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**Economic and Social Council  
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference  
on Women and to the twenty-third special  
session of the General Assembly, entitled  
“Women 2000: gender equality, development  
and peace for the twenty-first century”:  
gender mainstreaming, situations and  
programmatic matters**

## **Report of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women on the activities of the United Nations trust fund in support of actions to eliminate violence against women**

**Note by the Secretary-General**

### *Summary*

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit herewith, to the Commission on the Status of Women and the Human Rights Council, the report of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) on the activities of the United Nations trust fund in support of actions to eliminate violence against women, which was prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution [50/166](#).

\* [E/CN.6/2024/1](#).



## I. Introduction

1. The United Nations trust fund in support of actions to eliminate violence against women, established by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/166, is a global, multilateral grant-giving mechanism dedicated to preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls. Administered by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) on behalf of the United Nations system, the trust fund supports civil society, in particular women's rights organizations, in implementing multi-year projects to address, prevent and ultimately eliminate violence against women and girls. The trust fund leverages strong institutional support from UN-Women, including through its regional, multi-country and country offices, and collaborates with the broader United Nations system through its inter-agency Programme Advisory Committees.<sup>1</sup>

2. The trust fund's vision is a world in which all women and girls live free from all forms of violence and enjoy and exercise their human rights freely and safely. This vision aligns with international human rights and humanitarian law and follows agreed norms and standard-setting instruments at the global, regional and national levels. The trust fund's efforts contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 5, and directly support the meeting of three targets: ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere (target 5.1); eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation (target 5.2); and eliminating all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation (target 5.3).

3. The present report, prepared for the sixty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and the fifty-sixth session of the Human Rights Council, highlights the impact and achievements of the trust fund and its grantee partners in 2023.

4. During the year, the trust fund managed a grant portfolio of 191 projects aimed at preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in 68 countries and territories, across five regions, with grants totalling \$92.1 million, and awarded its twenty-sixth cycle of grants. Grant recipients were all civil society organizations, the majority (65.1 per cent) of which were women's rights organizations. Since 1996, the trust fund has provided grants to 670 initiatives across 140 countries and territories, totalling \$225,837,268.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2023, the trust fund's Programme Advisory Committees at the global and regional levels included representatives of leading civil society organizations and other experts on ending violence against women and girls, as well as staff members from 15 United Nations organs and bodies that actively contributed to the trust fund's grant-giving approval processes, providing strategic input to funding decisions and playing a vital role in driving forward collective efforts to engage the wider community in work to prevent and end violence against women and girls. This included representatives of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the International Organization for Migration, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Office for Project Services, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization. The Committees also included representatives of intergovernmental organizations, civil society organizations and other experts at the global and field levels, including representatives of the Center for Women's Global Leadership, Equality Now, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München and the South African Medical Research Council.

5. As of December 2023, the trust fund's contributors comprised several national Governments, including the Governments of Australia, Austria, Canada, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Norway, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America. In addition, it received support from UN-Women national committees in Australia, Germany, the Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and the United States. Contributions also came from the Spotlight Initiative, a joint effort of the European Union and the United Nations, and partners such as Conscious Step, Soko and the Wellspring Philanthropic Fund.

## II. Context in 2023

6. Violence against women and girls is a pervasive, widespread and grave human rights violation with immediate and long-term repercussions for women and girls, families and societies. In recent times, there has been an alarming increase in opposition to women's rights and a backlash against feminist movements globally. Shrinking spaces for women and girls, along with escalating and protracted conflicts and other overlapping crises, continue to put the lives and bodies of women and girls at increased risk of violence.

