they caused by conflict or disasters, as well as women's key roles in peacebuilding, recovery, prevention and resilience, are other areas where UN-Women has maintained sustained focus and will advocate for increased attention to deliver more efficiently and effectively on the SDGs.

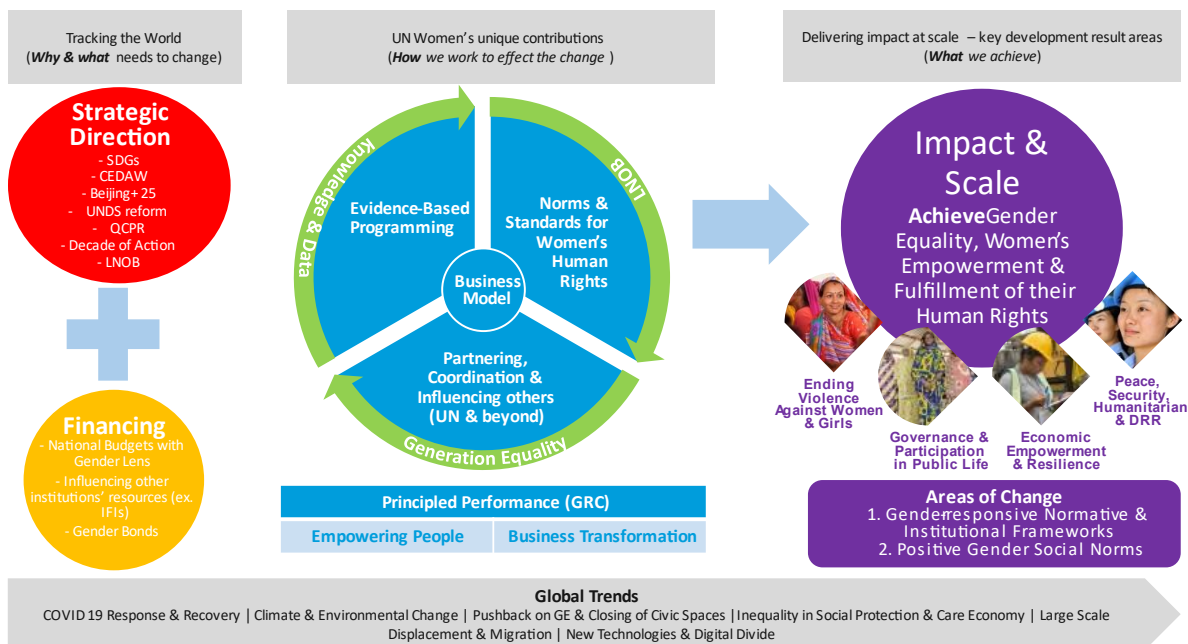
The achievement of the SDGs also requires leveraging technology and innovation in a way that truly benefits women and girls, closes the gender digital divide, and addresses risks posed by emerging technologies for women and girls, including those related to privacy and safety. Further commitment to generating and using comprehensive gender data and statistics across SDGs is also fundamental to enabling results, and ensuring their accountability and measurability.

COVID-19 and Leaving No One Behind

The impacts of COVID-19 have highlighted the urgency of achieving gender equality to rebuild better and to decisively address the deep and pervasive social, political and economic inequalities that the crisis has both exposed and exacerbated. Yet, analysis of the policy response to COVID-19 from a gender perspective shows that so far only a fraction of the measures taken by Governments so far address women’s needs.

Women and young people’s equal participation and decision making is a precondition to their success across sectors. Ensuring gender-sensitive approaches to COVID-19 response and recovery, including by appointing women and gender equality advocates to leadership positions and setting gender parity targets for relevant decision-making bodies, is essential. Equally important is women’s leadership in confronting the fallout of the crisis and transforming of modes of governance required in its aftermath. In line with the principle of *Leaving No One Behind*, the needs, demands and interests of women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, vulnerability and marginalization should be addressed.

