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**Gender equality at UNDP**

**Annual report of the Administrator on the implementation  
of the UNDP gender equality strategy in 2023**

*Summary*

This report highlights the midterm review and second year of implementation of the UNDP 2022-2025 Gender Equality Strategy. It is on track despite the momentary crisis and backlash against gender equality. In the first two years of implementation of the strategy, UNDP has met targets, expanded new areas of work, and showcased how structural transformation can unfold by advocating, innovating, and demonstrating integrated development.

UNDP has initiated long-term support for gender-responsive tax reforms and fiscal governance. It has integrated gender equality in social protection, encompassing unpaid care and the informal economy. UNDP is amplifying support for women to access justice, especially in cases of gender-based violence, including in crisis settings. Two years into the strategy, UNDP is better equipped to navigate and influence negative gender norms and understands the need for continued effort and stronger analytical capacities. The Gender Seal has been fully implemented in 90 per cent of countries as the main vehicle to drive the institutional transformation required for the gender equality agenda. The potential for UNDP to strengthen gender equality and empowerment of women is being realized but not in full—it needs firm commitments from bilateral partners so UNDP can continue to showcase how integration and structural transformation drive gender equality.

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## I. Introduction

### A. Demonstrating transformation even in turbulent times

1. The 2022-2025 Gender Equality Strategy was born post-COVID-19 crisis during an acute period of questions being asked about why progress towards gender equality continued to be slow, scattered and has even reversed. The call for re-thinking political, economic, and environmental systems emerged and drove governments to consider shifts to fundamental systems and power structures that continue to generate gender disparities and women’s disempowerment.

2. By 2024, however, the world has become more dangerous and unjust for many women and other groups facing discrimination linked to factors such as age, class, disability, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity or migration status. Over 380 million women and girls live in extreme poverty. Risks and vulnerability continue to rise amid climate change, as well as a debt crisis that pressured economies and diminished public services. The gender digital divide leaves millions of people, especially poor women and girls, stranded from the promise of digital transformation. Nearly every conflict, humanitarian and development challenge threaten gender equality gains.

3. Despite the obstacles, UNDP has, over the last two years, found ways to move its Gender Equality Strategy forward through its network of country offices and national, local and United Nations partners. Today, UNDP is more equipped to achieve the overarching goal of the Gender Equality Strategy, linking immediate improvements in the lives of women with dismantling long-term barriers to sustainable development and gender equality. It is helping governments protect development gains and make continued progress by moving gender equality to the centre of political, economic, and environmental agendas.

### B. UNDP performance: Key findings and observations

4. **UNDP is on track overall in delivering the Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2025.** It is meeting targets, expanding new areas of work, and showcasing how structural transformation can unfold by advocating, innovating, and demonstrating integrated development. UNDP maintained high performance against the System-wide Action Plan 2.0, exceeding or meeting targets on 15 of 16 relevant indicators, up from 14 out of 16 in 2021.

5. **In the current context of public debt distress and shrinking resources, emerging support for fiscal policies for gender equality is one of the most promising new areas of work.** An additional \$360 billion US dollars per year is required to achieve gender equality targets of the Sustainable Development Goals. UNDP has initiated long-term support for gender-responsive fiscal and tax reforms and fiscal governance in over 20 countries. Investments need to be financially sustained as comprehensive reforms require time.

6. **Institutional innovations such as the Equanomics Global Learning Lab are proving to be powerful in boosting UNDP capacities to drive structural changes.** Launched in 2023, the lab links UNDP and leading feminist economists. Interest in the lab was unexpectedly high, with 252 applications to join from more than 100 country offices. Sixty UNDP economists were selected to work with national partners in implementing innovative solutions to realize gender equal economies. There is significant potential to expand the lab to governments and development organizations.
7. **UNDP has taken a step beyond a basic parity approach to women’s participation in the labour market.** It integrated gender equality in social protection, encompassing aspects such as unpaid care and the informal economy. UNDP support, however, remains limited to back the transformative national practices needed to provide adequate social protection to all women. Further efforts are required to secure stable resources and sustain engagement with national partners.
8. **UNDP is amplifying support for women to access justice, especially in cases of sexual and gender-based violence and in crises.** In 2023, UNDP improved access to justice for 33 million women in 55 countries, an increase from 32 million in 2022. The next step is to scale work to civil justice matters, particularly those related to women’s rights to land, natural resources, and inheritance. All are critical for multiple dimensions of empowerment and sustainable development. UNDP started raise visibility on the crucial role women play in land management through the [Her land. Her rights](#) campaign.” Pending resources, there is significant potential for a comprehensive and integrated strategy on land and property rights that would yield economic, social, and environmental returns.
9. **Designing and implementing interventions to transform norms, values and power structures remains a challenge.** Although UNDP is better equipped to navigate and influence negative attitudes and beliefs, evidence from its Gender Social Norms Index affirms pervasive discriminatory perceptions and biases and disappointingly slow progress in changing either. The number of people holding a bias against women has barely declined in recent years, suggesting the need to temper expectations of rapid progress. Evaluations reinforced the importance of higher-level commitments to gender equality given the complexities of social norms transformation. They also underline the need for continued efforts and even stronger analytical capacities.
10. **In the last two years, UNDP engaged more proactively with civil society and women’s organizations.** More than 100 country offices partnered with women’s or feminist organizations in 2022 and 2023, advocating for women’s rights and addressing gender-based violence. Most UNDP support aims at strengthening the capacities of civil society organizations, followed by coalition-building and advocacy to address backlash. Given violence against human rights defenders, UNDP increased support to women’s climate justice advocates and continued efforts to monitor hate speech and backlash, including during elections, but much more needs to be done amid growing antagonism to gender equality.
11. **The Gender Equality Seal has proved to be the most relevant global initiative in helping operationalize the Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2023.** The Seal has been fully implemented in 90 per cent of UNDP country offices. In 2023, 66 country offices achieved the minimum standards required for bronze, silver, or gold certification. The Seal is much more than a certification, however, as it takes country office participants on a unique journey that connects UNDP core values, learning, a collective sense of purpose and strict methodology to improve impacts on gender equality. It has become the main vehicle to drive institutional transformation required for the gender equality agenda.
12. **Performance factor analysis found that higher UNDP performance on development outcomes results from higher levels of dedicated investments in gender equality.** Greater country-level spending on GEN3-marked projects led to higher *overall* achievement. Every 10 percentage point increase in GEN3 spending, a proxy for gender mainstreaming, produced a 5 percentage point advance in realizing country programme outputs. This achievement of multiple development gains provides a compelling rationale for increased investment.
13. **The potential for UNDP to strengthen gender equality and empowerment of women is being realized but not in full.** The Gender Equality Strategy needs firm commitments from bilateral partners to invest seed funding so UNDP can continue to showcase how integration and structural