7. The compounding impacts of global, regional and national crises, including climate emergencies, violent conflicts and economic shocks, have significantly increased the need for humanitarian assistance, including life-saving protection from gender-based violence.<sup>2</sup> In 2022, an estimated 406.6 million people needed humanitarian assistance, with the vast majority (83 per cent) living in contexts of protracted crisis.<sup>3</sup> This has a disproportionate impact on women and girls, who, it has been noted, have experienced an intensification of different forms of violence and an increased risk of violence. For instance, in crisis settings, 70 per cent of women experience gender-based violence, compared with 35 per cent of women worldwide.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, civil society and women's rights organizations comprise over half of the trust fund's active grantee partners, with grants totalling \$55.5 million, and are at the forefront of crisis, providing life-saving interventions and preventing violence. As crises continue to unfold around the world, the need for long-term, core and flexible funding to support civil society and women's rights organizations in addressing gender-based violence and meeting the needs of women and girls remains vital.

8. The trust fund's experience underscores the adaptability and resilience of front-line local and community organizations when it comes to leading efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls, regardless of whether it occurs in a humanitarian, peace or development context. Front-line civil society and women's rights organizations are critical to supporting women and girls, and have shown remarkable flexibility and resilience in navigating rapidly evolving and complex situations, while maintaining a focus on interventions to prevent and end this egregious human rights violation.<sup>5</sup> Investing in strengthening women's rights, women-led and feminist organizations at various levels, whether in one country or in multiple countries, is essential. Such support equips these organizations to effectively prepare for, respond to and recover from the dynamic and overlapping challenges

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Global Humanitarian Overview 2022* (New York, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Angus Urquhart and others, *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2022* (Bristol, United Kingdom, Development Initiatives, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Alison Barclay, Michelle Higelin and Melissa Bungcaras, "On the frontline: catalysing women's leadership in humanitarian action" (Johannesburg, ActionAid International, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Gemma Wood and Shruti Majumdar, "COVID-19 and the impact on civil society organizations working to end violence against women and girls" (New York, UN-Women, 2020).

present in today's world. These organizations are critical to safeguarding women and girls from all forms of violence across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

9. The trust fund has included measures to support grantees coping with unprecedented changes resulting from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, increased backlash against women's rights, and escalating conflicts, among other crises. Such measures include providing contingency funding, as well as resourcing practices related to self-care and collective care while increasing access to flexible and core funding.

10. For example, in Ukraine, the non-governmental organization Club Eney, a trust fund grantee, is leading a project to prevent gender-based violence and the spread of HIV among women who use drugs, self-identified women sex workers, women living with HIV and internally displaced women. In response to the war, Club Eney adapted its screening and intervention tool to guide women at risk through risk assessments and safety planning, and made allowances for evacuation, food and medication for project staff and beneficiaries, including by providing supplies for internally displaced women to help them grow vegetables and improve food security.

11. Further, in 2023, the trust fund commissioned and published a scoping study to examine how humanitarian action operates in the context of increasingly complex crises, focusing in particular on how these crises affect the prevention of and response to violence against women and girls. The study found that women-led organizations and women's rights organizations are chronically underfunded and often lack sufficient recognition by donors.<sup>6</sup> It also found that the trust fund can play a key role in supporting platforms for women's rights and civil society organizations to foster partnerships with larger organizations that influence humanitarian work. In addition, the trust fund supports civil society and women's rights organizations in building organizational capacities through long-term investments, which are crucial to enable them to act in rapidly changing crisis contexts.

12. Trust fund grantee organizations also faced new challenges, including backlash against advancing women's rights and ending violence against women, threatening hard-won gains around the world. For instance, in Nigeria, Alliances for Africa, funded under the Spotlight Initiative, reported that those who opposed gender equality activists were disrupting the organization's advocacy for the full implementation of the Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015, the country's first legislation outlawing and criminalizing violence against women. Despite these challenges, the organization has made strides in increasing awareness of the importance of the law through improving the knowledge of the 27 lawmakers at the Imo State House of Assembly in Imo State. Further, the organization has made progress in prosecuting cases using the law.