UN-Women’s value proposition: Leveraging our triple mandate for impact and scale



UN-Women is the United Nations Entity mandated to provide guidance and technical support on gender equality, the empowerment and rights of women, and gender mainstreaming. UN-Women supports Member States in setting global norms and standards to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, including women’s full enjoyment of their human rights, and in translating these standards into the development and implementation of gender-responsive laws, policies and programmes. By effectively leveraging its triple mandate of normative support, UN system coordination, and operational activities, UN-Women has been able to influence others at the global, regional and national levels to lift the world’s aspirations for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Over the past decade, UN-Women has established itself as a global thought leader and at the forefront of the production and use of data, evidence and knowledge on gender equality issues. UN-Women's key comparative advantage, its deep technical knowledge and engagement in evidence-based policy advocacy, programming, and advisory services, is vital to translating normative commitments into concrete action and results. Combined with its global reach and cutting-edge research and expertise, UN-Women's strong partnerships with policymakers, diverse women's movements and civil society organizations, private sector partners, and a broad range of gender equality influencers are key to its success and to the unmatched value that UN-Women offers within the multilateral system.

UN-Women identified its comparative organizational strengths in its previous Strategic Plan as its ability to link global and national policy development for gender equality goals; status as the largest source of gender expertise in the UN; longstanding relationship with civil society and women's movements; and comprehensive and integrated contributions across the UN's peace and security, human rights and sustainable development pillars. Moving forward, to secure UN-Women's continuing relevance and ability to deliver on its triple mandate with greater scale, the new Strategic Plan will help the Entity refine not just *what* it does, through the sharpening of its programmatic focus, but also *how* it is done. New and innovative ways of partnering and engaging with a broader range of actors will be essential to strengthen UN-Women's work's impact.

Lessons learned

Informing the ambitions for the next Strategic Plan are the lessons learned from UN-Women's Mid-Term Review of its 2018-2021 Strategic Plan, along with other independent evaluations and assessments. This rich evidence shows strong support for UN-Women's strategic direction, and validation that UN-Women's work remains relevant, timely, and on-track for achieving results. Areas to further strengthen UN-Women's impact have also been identified, including calls for a greater focus on *Leaving No One Behind* and addressing cross-cutting issues such as social norms change; ensuring enhanced programmatic focus through more systematic approaches and measurements; and more systematically embedding gender equality and women's empowerment within the broader development agenda, including in the context of the UNDS reform. Importantly, while UN-Women is already highly regarded for its research and publications, more investment will be key to improving research and knowledge management. Expanding the capacity to collect and aggregate data will help consolidate the organization's role as a global knowledge leader, driving evidence-based advocacy and policy making.

These lessons align with the findings of the 2020 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR). The QCPR emphasized the need to “[invest] in the development of all women and girls and [promote] their economic, social and political empowerment and full, equal and meaningful participation and equal access to leadership and representation at all levels”; accelerate gender mainstreaming through the full implementation of the System-Wide Action Plan on gender equality and women's empowerment and ensure that gender equality expertise is available throughout the UNDS at all levels; and increase coordination, collaboration, efficiency and coherence in the UNDS, with strengthened results-based management and common methodologies for planning and reporting on results.

4. Vision for UN-Women 2.0

Ten years after UN-Women’s creation, the Entity is continuing its transformation to a scaled-up “UN-Women 2.0” -- a high-impact business model centred on influencing others -- along with building the corresponding organizational foundations to effectively deliver on the new Strategic Plan. This will ensure sharper programmatic focus and upscale the Entity’s role as a central partner in a repositioned and reformed UNDS, whilst building on UN-Women’s comparative advantages and responding to the global context. UN-Women 2.0 is not a static plan, but a set of ambitions and principles focused on driving for impact through a stronger, inter-connected field presence and HQ, for UN-Women to become a more nimble, globally networked and knowledge-based organization.