transformation work while scaling up priority programmes. Gaps in the quantity and quality of funds remain serious constraints.

## II. UNDP priorities

14. Progress on gender equality requires sustained action and investment. UNDP six signature solutions focus on closing structural inequities and helping women realize empowerment, autonomy, and personal choices.

### Poverty and inequality

15. Debt servicing is hijacking fiscal space in lower-income countries and crowding out public investments in social services, negatively impacting women who assume the burden of subsidizing the economy through care work. UNDP prioritized structural reforms through gender-responsive fiscal policies and tax systems while helping to expand inclusive social protection and care. It addressed immediate needs for essential services, finance, digital assets, and livelihoods.

16. **Universal and gender-responsive social protection and care services.** The cost-of-living crisis in 2023 created new urgency around investing in extended social protection. At the same time, social service cuts and suspension of funding and conflict made it difficult to continue or expand support to national social protection systems. UNDP worked in 43 countries on social protection and care, up from 49 in 2022. It expanded social protection coverage to a wider number of women and excluded populations through digitalization, improved social registries, outreach and the revision of legislation and national financing strategies.

17. With UNDP support, the Dominican Republic used a multidimensional poverty approach to reform its social protection systems, formulate a decennial health plan, expand early childhood care coverage, and develop a national care policy to advance gender equality. Honduras developed the use of biometric identification to reach unregistered refugees and unregistered people in poverty, the majority being women. UNDP assisted Montenegro to develop an e-social registry that integrates services and improves protection by connecting different registries related to gender-based violence and social security.

18. While unpaid care work continues to be undervalued in mainstream economic discourse, United Nations Member States declared October 28 as the International Day of Care and Support. This lent new momentum to a programme area that continues to grow at UNDP. In 2023, it backed the development and expansion of comprehensive care systems in 13 countries, such as Peru, which set up a national care system using an innovative care georeferencing tool to trace supply, demand, and service gaps.

19. **Fiscal policies that work for gender equality.** UNDP expanded support on financing for gender equality to more than 44 countries in 2023, up from 36 in 2022. Major prongs comprised fiscal policy reforms (23), gender-responsive budgeting (14), and leveraging and aligning private finance (23). Amongst the 85 countries that drafted integrated national financing frameworks, 46 identified gender equality as a priority. Morocco included reforms to align gender-responsive budgeting and the budget cycle with framework recommendations.

20. UNDP launched the flagship programme, Equanomics, to make fiscal policies work for gender equality and mobilize support for fiscal policy reforms by looking at public revenue and expenditure. UNDP supported 23 countries in initiating reforms of fiscal policy at the national/federal level, while also supporting local/state planning and budgeting. Services to governments have included diagnostics of gender biases and tax and expenditure impacts on the gender poverty gap, capacity development for civil servants, national policy dialogues, data generation and legislative revisions. At the same time, Equanomics supported ministries of finance and tax authorities to undertake reforms and maintain such changes.

21. UNDP partnered with the Mongolian Tax Administration and National Committee on Gender Equality to research the gender-responsiveness of tax policies, with a special focus on personal income tax. Equanomics enhanced the capacities of 40 officers of the General Tax Authority, Ministry of Finance, and National Committee on Gender Equality to detect and correct implicit biases in core taxes. The Ministry of Finance is now drawing on their new skills and knowledge to steer reforms that put gender equality at the centre of public finance.

22. **Expanded access to essential services, digital, and other assets, and finance.** With UNDP support, 91.9 million women accessed essential services in 2023, up from 71.5 million in 2022. Almost 28 million women obtained financial services (compared to 14 million in 2021). While these interventions are potentially less transformative in terms of structural shifts, evidence shows their impact typically extends beyond economic empowerment to positively alter partner relationships and household decision-making, rendering families less susceptible to hunger and poverty.

### Governance

23. Disinformation and mistrust, combined with a sense of injustice and insecurity, have polarized societies around the world and resulted in a regression of laws and policies. UNDP continued working with civil society and governments to anticipate and address risks and protect gender equality gains.

24. **Women's collective mobilization, voice, and influence.** Supporting women's movement-building in the most challenging environments is more important than ever. UNDP closely tracks its engagement with women's and feminist organizations to expand and deepen these relationships. In 2023, 106 UNDP country offices partnered with women's or feminist organizations to advocate for women's rights (86), address gender-based violence (75), and support movement-building and expanded civic space for feminist organizations (33). In Iraq, UNDP assisted the government in the creation of the Women's Alliance for Development and Climate Justice by uniting three women-led national networks of 68 non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Collectively, they champion women's rights in the women, peace, and security agenda, and integrate them with actions on climate justice.