13. Despite the increased difficulties faced by trust fund grantee organizations in carrying out life-saving work, the organizations continued to find innovative solutions to ensure that they reach the most marginalized women and girls. In Somalia, the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa reports that the situation for women in camps for internally displaced persons is worsening, with a rising number of cases of sexual violence. Drought and conflict have resulted in mass displacement, overstressing camps and worsening the security situation in some project operating areas, making it more difficult for the project to carry out planned activities. In response, the grantee organization established two advocacy coalitions composed of civil society and women's rights organizations, internally displaced persons and

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<sup>6</sup> Marta Perez del Pulgar, "Supporting civil society and women's rights organizations to end violence against women and girls in protracted, complex and overlapping crises: a scoping study commissioned by the UN trust fund to end violence against women" (New York, UN-Women, 2023).

activists. The establishment of the coalitions led to increased public awareness and response to sexual violence against women living with disabilities.

14. Further, the trust fund's work remains guided by the principle of leaving no one behind, which is implemented through an intentional and proactive intersectional approach, with nearly 80 per cent of the portfolio working to reach those most likely to be left behind, including women and girls living with disabilities, women and girl refugees and internally displaced persons, lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, Indigenous women and other marginalized women and girls. As the trust fund grantees work in increasingly complex environments, this dedication remains vital for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the goals contained in the trust fund's strategic plan for 2021–2025.

### **III. Strategic plan for 2021–2025**

15. The trust fund's strategic plan for 2021–2025 contributes to the implementation of the UN-Women strategic plan for 2022–2025 and is oriented towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5. As an inter-agency, multilateral grant-giving mechanism, the trust fund is well situated to strengthen coordination efforts across the United Nations system to end violence against women and girls and foster partnerships with civil society and feminist movements.

16. The trust fund continues to fund interventions to end violence against women and girls under three outcome areas of the current strategic plan: (a) improved access for women and girls to essential, safe and adequate multisectoral services; (b) improved prevention of violence against women and girls through changes in behaviours, practices and attitudes; and (c) increased effectiveness of legislation, policies, national action plans and accountability systems. Trust fund projects work across these outcome areas, highlighting the grantees' holistic approach to meeting the essential needs of women and girls and fostering sustainable, transformational change. In 2023, the trust fund initiated a midterm review of its strategic plan, which will influence the final two years of implementation under the current plan. The review includes key informant interviews with a range of stakeholders critical to the trust fund. The purpose of the review is to assess whether the current strategies are effectively meeting the strategic plan outcomes and goals. The findings from the review will guide the trust fund in ensuring that its efforts are on track to achieve its goal of preventing and ending violence against women and girls.

17. Through long-term and flexible funding, the trust fund enables civil society and women's rights organizations to implement demand-driven initiatives to end violence against women and girls, supporting both programmatic sustainability and organizational resilience. For instance, the trust fund's annual partner survey found that 67 per cent of grantees reported being able to mobilize an increased proportion of flexible, core and long-term funding through additional funding sources. In addition, 59 per cent of grantees reported engaging in and creating useful partnerships, for example, with government agencies to develop advocacy campaigns and build their capacity. One grantee noted that the partnerships were strengthening its service delivery and improving on promptness and effectiveness despite all the conflict-related challenges that it faced.

18. The trust fund continued its work towards reaching these goals through its partnership with UN-Women and the European Union to develop the new Advocacy, Coalition Building and Transformative Feminist Action to End Violence against Women programme to accelerate efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. Through a focus on strengthening coalition-building, networking, leadership and the resilience of global and regional feminist women's rights

movements, as well as increased and enhanced advocacy, campaigning and policymaking, the partnership will work to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls. Further, through the codification and elevation of the building of feminist movements by civil society and women's rights organizations, the trust fund will inform the policy and programming of the United Nations and key partners on ending violence against women and girls.

#### **IV. Grants awarded in the twenty-sixth cycle**

19. In 2023, 24 grants were awarded across 22 countries and territories, totalling \$11.1 million, with 34 per cent of the funding awarded under the special focus on protracted crises. Additional funding under the general window was also allocated to organizations implementing projects in contexts of protracted crises. Of the organizations awarded grants, 75 per cent identify as women's rights organizations, a new record. In addition, 92 per cent identify as women-led organizations, with more than 61 per cent of women in leadership positions.