This ambition will address three key components. First, UN-Women will focus on scaling up execution of its triple mandate and its impact. It will continue to support global normative processes and link them to operational activities, as well as further leverage UN coordination, advocating and engaging with more and different partners for collective action, and pursuing innovative financing approaches, including with international financial institutions (IFIs) and influencing national budgets.

Second, UN-Women will strengthen its ability to influence other actors globally by focusing on “what UN-Women is known for”, i.e. investing in standardized programme approaches, knowledge products, and service offerings for the achievement of impact at scale. In recognition that UN-Women’s mandate is global and that SDG5 applies to every country, as a thought leader the Entity will explore to offer advisory services against a fee to help partners apply standard knowledge product and projects in their local contexts. For UN-Women programmes, the Entity will focus on larger, impactful and joint programmes aimed at achieving systemic and transformative change, and move away from small standalone projects, while using its resources where they are most impactful. UN-Women will also continue the work commenced in the previous Strategic Plan period to standardize country office typologies, while ensuring the organization is present in crisis and fragile contexts where its contributions are most needed in terms of the acute needs of women and girls as well as the opportunities for transformation.-

Finally, sharper organizational focus on driving for impact, principled performance and ensuring continuous improvement will guide business transformation, with efficient administration and financial management that strengthen UN-Women’s business processes, governance, and oversight. Alongside the pursuit of additional and innovative financing for SDG5, the Entity will seek to innovate its own financing, creating even stronger linkages between resources and results, re-thinking its internal budget allocations and creating incentives for growth, in line with the Strategic Plan ambitions. In line with QCPR recommendations, the Entity will move towards even more detailed internal understanding of efforts, costs and how business processes, policies, systems can be re-designed to both serve the organization better, as well as to achieve efficiency gains and implement the Value For Money (VfM) principles which the organization is committed to. UN-Women will further align internal functions with funding, to support decentralization of functions from HQ including to Shared Services options, Regions and Countries. These business transformation efforts will also harness the opportunities for inter-agency collaboration and harmonization that UNDS Reform provides.

In support of these ambitions, UN-Women will further develop its organizational leadership principles, in line with the UN Leadership Framework. This will promote inclusive and participatory decision-making processes, a culture of accountability, and an explicit recognition of power dynamics and unconscious bias to harness a transformative leadership style to create an even more effective organization with a diverse and empowered workforce. Improving recruitment approaches, upscaling leadership training and supporting talent management will all form part of this strategy. This organizational management will ensure a commitment to increasing diversity, tackling discrimination, and a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment and abuse of authority. UN-Women feels a strong sense of pride in its own internal culture of feminist excellence and will continue to nourish, strengthen and leverage this unique organizational advantage.

5. The Role of Partnerships

Under the new Strategic Plan and vision for UN-Women 2.0, UN-Women seeks to transform into an increasingly partnership-oriented organization. It acknowledges the importance of maintaining a high level of ambition for growth in order to achieve impact at scale, and that the capacity to be the leading influencer and champion for the achievement of gender equality in the multilateral system is dependent on the Entity's ability to influence and engage with a breadth of partners to deliver for women and girls. This partnerships approach is underpinned by the intention for UN-Women to act as a convener bringing together actors to collaboratively achieve greater impact than could be achieved individually, and to generate evidence, knowledge, and expertise to enable and mobilize others to support progress towards the achievement of gender equality.

Governments

UN-Women provides support to Member States in setting and implementing global norms and standards in a broad range of intergovernmental processes. The Entity will continue to broaden its relationships with—Government counterparts, including line ministries, parliaments and local government, as well as—with its well-established partners within national mechanism for gender-equality. Collaboration with Finance and sectoral line Ministries will be strengthened to help ensure that budget allocations for gender equality are increased, effectively tracked, and made publicly available. UN-Women will also engage Resident Coordinators and UNCTs in support of such partnerships.

United Nations system

UN-Women will continue to leverage its UN coordination mandate to support greater accountability for gender equality and enhance gender mainstreaming in the UN System. Moving forward, UN-Women will further leverage this role to catalyze system-wide results for gender equality and women's empowerment, including in humanitarian and post-conflict settings as well as protracted crises, in line with strategic objectives set in United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) and Humanitarian Response Plans.