25. **Towards gender-responsive states.** UNDP continued to play an influential role in promoting gender-responsive public institutions through the Gender Equality Seal. In 2023, it expanded the Seal to 30 countries and 91 public institutions, from 22 countries and 63 institutions in 2022. The Seal equipped more than 224,000 public servants with skills and tools to dismantle discriminatory norms and increase civic engagement. All participating institutions established a zero-tolerance policy for gender-based violence and sexual harassment in the workplace—65 per cent approved protocols to tackle discrimination. Seventy per cent ensured systematic data disaggregation by sex, and 74 per cent pursued at least one initiative with civil society partners like women's studies researchers and women-led organizations. Thirty-nine per cent showed significant gender equality results in at least two main institutional programmes.

26. Through the Seal, the Panama National Secretary of Science and Technology led in approving the National Policy and Action Plan for Equality in Science, Technology, and Innovation by setting targets to increase women's participation in producing scientific knowledge and technological development with a focus on indigenous women. The Judiciary Power in the Dominican Republic (awarded a gold ranking on the seal in 2023) strengthened the gender-responsiveness of judges and increased the number of sentences incorporating a gender lens.

27. **Achieving gender justice to realize rights.** Evaluations found that UNDP has successfully addressed women's access to justice, with a focus on sexual and gender-based violence. In collaboration with United Nations Organization for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the Gender Justice Platform worked with 19 countries in 2023. In Algeria, UNDP applies behavioral insights to improve the social reintegration of women prisoners. The new Women's Leadership in Justice initiative works with justice institutions in Algeria, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique and Senegal on gender audits, reviews of legal frameworks and training for women lawyers, paralegals, and judges. In Kyrgyzstan, UNDP supported the Ministry of Justice in providing free legal

aid with a gender-inclusive focus, reaching more than 10,000 individuals. Doubling payment rates in the state-guaranteed legal aid system attracted more qualified lawyers.

### Resilience

28. UNDP maintained life-saving support in crisis or post-crisis settings, guaranteeing that women have livelihood and labour opportunities to survive and withstand shocks. More needs to be done to deepen collaboration and financing for women's rights organizations to lead and participate in peace and recovery. Ad hoc gender equality approaches in conflict settings remain a significant challenge and more efforts are needed as gender equality determines the resilience of individuals and societies.

29. **Fully gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and management.** UNDP increased the use of sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis in recovery plans. In 2023, 28 countries (up from 17 in 2022) developed gender-responsive early warning systems, including Angola, Ethiopia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, and Sierra Leone. Partnerships with the World Bank and European Union supported the Government of Türkiye to assess recovery and reconstruction after the devastating 2023 earthquake that resulted in making specific provisions for sustainable community-based models to build women's resilience.

30. **Resilient economic recovery to advance gender equality.** Many strategies have worked to enhance women's access to knowledge, land, credit, technology, social protection, and care services. Nearly five million women gained jobs and improved their livelihoods in 42 countries in crisis or post-crisis settings in 2023, which is a slight decrease from 5.4 million in 2022 and correlated with declines in Pakistan and Zimbabwe. More programmes targeted survivors of gender-based violence, individuals living with disabilities and displaced populations, integrating economic activities with mental and psychological support. In Burundi, over 200,000 people accessed microcredit and financial skills training, as well as land certificates. Including women's names on land certificates, and recognizing their right to ownership, was a step towards breaking longstanding cultural barriers. The UNDP Gender and Crisis Facility continued supporting countries to develop economic recovery programmes based on gender analyses and structural and social norms transformation.

31. The rate of Afghan women's employment, an abysmal 6 per cent, has halved in two years. Supporting women entrepreneurs and the systems and markets they operate in is the most effective course of action to create opportunities for women. UNDP estimates that bans on women are costing the economy \$1 billion US dollars per year. UNDP supported the creation of more than 60 community kitchens operated by women-led SMEs and establishment of more than 200 women-focused savings groups with 2,975 members who received cash grants for income generating opportunities. Despite facing ingrained discrimination and new limitations, women entrepreneurs in Afghanistan are demonstrating remarkable resilience. UNDP will continue working alongside them adapting programmes to support them despite of mounting restrictions.

32. **Women's leadership and full participation in peace and recovery** (see signature solution 6).

### Environment

33. Working with partners from local to global levels, UNDP has been able to deepen a broader understanding of links between gender equality, the environment and climate change. New insights turn into the basis for integrated actions that can shift the needle on both environment and gender equality.

34. **Gender-responsive management of natural resources.** To protect and better manage ecosystems and biodiversity, UNDP supported women's leadership and decision-making related to natural resources in 89 countries in 2023. In 93 countries, a UNDP and Global Environment Facility (GEF) portfolio helped close gender gaps in providing access to, and controlling of, resources.

35. The **Nature Pledge** is a major new initiative committed to supporting over 140 countries to protect and restore biodiversity while reducing gender and other inequalities. The Pledge includes a target for 100 countries to promote women's leadership in natural resource management. The [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#), with two first-of-its-kind targets on gender

equality, and the renewed [Gender Plan of Action](#) present a historic opportunity. Partnering with municipalities, local women's organizations and productive groups will be crucial and UNDP is already positioned to make rapid progress. It supported Costa Rica, in creating a network of women in the Sixaola River area who use geospatial technologies for better waste management and conservation of natural resources.