20. In Africa, eight organizations were awarded grants for projects aimed at providing support to women and girls in the context of protracted crises, including conflict settings, as well as focusing on reaching those most likely to be left behind. In South Sudan, Women for Women International, a women's rights organization, will work to prevent violence against women and girls, including refugees and internally displaced women, in conflict- and war-affected counties through transforming community behaviours, practices and attitudes. In Nigeria, a project to be implemented by the Empowering Women for Excellence Initiative will provide comprehensive specialist support to women and girls at risk of violence, including Indigenous women and girls and refugee or internally displaced women, in the context of the protracted conflict in Kaduna State.

21. In the Arab States, three new grantees will work to reach some of the most marginalized women and girls, such as women in the lowest income groups, with prevention and psychosocial support. The new grantees will also develop and implement policy recommendations. In Jordan, the National Association for Family Empowerment will strengthen specialist support services through the establishment of mobile clinics for legal assistance and develop legal recommendations and policy briefs to foster collective action.

22. In Asia and the Pacific, four organizations will implement new grants to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations, prevent violence against women and girls, including women and girls living with HIV, and protect survivors of violence in areas affected by protracted conflict. In Myanmar, CARE International will work to empower marginalized women and girls (women living with disabilities, women in the lowest income groups, women in minority and ethnic groups), including survivors and those at risk of violence in Shan State, an area affected by protracted conflict, by providing emergency hotline services and legal representation services, and by training community and local leaders on violence prevention and response mechanisms in 45 communities across the State.

23. In Europe and Central Asia, five new grants will improve the rights of marginalized women and girls, such as those affected by war, and be aimed at preventing child marriage and other harmful traditional practices. In Türkiye, the Amal Healing and Advocacy Centre intends to prevent violence against Syrian refugee women and girls, including by preventing child marriage through training community mobilizers to lead advocacy groups in Gaziantep and Hatay Provinces. In Tajikistan, the Public Organization Office for Initiative Development will work with young people to foster collective action in preventing violence by raising awareness

of prevention and referral mechanisms, including through a “safety at home” public information campaign.

24. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the trust fund awarded four new grants to improve access to specialist services for women and girls with disabilities and to foster women’s rights for those experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination, among other strategies. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, a project implemented by the Centro de Desarrollo Integral de la Mujer Aymara is aimed at fostering women’s rights to empower and protect Indigenous women and girls in seven municipalities of La Paz through strategies such as training women and girl leaders on prevention and referral mechanisms. In Brazil, the Coletivo de Mulheres Negras Maria-Maria will work to promote the human rights of, and end violence against, women and girls of African descent by strengthening specialist support services for survivors of violence and those at particular risk, including lesbian, bisexual and transgender women; Indigenous women; and women human rights defenders.

## **V. Achievements**

25. In 2023, trust fund grantee organizations continued working to prevent and end violence against women and girls through innovative and effective interventions under the three outcome areas of the trust fund’s strategic plan for 2021–2025. Grantees adapted to context-specific needs to deliver results on preventing violence, ensuring that women and girl survivors of violence have access to adequate essential services and improving the implementation of laws and policies.

26. All trust fund grantees received comprehensive capacity development support to strengthen their organizational operations. Grantees are required to provide information on their systems for reporting allegations of sexual harassment, assault, sexual exploitation and abuse. In 2023, significant progress was made in organizational policy development on the prevention of sexual harassment, assault, sexual exploitation and abuse, among organizations supported by the trust fund. All eight of the organizations that did not have a policy on the prevention of sexual harassment and assault successfully developed one. Similarly, 10 organizations without a policy on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse established such a policy. Further, the trust fund supported 12 organizations that did not have an anti-fraud policy to put one in place by the end of the first year of project implementation. In addition, the trust fund delivered 13 thematic capacity development webinars, with a combined total of 1,049 attendees, focused on project reporting, audit preparations, financial planning and programming principles related to ending violence against women, among other topics.

27. The achievements of grantee organizations during the year show the results of the trust fund’s policies in practice, including the importance of flexible and core funding. The present section showcases key grantee achievements during the year, highlighting their ability to change the lives of women and girls, especially those left furthest behind.