Working through partnerships to deliver impact at scale will also be done with UN partners, including UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF, to yield deeper collaborations across sectors with results that are harmonized and standardized. In line with the spirit and the aspirations of the UN reform

agenda, increased attention will be paid to the delivery and measurement of results. UN-Women's central role within UNCTs will be maximized to ensure that UNSDCF and other common country documents are gender-responsive and pursue results that strengthen accountability and impact from all participating agencies.

Civil society

UN-Women's deep partnerships with civil society and women's movements is one of its greatest strengths. The modalities of these relationships must be fit to enable joint action; create meaningful spaces for civil society voices and influence; and widen and deepen impactful partnerships with diverse groups of women and girls and young people. Partnership modalities that simplify collaboration between UN-Women and civil society are vital to achieving joint results and will be prioritized in the new Strategic Plan. Alliance-building strategies and programmes that clearly define impact and results are central to fostering effective, accountable partnerships. Such effective local partnerships are key to advancing gender equality and women's leadership, including in humanitarian and crisis settings.

UN-Women's work is strongly informed by the needs, priorities, and expertise of civil society organizations and movements, and our advocacy on global platforms is responsive to their voices, with particular attention to diverse groups of women and girls and young people at the grassroots and community levels. We aim to support an enabling environment for civil society to conduct their work, platforms for their participation in decision-making forums at all levels, and access to funding opportunities. In line with the Entity's Generation Equality initiative, UN-Women 2.0 will place a strong emphasis on the need for youth engagement to help build and support a new generation of gender equality advocates, and for truly inclusive and supportive means of supporting youth leadership.

Closing the financing gap

Mobilizing financing for the broader gender equality agenda is vital in order to affect meaningful change in the lives of women and girls. Programmes to advance gender equality and women's empowerment cannot be implemented without proper resourcing. The commitment of Member States to fund gender equality through public investment and fiscal policies remains paramount in realizing this goal. Increasingly, the private sector is broadening its investment focus to include the 2030 Agenda, which has given rise to new and innovative financial instruments that seek to achieve social goals in addition to financial goals. IFIs can be a key mechanism in sustainable and SDG financing, which aims to increase accountability for achieving social, economic and environmental results. In particular, UN-Women is promoting the financing of government national gender equality plans by connecting national gender equality champions with decision-makers in ministries of finance. Ensuring that such plans are funded through sovereign financing such as targeted gender bonds, and budgets are allocated to gender programmes, are key to ensuring accountability for gender equality results.

In its next Strategic Plan, UN-Women will complement ongoing, national-level financing for development and gender equality, with new and innovative financing approaches such as gender bonds, and engaging with IFIs, the private sector and institutional investors. UN-Women's internal expertise on these issues is being enhanced in order to realize these aims.

Leveraging Generation Equality

In the context of Beijing+25 and the Decade of Action to achieve the SDGs, Generation Equality has provided a platform to harvest a broad range of ideas and views from Member States, civil society, youth and other stakeholders on how to accelerate progress towards gender equality. The new Strategic Plan provides a unique opportunity to use these insights, in particular the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships and UN-Women's role as a convenor to facilitate collective action, for the effective delivery of UN-Women's mandate.

At the centre of the Generation Equality initiative lie civil society and youth engagement. Bringing in a new generation of gender equality advocates around the world is critical to build momentum. Based on specific blueprints, Governments, UN entities, civil society organizations, youth-led organizations, the private sector, and philanthropic organizations have come together on a voluntary basis as part of Action Coalitions and the Compact on Women, Peace, and Security/ Humanitarian Action (WPS/HA), with game-changing commitments to accelerate progress through concrete results over the next five years.