36. Environment-related collaborations with women's organizations increased from 22 countries in 2022 to 27 countries in 2023. Collaborations boosted advocacy for nature-based solutions, including those rural and Indigenous women use every day. In 61 countries, UNDP supported women's cooperatives and collective engagement in responding to environmental concerns. Of the completed projects under the GEF-financed Small Grants Program, 43 per cent were led by women or a women's cooperative/group.

37. In partnership with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and Government of Panama, UNDP developed the first Regional Action Plan for Human Rights Defenders on Environmental Issues. It includes provisions on the exercise of environmental justice as a basic right.

38. UNDP supported an analysis of gender and climate commitments relevant to African countries, featuring conditions necessary to implement them such as the gender-responsiveness of adaptation and mitigation actions in different sectors. The report considers the capacities of the African Group of Negotiators and highlights examples of gender-responsive climate actions by African countries that contribute to climate goals and commitments. It makes recommendations on how to address persistent gender gaps in climate action.

39. Implementing **gender equality commitments in climate action plans**. Through UNDP, the multi-partner Climate Promise has supported over 77 countries to implement gender and climate commitments. In 44 countries, efforts focused on strengthening institutional capacities in the ministries of environment, energy, finance, and gender. Mali trained national ministry staff on gender-responsive budgeting. A second priority is women's entrepreneurship and employment. With Climate Promise support, 30 per cent of direct grants for Indigenous people and local communities in Cambodia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Kenya went to women-led projects, supporting them to lead action on forestry, land management and environmental protection.

40. Under the United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD) Programme, UNDP helped 19 countries to integrate gender equality and women's empowerment principles into REDD+ strategies and action plans. In Indonesia, this resulted in higher rates of women's participation in the national forest monitoring system, ranging from 30 to 53 per cent.

41. Challenges to climate action continued to include tight timeframes to achieve results that do not align with complex realities, including political dynamics. Such constraints can lead to rushed stakeholder engagement and weaken the meaningful participation of underrepresented groups.

42. In Mexico, UNDP helped Green Sorority Networks of Indigenous and rural women in Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Yucatán to develop livelihoods and gain skills as environmental stewards. The network strengthens sustainable production practices, promotes financial resilience in the transition to a green economy, and builds space for indigenous women to address environmental degradation.

## Energy

43. The UNDP Sustainable Energy Hub works towards the moonshot of access to clean energy for 500 million people, of which 250 million should be women. Sustainable, accessible energy innovations drive development outcomes that are both inclusive and green.

44. **Increasing energy access to unleash women's economic empowerment**. UNDP supported energy access for 14 million women in 37 countries in 2023. The Government of Niger connected 170,000 women to clean and affordable energy. In Somalia, 13,000 women-headed households were able to access fuel-efficient stoves, solar lanterns, and alternatives to charcoal.



45. A recent evaluation found UNDP could more systematically address the influence of household decision-making and financial controls on energy usage, as well as women's leadership in the green transition. Accordingly, the Sustainable Energy Hub recently scaled up support for staff to work at the intersection between gender equality and clean energy, with online dialogues and training courses already engaging over 300 participants. A new initiative, Powering Gender Equality, dedicated financial and technical support to Ethiopia, Eswatini, Madagascar and Malawi to demonstrate how to increase women's economic empowerment and leadership, enhance gender-responsive energy governance and support energy policy frameworks that accelerate gender equality. Ethiopia recently adopted a new national policy to integrate gender equality into energy frameworks, including through an enhanced role for women in energy-related decision-making.

46. **Energy investments reduce time poverty.** The UNDP active portfolio of clean cooking projects funded by GEF and Green Climate Fund involves 75 countries and \$350 million US dollars in grants. Energy-efficient cooking stoves reduce deforestation and pollution and women's time poverty, although more efforts are needed to determine the precise amount of time saved by women.

### **Gender equality**

47. Signature solution six reflects key priorities of the 25-year review of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the following ways.

48. **Inclusive economies and the economic empowerment of women.** In 2023, UNDP supported 29 countries to eliminate barriers that perpetuate labour segregation and gender-based discrimination in the economy, including improving access to finance, land, digital assets, and entrepreneurship opportunities. Partnerships with national and local governments and civil society organizations established business incubators and services to foster innovation, digitalization, and business development for women in Bhutan, Burundi, Congo, Guinea, Kosovo, Namibia, and South Sudan, among others. In Armenia, a comprehensive National Employment Strategy with a gender perspective includes provisions for refugees and unemployed women.

49. Digital technologies are reshaping work and producing a new generation of inequalities. UNDP worked in 22 countries to closing the gender digital divide, which is integral to more inclusive economies. It collaborated with the Jordanian Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship and the private sector to build digital skills among young and refugee women, helping to improve labour market integration. A collaboration with the Ministry of Information Communication Technology in Bangladesh led to the launch of a pilot programme for integrating mental health and psychosocial support to combat cyberbullying that excludes girls from digital spaces.

50. UNDP supported countries to expand women's access to, and control over, ownership of land and other property. On the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought in 2023, UNDP launched the [Her land Her rights](#) campaign and reached more than 12,000 views. In Burundi, UNDP facilitated access to quality judicial services for more than 33,000 women, including displaced women, to reduce arrears in treatment land disputes.

51. **Equal power and representation.** Amidst the multiple threats to women in politics and leadership, UNDP continued to advance inclusive political processes by supporting voter registration for 133 million women in 26 countries in 2023. Efforts in 43 countries to increase women's leadership and equal participation in public and private institutions resulted in increasing the capacity of women employees in public offices, using women's networks, caucuses, and parliamentary committees. In the Arab States, where there is a low level of political participation in parliaments that has barely budged, UNDP helped launch the regional Arab Leadership Academy for Women and the #HerParticipationOurFuture regional campaign. Eight countries committed to creating national leadership academies in 2024 and two to implementing advocacy campaigns.