### **A. Preventing violence against women and girls**

28. Preventing violence against women and girls lies at the core of the majority of grantees’ projects, in tandem with other strategies such as improving multisector service provision and effectively implementing laws and policies. The trust fund portfolio implemented between 2018 and 2023 included 164 projects partially or fully focused on prevention efforts, with an investment of \$79 million that represented 81 per cent of the portfolio. In 2023, the trust fund conducted an analysis of the

prevention interventions implemented by its grantees and found a diverse range of themes across these activities, including improving the confidence and knowledge of women and girls to report sexual and gender-based violence, as well as mobilizing communities to shift behaviours, attitudes and practices to respond to and uphold the human rights of women and girls. In addition, grantees actively apply an intersectional approach to preventing violence against women in efforts to leave no one behind by making intersecting vulnerabilities visible in prevention efforts. These varied themes reflect the multifaceted approach to prevention that the trust fund finds across its diverse portfolio of partners.

29. In Kosovo,<sup>7</sup> Women for Women Kosova is improving prevention while simultaneously strengthening institutional responses. During 2023, that grantee organization significantly improved awareness of available services for survivors of violence. For instance, it involved 112 women in meetings with local institutions, including the Kosovo police and the Office for Victim Protection and Assistance. At least 97 per cent of women who attended the meetings indicated via surveys that their participation had significantly increased their knowledge about gender-based violence and available services. In addition, Women for Women Kosova improved the economic outlook and well-being of 230 women at risk and survivors of violence by providing economic empowerment training, which improved their self-confidence, knowledge and business skills while increasing their ability to recognize gender-based violence and make informed decisions for their lives. In addition, the organization provided 130 psychosocial support sessions to 40 women, increasing their coping skills and resilience.

30. In Iraq, the grantee the Lotus Flower noted an increase in violence against women and girls amidst a shifting social, political and economic environment, including the long-term repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. In response, it provided livelihood training for 50 at-risk women, including women heads of household, survivors of violence and internally displaced and refugee women. Twenty-five of these women were also provided with grants for their businesses. Following a comprehensive business training programme, 51 per cent of participants reported significant benefits such as business management and start-up skills. The organization engaged in prevention efforts during 2023 through home visits to 40 refugee women, while workshops on positive masculinity reached 78 men in partnership with the University of Duhok, with 65 per cent of participants indicating that the workshops had helped improve their knowledge on preventing violence against women.

31. During the year, the Lesedi la Batho Community Centre in South Africa, supported by a small grant from the trust fund, trained 61 women survivors of violence on technical and life skills, including computer literacy and economic skill-building, including sewing. In addition, the Centre conducted training for 23 duty bearers, including members of the police, health workers, counsellors and teachers, on aspects of sexual exploitation and abuse. This training was aimed at enhancing their understanding of their crucial role in ending violence against women and girls. These efforts synergized with the Centre's initiatives in schools and with community leaders to educate and raise awareness about violence against women and girls in schools and communities. The Centre also hosts weekly support groups for survivors of violence, offering assistance and counselling to 104 women throughout the year. In response to the specific needs of Mabopane, a marginalized township that continues to face challenges that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Centre addressed the lack of knowledge on violence against women through

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<sup>7</sup> All references to Kosovo in the present report should be understood to be in compliance with Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).



school-based prevention lessons, which reached 834 students during 2023 and resulted in positive changes in behaviours.

32. While the COVID-19 emergency has ended globally, the consequences of confinement continue to cast a long shadow, in particular as regards gender-based violence. For example, in Mexico, Equidad de Género: Ciudadanía, Trabajo y Familia is working to address an increase in sexual violence and teenage pregnancies sparked by the pandemic. Using a comprehensive community-based approach, the grantee is working to prevent and address sexual violence against girls and young women aged 10–19 years in the States of Hidalgo, México, Puebla and Tlaxcala, where the prevalence rates of violence against women and girls and of human trafficking for sexual exploitation are high. In 2023, through the dissemination of radio and online messages, the project reached 9,890 women and girls, including 730 Indigenous women and girls, including in remote communities. In total, the project has provided comprehensive guidance, including legal orientation and psychological first aid, to survivors in 799 cases of sexual and gender-based violence.