6. Areas of thematic focus 2022 – 2025

Key findings from the Mid-Term Review of the current Strategic Plan, together with internal and external consultations on the Strategic Plan 2022-2025, endorse UN-Women's thematic directions as having continued relevance in the current global context. Guided by this evidence and 10 years of experience, the new Strategic Plan maintains those areas of thematic focus whilst bringing a sharper articulation to them to achieve targeted and scalable actions and results.

Within this thematic framing, UN-Women plans to improve its gender-responsive response to crises, climate change, and fragility, ensuring that these contexts are well-aligned with the overarching thematic model, and leveraging proven successes and entry points.

UN-Women will also continue to strengthen its function of **normative intergovernmental support**, which supports the strengthening and implementation of a comprehensive and dynamic set of global norms, policies and standards on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. This work will notably be done in the context of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the High-level Political Forum, the Security Council, the Human Rights Council and the Rio Conventions, as well as specific thematic processes, including the Commission on the Status of Women.

In the 2022-2025 Strategic Plan, UN-Women will continue to strive to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, with a focus across four thematic areas:

- **Governance and Participation in Public Life:** women and girls lead, participate in, and benefit from governance systems.
- **Economic Empowerment & Resilience:** women and girls have income security, decent work and economic autonomy
- **Ending Violence Against Women and Girls:** women and girls live a life free of all forms of violence

- **Peace, Security, Humanitarian Action, and Disaster Risk Reduction:** women and girls lead in building peaceful, resilient societies and equitable crisis response.

Aware of the limitations of a sector-specific Theory of Change, such as the risk of siloed work, duplicating resources and/or addressing an issue in a piecemeal way, UN-Women's next Strategic Plan will conceptualize these themes as **main areas for intervention with multiple intersections**.

This focus retains the flexibility to be swift and responsive in addressing emerging global trends in strong coordination with UN system partners and addressing the linkages between peace, development and humanitarian action. UN-Women has identified the need to support more gender-sensitive responses, across all four thematic areas, to address the challenges and opportunities of:

- COVID-19 response and recovery
- Climate change and environmental challenges, including women's role in adaption and mitigation
- Pushback on gender equality and closing of civic spaces for women's organizations
- Inequality in social protection and the care economy
- Large-scale displacement and migration
- Advancements in new technologies for the delivery of services, skills development and closing the digital divide

The Strategic Plan's impact areas will seek to address structural barriers to gender equality and women's empowerment, and to create an enabling environment where all women and girls can realize their full potential as individuals, family and community members, citizens, and key economic, political and social actors.

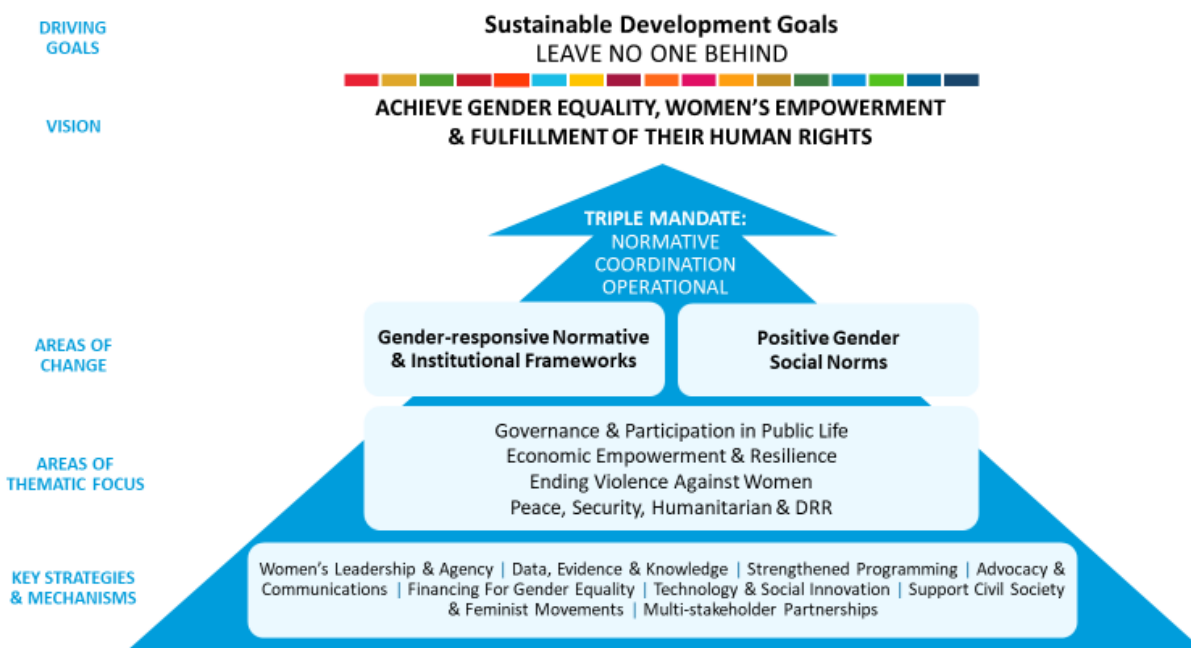
Through its programmatic, coordination and normative work and across thematic areas, UN-Women will seek to achieve these overarching results:

- **Gender-responsive normative, legal and institutional frameworks**, from global norms and standards to laws and policies at regional, national and local levels, that end discrimination and promote equality and empowerment for all women and girls. This includes supporting Member States and institutions in their capabilities to deliver on such normative advancements.
- **Positive social and gender norms** and values that foster positive beliefs, attitudes, behaviours and practices among individuals, communities, institutions and societies to advance gender equality and women's rights, dignity, value and agency. This includes working with institutions and social and influential actors, as well as mobilizing communities and civil society including diverse women's movements and youth groups, faith-based organizations and leaders, media, and men, women, boys and girls, to transform patriarchal masculinities and power relations to foster positive social and gender norms.

The achievement of these results, through high-quality, evidence-based and impactful action will be made possible through reliance on the following proven **key strategies and mechanisms**:

- **Supporting women's leadership and agency**
- **Availability and use of data, evidence and knowledge**

- Strengthened programming, monitoring, learning & evaluation
- Advocacy and communications to meet normative commitments
- Financing for gender equality
- Technology and social innovation
- Support to civil society and feminist movements
- Multi-stakeholder partnerships



7. Expected Results

UN-Women’s Theory of Change and results framework will be driven by the pursuit of the **SDGs**, and in particular **SDG 5**, within the Decade of Action. The overall aim of our work remains to **achieve gender equality, the empowerment of all women and girls, and the full enjoyment of their human rights.**

The principle of **Leaving No One Behind** will occupy a central place in the next Strategic Plan. Embedded in UN-Women’s own mandate and work, LNOB provides a unique framework to address the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by women and girls, in all their diversity.

Evidence-building to ensure a good understanding of the **process of change**, including its different speeds, phases, and levels from the grassroots will be a key to reach out expected results.

UN-Women’s efforts towards transformative change will be underpinned by its **triple mandate** which will be applied across the thematic areas UN-Women will support. The Entity will aim to achieve results through: (1) Operational activities, with a focus on knowledge and evidence-based programming and delivering at scale; (2) Supporting the development and implementation of inter-

governmental norms and standards for women’s human rights; and (3) Partnering and coordinating, including through further leveraging our UN System coordination mandate. The articulation and full use of these three interconnected and mutually reinforcing components constitutes the essence of our work.

Key expected results will be defined in a Theory of Change and the Integrated Results and Resources Framework (IRRF), which will respond to key gaps and lessons learned identified in the current Strategic Plan. These include: 1) taking a cross-thematic and integrated approach to articulate transformative results; 2) better defining results from the UN system coordination functions; 3) more systematically measuring results at the impact level; and 4) identifying key common results that will be achieved and reported jointly with UN partners, including UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF. Following the agreed timeline of the SP roadmap, UN-Women will consult with the Executive Board on the draft Theory of Change and the draft structure of the IRRF.