52. Temporary special measures that included quotas, levelled the playing field for women in politics in Gambia, Georgia, Lebanon, Maldives, Mauritania, the Republic of Tanzania, Somalia, Sri Lanka, and Yemen. A quota in Yemen, to involve women in local collaboration platforms, encouraged



reflection on women's needs in local government plans and led to the rehabilitation of schools, maternity and childhood hospitals, and vocational centres for women. New global guidance for UNDP country offices on [introducing temporary special measures](#) offers concrete and proven actions to reduce gender gaps in electoral processes.

53. **Women's leadership and full participation in peace and recovery.** In 2023, attacks against women human rights defenders continued to climb in crisis and conflict settings. UNDP helped counter regressive trends by advancing women's leadership and equal participation in decision-making in mediation, reconciliation, and peacebuilding mechanisms in 22 countries. In Sierra Leone, UNDP aided the Ministry of Gender, Child, and Social Welfare in drafting an Affirmative Action Bill on peacebuilding and setting it for parliamentary approval in 2024. Confidence-building activities for more than 700 young men and women in Kosovo increased their awareness of conflict legacies and promoted constructive narratives on gender equality.

54. To protect and open space for women's empowerment and defense of women's rights, UNDP in Africa supported 120 women human rights defenders in drafting and reviewing laws to safeguard women's rights groups, civic space, and human right defenders. In the Sahel, collaboration with UN Women assisted a women-led regional network to convene a dialogue on gender integration, social inclusion in disaster planning and climate change, engaging participants from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal.

55. **Preventing and responding to gender-based violence.** UNDP support for ending gender-based violence reached 88 countries in 2023. Its holistic approach, in collaboration with governments, builds capacities to prevent gender-based violence, ends impunity for perpetrators, and increases access to justice and protection. UNDP aided in revamping the Zambia Police Service Training Curriculum to incorporate modules to protect female officers from gender-based violence in training and on duty, and increased capacities to deliver integrated response services with a one-stop centre.

56. The first phase of the European Union and United Nations Spotlight Initiative came to an end in 2023. Over four years, the initiative that spanned the United Nations development system, reached 122 countries, delivered 34 programmes in 25 countries and five regions, and had a total delivery rate of 95 per cent. Almost 500 laws and policies were signed to end violence against women and girls, and 43 countries strengthened national action plans to eliminate gender-based violence. More than two million women and girls accessed gender-based violence services while two million men and boys were educated on positive masculinity. Gender-based violence prevention campaigns reached 260 million people.

57. UNDP played an active role in 25 Spotlight-assisted countries. Under its leadership, the conviction rate for perpetrators of gender-based violence doubled in 12 countries. Belize developed the first set of national indicators for gender-based violence as per Caribbean Community standards to improve victim response across health, police, social and judicial services. Kazakhstan enhanced sanctions against domestic violence perpetrators and refined administrative measures for prevention. Spotlight Initiative 2.0 is harnessing lessons learned to streamline processes, design more responsive technical assistance mechanisms, increase country ownership and simplify governance approaches.

58. UNDP supports women to access HIV and other health services, helping reduce their risk of acquiring the virus due to sexual and gender-based violence. To diminish stigma associated with HIV and gender-based violence, UNDP in supported the recruitment of female outreach workers in Egypt, as well as disseminated targeted information and established stigma-free counselling centres within NGOs. Globally, the number of women reached by HIV behavioral change communications fell from 7.2 million to two million due to lack of funding.

59. **Reversing backlash against gender equality.** Research, new tools and sharper measurements support UNDP responses to the global backlash against women's rights, including through its landmark Gender Social Norms Index. UNDP Libya tailored eMonitor+ to provide electoral authorities with knowledge and skills to combat online gender-based violence. New data and insights informed electoral commission strategies and awareness campaigns to create a supportive online environment for women in politics. UNDP increased its support to women's climate defenders and

advocates, increasing from 22 countries in 2022 to 27 countries in 2023. This includes responding to backlash and strengthening coalitions to advocate for justice.

60. UNDP continues to collaborate on knowledge products to elaborate intersectional analyses. In Brazil, a partnership with the Faculdade Baiana de Direito and Jusbrasil resulted in the Racism and Racial Slurs Perpetrated on Social Media study where experts made recommendations on how to act more effectively in addressing racism. In Ecuador, research on political participation and data from a political parity index showed disparities amongst Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian women.

61. Globally, UNDP collaborated with UN Women on the Intersectionality-Informed Gender Analysis Toolkit that will be published in 2024. UNDP programmes with an intersectional perspective include Costa Rica where stakeholders support the creation of a network of Indigenous and Afro-descendant women that developed a common agenda and practical tools to prevent and address violence against women. In Mexico, UNDP assisted in creating an Advocacy Office for Women within the National Electoral Institute, consulting more than 300 Afro-Mexican women to design a training platform on gender-based political violence in preparation for the 2024 electoral process. The platform focuses on ideas of masculinity in Indigenous and Afro-Mexican communities.

62. In June 2023, UNDP published the 2023 Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI) report that breaks down gender biases on an empirical level to shift social norms towards gender equality and help design public policies that are equipped to tackle gender-biased backlash. The report attracted 127,000 unique visits to the UNDP site and more than 25,000 downloads. The GSNI quantifies biases against women, capturing attitudes on women's roles in four key dimensions: political, educational, economic, and physical integrity. Covering 85 per cent of the global population, the GSNI revealed progress has been disappointingly slow and the number of people who hold a bias against women has barely declined in recent years. Nine out of 10 men and women hold fundamental biases against women and 87 per cent of women and 90 per cent of men have at least one gender bias related to upholding women's rights and realizing their full potential. A quarter of people believe it is justified for a man to beat his wife. In countries with the highest levels of gender biases against women, women spend over six times as much time as men on unpaid care work.