33. During 2023, the Collateral Repair Project in Jordan helped 112 refugee and host community women and girls feel safer and gain an improved sense of well-being through psychological support services, vocational training and women's empowerment seminars. The Project reached more women and girls by increasing programme offerings and expanding project activities into areas hosting high numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers. The Project worked to empower community members to take action to prevent violence against women in their communities by delivering four women's empowerment seminars focusing on preventing violence against women and girls to 67 participants. Of those who participated in a survey after the training, 70 per cent indicated that they had increased knowledge of gender-based violence and prevention strategies in the community.

## **B. Fostering the implementation of laws and policies**

34. In 2023, 44.3 per cent of grantees have implemented projects with a component focused on the implementation of laws and policies. The work of grantees in monitoring and implementing laws and policies related to ending violence against women carries significant implications, highlighting the importance of investing in women's rights and feminist movements. For instance, a 2012 study on policy change shows that countries with the strongest feminist movements are more likely to have comprehensive policies addressing violence against women and girls than countries with weaker or non-existent feminist movements.<sup>8</sup> Civil society and women's rights organizations supported by the trust fund play a critical role in engaging with formal and informal legal and policy systems for violence prevention and response. Further, many projects seek to shift the formal stance of duty bearers on violence prevention from reactive to proactive. Examples of projects aimed at implementing laws and policies in 2023 are described in the paragraphs below.

35. The Women's Justice Initiative (Iniciativa de los Derechos de la Mujer) in Guatemala, currently implementing a trust fund grant, is educating Maya Kaqchikel women in 24 Indigenous rural communities about their legal rights and providing them with the knowledge and confidence to access those rights. In 2023, at least 243 women graduated from a three-month women's rights training programme focusing on legal literacy. At the end of the training, 97 per cent of participants reported increased knowledge of legal rights vis-à-vis violence against women, an increase

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<sup>8</sup> Mala Htun and S. Laurel Weldon, "The civic origins of progressive policy change: combating violence against women in global perspective, 1975–2005", *American Political Science Review*, vol. 106, No. 3 (August 2012), pp. 548–569.

from 40 per cent at the start of the project. In addition, the grantee organization delivered capacity-building workshops to police officers focused on improving service providers' understanding of the needs of survivors of violence and reducing the revictimization of survivors who seek support from public institutions; 13 police officers attended two training sessions in 2023. To address the challenges women face when reporting violence, the Women's Justice Initiative trained municipal service providers and police and provided 190 women, including 152 survivors of violence, with legal services and supported 96 women to secure their legal right to receive child support.

36. The Center for Dalit Women Nepal is a constituency-led women's rights organization working to prevent violence against Dalit and marginalized women and girls by reforming laws and policies in 10 municipalities to promote zero tolerance of violence against women. In 2023, the Center worked to enact legislative reforms at the local level, including with guidelines for violence-free municipalities in Madhesh Province. The Center supports women and girls from sexual, gender, ethnic and religious minorities, including Madhesi, Madhesi Dalits and Muslims, in the 10 municipalities by offering orientation sessions and self-defence training, and by organizing women-led youth groups and street theatre, among other activities, to promote violence-free environments. The project also built the capacity of 602 local government representatives and women leaders by equipping them with the knowledge and skills to address violence against women by ensuring placement of the issue on the agendas of local municipalities specifically as related to harmful traditional practices and dowry-related violence. Most government representatives were members of local judicial committees, including deputy mayors, who play a crucial role in raising awareness and institutionalizing response mechanisms related to the prevalence of violence against women. Further, the project also offers direct services to survivors of violence and supported 126 women and girls through its new hotline, which provides information and counselling to women survivors of violence.