63. **Changing negative social norms.** In 2023, UNDP implemented 407 prevention initiatives tackling harmful social norms and gender-discriminatory roles and practices in 34 countries despite evidence showing designing such interventions remains a challenge. In Montenegro, the Implementing Norms, Changing Minds initiative is designed to strengthen women's organizations to inform legislation and policy reform and hold the government accountable for preventing and responding to gender-based violence. In Sierra Leone, UNDP enhanced the capacity of male motorbike riders with training sessions on positive masculinity and to act as agents of peace and role models in combatting sexual and gender-based violence.

64. **Better data and analysis for policymaking.** In 2023, 68 countries expanded their gender data analyses; the increase (from 38 in 2021) was triggered by the launch of the Multidimensional Poverty Index. Offices also developed socioeconomic assessments and helped strengthen national statistical systems and Global Goals monitoring. UNDP developed a proposal for a [MPI with a focus on women](#) to support more targeted social protection. In Pakistan, a [report on women and digitalization](#) delved into the gender digital divide and offered potential solutions. An [online Gender-Based Violence Among Women and Girls Assessment](#) in Zambia built on existing policies and laws to make recommendations to mitigate online gender-based violence.

### III. Partnerships

65. In line with the Gender Equality Strategy, UNDP continued to pursue new partnerships for gender equality and deepen existing ones to advance longer-term advocacy and policy goals.

66. **Coordination within the United Nations system.** In response to the independent review of the United Nations system capacity to deliver on gender equality, UNDP was a proactive member of the Task Team that developed the Gender Equality Acceleration Plan with other United Nations entities. UNDP stands committed to ensuring strong implementation of the plan throughout the United Nations system. It continues to proactively implement the Gender Equality Score Card of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women—89 country offices implemented the score card in 2023 compared to 75 in 2022. Forty-six UNDP country offices co-chaired an inter-agency gender theme group.

67. UN Women remains a steady partner of UNDP in 74 countries, mainly for strategic planning and substantive programming given UN Women staffing shortages and non-resident position in certain areas. To capitalize on learning from the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, UNDP and UN Women, in partnership with the Republic of Korea, launched [Promising Practices for Gender Equality: A Catalogue of Practical Solutions](#) based on the COVID-19 response. It provides a suite of policy options to increase gender-responsiveness and build resilience to future shocks.

68. UNDP continues to engage with other agencies from the United Nations system across different countries. In South Africa, with UN Women, United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and International Labour Organization (ILO), it completed a study that explored options for social insurance schemes for the informal sector with a strong focus on women and youth. UNDP is currently working with stakeholders to use study findings to design and pilot a social insurance initiative for women informal sector workers.

69. **Expanded links with civil society.** UNDP country offices are pursuing more strategic partnerships with civil society that are in line with the Gender Equality Strategy central emphasis on reaching people left behind. More than 100 country offices partnered with diverse women’s or feminist organizations and movements in 2022 and 2023, advocating for women’s rights and action to address gender-based violence. Collaboration included grass-roots groups experiencing racial discrimination and put a strong focus on working with young women.

70. UNDP partners with civil society to address discrimination based on intersecting identities, highlighting people with disabilities. In Samoa, UNDP partnered with Nuanua Ole Alofa to support the development of the Women with Disability Stigma Inventory and capture insights on the experiences of 130 women living with disabilities on stigma, discrimination, and violence to inform policy and legislation. In Georgia, UNDP financed grants for women-led local civil society organizations to promote dialogues between Geo and Abkhaz communities with a specific focus on the women, peace, and security agenda as being integral to reconciliation.

71. **A broader spectrum of partners.** UNDP continues to support religious and youth networks in leading efforts to halt violent extremism and shift gender norms. After elections in Benin, UNDP joined the National Coalition for Peace to sponsor trainings on conflict management, violent extremism and terrorism, engaging women, youth, and religious leaders from civil society. An awareness campaign for the project reached more than 2,000 religious leaders.

72. UNDP works with academic institutions and think tanks to develop new research and shape advocacy for gender equality. A collaboration with the University of Bahrain resulted in a workshop on gender-aware economics for government officials. In 2023, UNDP, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), and the University of Pittsburgh banded together under a global initiative on gender quality and public administration to conduct national reviews of measures that promote women’s leadership and presence in public administration in Bhutan, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Mauritius, and Senegal.

73. UNDP explored new collaborations with international financial institutions and multilateral development banks. In partnership with the Asian Development Bank, UNDP conducted a comprehensive socio-economic analysis of the health, education, and food security sectors in Afghanistan with a focus on gender equality.

74. **The private sector.** Partnerships with banks and private investors helped redirect financial investments in gender equality. In 2023, UNDP and UN Women collaborated with the Financial Centers for Sustainability on a gender finance booklet to guide gender equality measures within the financial sector. Members of the Financial Centers for Sustainability manage 82 per cent of the global equity market and represent \$84 trillion in equity market capitalization.

75. The Gender Equality Seal for the private sector remains a main UNDP initiative to promote women's leadership and participation, develop inclusive workplaces and ensure equal pay for equal work. In 2023, 189 private sector companies were awarded the Seal, including in energy, telecommunications, and finance sectors. This benefited more than 450,000 workers, 48 per cent percent of whom are women. The Stanbic Bank of Uganda created a specialized women's banking unit and plans to allocate \$15 million US dollars to women's financial inclusion, including a set of loans already disbursed to more than 1,000 women.

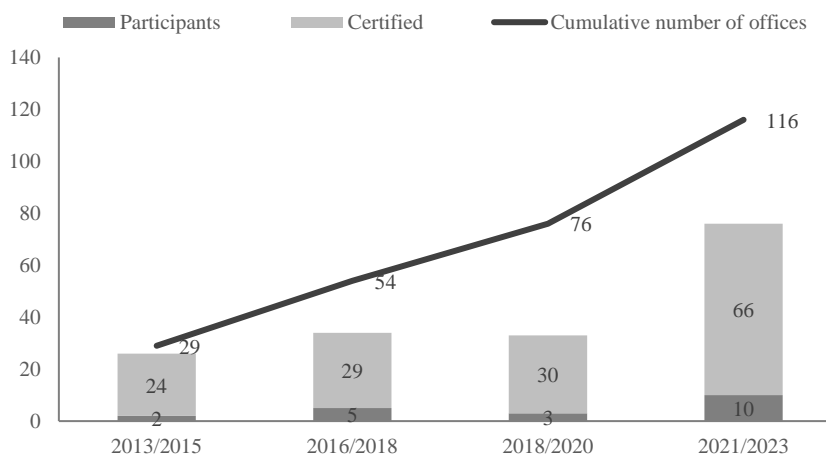
76. **UNDP continued to deepen engagement with key donors at the global level**, including UNDP Funding Windows. The governments of the Republic of Korea and Luxembourg, primary partners to the UNDP Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Funding Window, provided critical flexible support to invest in new areas of work such as Equanomics. Fruitful collaboration has continued with the governments of the United Kingdom, Germany, and France, amongst others. UNDP also welcomed new collaborations with philanthropic partners like the Hewlett Foundation.

## IV. Institutional transformation: a deep dive into the Gender Equality Seal

77. In 2023, UNDP strengthened the seven interconnected building blocks of its institutional framework (leadership, integration, learning and innovation, culture, funding, accountability, and communication), leveraging the Gender Equality Seal as a driver of progress in country offices.

78. The Gender Equality Seal is a UNDP flagship initiative to develop capacities and accelerate impacts to achieve transformative results in gender equality. In the 2021-2023 round of the Seal, 76 country offices voluntarily completed the two-year initiative with 66 achieving the minimum standards required for bronze, silver, or gold certification. By 2023, the Seal had been fully implemented in 116 country offices over 10 years, this comprises 90 per cent of UNDP country offices.

79. **The Seal is much more than a certification.** It is a unique journey that connects UNDP core values, learning, a collective sense of purpose and strict methodology to measure impact. The Seal has brought changes to UNDP and inspired other United Nations organizations to integrate gender equality into their organizational culture and results. OHCHR is working with eight countries under its Gender Accreditation Programme. The World Food Programme engaged 33 offices in its Gender Equality Certification Programme and 27 offices are currently certified.

**Figure I. Number of Gender Equality Seal offices 2021-2023**

Source: UNDP Gender Equality Seal tracking

## Leadership

80. In general, country office senior managers that received Seal certification have effectively demonstrated a strong commitment and ability to manage organizational change. Many have publicly advocated for gender equality and negotiated a solid gender agenda with partners. Leaders from gold-certified offices go the extra mile to prove commitment by moving beyond comfort zones, changing personal behaviors, and demonstrating power-sharing practices and strategic thinking. They also have a credible and rigorous evidence-base to support gender impact claims. UNDP offices that gained gold certification in 2023 include Bangladesh, Burundi, Bosnia and Herzegovina, India, Nepal, the Pacific Office (Fiji), Paraguay and Samoa (multi-country office).

81. **Tracking the Gender Equality Seal for offices in crisis settings showed promising results.** In partnership with the UNDP Crisis Bureau, a special Gender Equality Seal tracker was launched in 2021-2023 and used in 13 offices in extremely fragile and fragile countries. With tailored technical support, programme expenditures that directly contribute to gender equality primary objectives (GEN3) increased from 5 per cent in 2020 to 8.7 per cent in 2023. The Seal helped 100 per cent of crisis country offices appoint a gender specialist, a significant improvement from a baseline of 36 per cent. Most importantly, offices are achieving concrete results in advancing gender equality and, as an example, UNDP helped establish a 30 per cent quota for women in Somalia's recent elections for the Upper House. Although the quota has not been reached, Somalia did achieve 21 per cent participation of women.

## Integration and specialization

82. The Seal has proven effective in helping country offices move away from piecemeal approaches. It requires the creation of multidisciplinary gender focal teams chaired by senior management. This mechanism, when strongly driven by senior managers and diverse team members, creates common goals to break silos and open doors to meaningful gender integration in programming.

83. The Seal standard of having a full-time gender specialist on staff led to changes in the UNDP gender architecture. Between 2021-2023, 14 new gender specialists were recruited. One of the most interesting lessons from gold-certified offices is all have a full-time, well-known national senior gender adviser in place who has direct access to decision-makers and an ability to influence national stakeholders. UNDP in Uzbekistan hired a full-time gender and energy specialist to support a low carbon e-mobility project that resulted in dismantling a law banning women from driving trucks and buses, proving the added value of having specialized experts embedded in different programme portfolios.

84. Although the global UNDP Gender Team, comprising 25 full-time international professional staff, remains the anchor of the UNDP gender architecture, the Gender Equality Seal has triggered the expansion of regional capacities and hire of 10 additional gender specialists. The Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific recruited four subregional gender specialists and a Gender Equality Seal coordinator. This significant investment in capacities led the Regional Bureau to achieve the highest overall improvement (33 per cent) and scoring (80 per cent) for the 2021-2023 certification round.

85. Participatory portfolio reviews have been fundamental to the Seal but their complexity requires expertise. Implementation has been uneven globally. The Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean has found a way forward by building a strong network of advisers to carry out country office portfolio reviews in 75 per cent of the region's Gender Equality Seal offices. A portfolio review in Paraguay helped revamp a land titling project that ultimately led to more than 1,300 women-headed households receiving land titles with catalytic effects on legal rights and access to capital.

### **Continuous learning and innovation**

86. The Gender Equality Seal is the largest UNDP capacity-building intervention on gender equality. While 93 per cent of Seal offices have provided training for all personnel, the most effective learning has built on behavioral and individual changes. The Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People offers a shining example by implementing the [Gender Transformative Workshops](#) methodology across field locations. Sessions provided participants with a safe space for self-reflection on personal, social, and religious perceptions of social norms. In-depth training built a strong sense of agency, strengthening motivation to integrate gender in programming.

87. **The Gender Equality Seal Global Learning Plan.** The 2022-2023 Gender Equality Seal Learning Plan was designed for 76 participating country offices. It delivered 11 interactive sessions, addressing social protection, environment, gender-responsive communications, and gender equality and power in the workplace. More than 1,000 attendees took part in each session and a vibrant community of practice with 300 members was established.

88. The capacities of heads of portfolios remain a challenge. Only 42 per cent of Seal offices (32 out of 76) offered specialized capacity-building to team leads. This standard was amongst those with the lowest rates of achievement.

### **An equal and inclusive culture**

89. There is a gender gap in perceptions of UNDP fostering an equal and respectful workplace. An anonymous survey with 5,000 country office participants (equal number of men and women) showed 77 per cent of men responded positively on perceptions of workplace equality and empowerment compared to 69 per cent of women. Work/life balance remains one of the greatest challenges for all offices, even those considered high performing. In 2024, best practices will be provided to improve organizational culture and further address patriarchal social norms in the workplace.

90. **Parity and power.** While UNDP can celebrate gender parity overall in staffing, data shows that efforts need to continue to ensure women are in decision-making positions, particularly in crisis countries. In the 13 Gender Equality Seal crisis offices, only 8 per cent meet the standards for gender parity. Going forward, UNDP is looking for new modalities to attract women to national and international positions in non-family duty stations.

91. **Mobilizing men for gender equality.** In 2023, a global dialogue engaged 85 people from 39 country offices in applying recommendations from the Men and Gender Equality in the Workplace: A Safe, Respectful and Inclusive Organizational Culture guidance note. A dedicated [SparkBlue page](#) consolidates resources and practices on masculinities while a working group of country offices formed to advance transformative approaches to masculinities within the organization.

### **Matching ambition with financial resources**

92. UNDP is committed to progressively achieving a stage where 70 per cent of programme expenditures fund work where advancing gender equality and empowering women is a principal or

significant objective. In 2023, the share increased to 69 per cent, up from 66 per cent in 2022 and 60 per cent in 2021 (comprising GEN3 at 5.2 per cent and GEN2 at 64.2 per cent in 2023). The UNDP office in Burundi has been in the programme since 2017 when expenditures on gender equality reached only 47 per cent. With a gold certification in 2023, the Burundi office attained 84 per cent.

### **Accountability**

93. In 2023, the Gender Steering and Implementation Committee, chaired by the UNDP Administrator, took stock of the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2025. The United Nations review of gender architecture pointed to the committee as good practice, encouraging all organizations to create a similar mechanism, including the Executive Office of the Secretary-General.

94. Aside from the Gender Equality Seal, UNDP established an Advisory Circle in 2023 that comprises civil society and external experts to guide and track implementation of the strategy. Members come from all areas: Gender and energy, women, peace, and security, feminist economics and feminists organizing more broadly. The Circle will hold regular biannual sessions and ad hoc meetings, as needed.

### **Communications for advocacy**

95. The Seal establishes a minimum threshold for social media posts, requiring 15 per cent of the total to target issues on, or relating to, gender equality. UNDP in China ran a campaign promoting rural girls in science that reached up to 100 million people. UNDP in Bangladesh led a successful campaign on women's safety in public spaces and gender-based violence.

96. The global community of practice on gender equality in 2023 ran seven global gender learning sessions engaging over 480 participants from 93 country offices. UNDP launched the [Gender Social Norms Index](#) and, in collaboration with UN Women, [twin indices on women's empowerment and parity](#) and the [Promising Practices for Gender Equality](#). Communications campaigns supported International Women's Day, 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, and other major moments. At the end of 2023, UNDP had over 8.3 million followers on LinkedIn, X, Facebook, Instagram, and Threads in English, French, and Spanish. There were 22,796 mentions on X from 7,140 accounts mentioning "UNDP," "PNUD" or "PNUDFR" and gender-related hashtags. During the United Nations General Assembly, UNDP produced the web story '[From global emergency to global equality](#)' and Goodwill Ambassadors Nikolaj Coster-Waldau and Yemi Alade spoke on gender equality during the SDG Action Weekend.

## **V. The way forward**

97. UNDP found inspiration and renewed its strength during the first two years of implementing the Gender Equality Strategy. UNDP now looks to influence fiscal structures, scale up comprehensive care policies, improve access to clean energy, and ensure women's leadership in the green transition in collaboration with partners. UNDP is embracing the challenge to deepen its efforts and strengthen analytical capacities to transform norms, values, and power structures.

98. UNDP will continue to look to the Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2025 for the guidance, humbly learning from two years of implementation and the profound changes that gender equality requires to push beyond comfort zones and generate changes in thinking and behaviours, building an enabling environment to advocate for gender equality.