37. The Coalition to Stop Violence against Women in Armenia works together with a network of civil society organizations to strengthen accountability mechanisms. In May 2023, the Coalition conducted a training session for 18 civil society organizations, focusing on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The training was instrumental in deepening participants' understanding of the foundational concepts and principles of the Convention. It examined effective ways to use concluding observations, the evolving landscape of treaty bodies, the historical engagement of Armenia with the Convention and the potential of these interactions to advance women's rights. This initiative was particularly enlightening for many civil society representatives, introducing them to these concepts for the first time. Coalition members report being better equipped to tailor their advocacy strategies in line with the Convention's guidance, fostering meaningful changes and promoting the advancement of women's rights in Armenia.

### **C. Improving access to multisectoral services**

38. Trust fund grantees implement projects to provide essential, multisectoral services to women and girl survivors of violence. In 2023, at least 70 per cent of grantees included direct interventions in their projects to increase access to essential services, including during emergencies. Grantees provide specialized support services to survivors and support multisectoral service providers in improving access to safe and effective referrals for a range of health, justice, protection and psychosocial services as part of a comprehensive response for survivors. Overall, trust fund grantees take a survivor-centred approach in improving services through their projects while engaging with survivors as empowered change agents. Grantee organizations

take the lead in multisectoral collaborations to train service providers, establish referral networks and ensure that survivors are treated with respect at different service points. Examples of grantees working to improve access to services are described in the following paragraphs.

39. THRIVEGulu works to reach refugee women and girls in Uganda to ensure that they have access to essential, multisectoral services and to fill the gaps in psychosocial support services for survivors that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2023, THRIVE Gulu trained 318 adolescents, including 108 refugee adolescents, in an eight-month life skills curriculum focused on advocating against violence against women and girls in a safe space for sharing experiences, learning from each other and making empowered decisions. The curriculum improved the confidence and knowledge of adolescent girls through topics such as creating safety plans, engaging in social and emotional skills, discussing early marriage prevention and making informed decisions. During the year, women and girl survivors of violence reported increased access to services, with 89 per cent of those surveyed indicating that there was improved availability of services, an increase from 77 per cent the year before. Increased access followed intense awareness-raising activities that reached 1,043 individuals through various methods, including outreach through radio talk shows, community dialogues with women and girls, and outreach to communities through door-to-door awareness sessions reaching 507 people.

40. In the State of Palestine, the Association for Woman and Child Protection worked to ensure that the most vulnerable women and girls in the Gaza Strip who had been subjected to violence, discrimination and harmful practices experienced improved safety and security, well-being, legal protection, quality of life, agency, resilience and empowerment. The project supported 1,631 vulnerable women and girl survivors of violence, increasing their access to immediate specialist services such as psychological support. Seventy-eight women and girls were supported in court representation. In addition, 90 women received unconditional cash assistance of \$100 per person to enhance their resilience, while some of them were trained on business management and craft skills.

41. A project implemented by the Organization for Community Development in India provided services, including medical treatment, counselling and/or legal assistance, to 539 survivors of violence who are part of the Mukkuvar Indigenous marine fisher community in Tamil Nadu State. This geographically and culturally isolated Indigenous community has seen an increase in violence against women following measures introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Among those who received services were at least 115 women survivors of violence who are small entrepreneurs working as fish vendors. In 2023, the grantee organization also provided 250 survivors of violence with access to skills-building initiatives to support their business ventures and enhance their economic independence. Skills training included fish processing, the making of fish chutney powder and fish pickles, seashell handicrafts and tailoring. In total, through monitoring approaches with community organizations, the project is providing services and monitoring to a total of 1,518 survivors to prevent further violence.

42. Physicians for Human Rights is implementing a trust fund grant in Kenya to ensure that survivors of sexual and gender-based violence have meaningful access to survivor-centred multisectoral responses and to enhance the availability of forensic evidence of crimes to support investigations and prosecutions. Physicians for Human Rights successfully launched MediCapt, its forensic evidence collection technical application, at two additional facilities in Nakuru and Nairobi City Counties, with the support of each county's Department of Health. MediCapt is now in use at the Nakuru County Referral and Teaching Hospital and the Naivasha Sub-County Referral Hospital in Nakuru, and the Mukuru Health Centre in Nairobi. The project is working

to scale up MediCapt through strategic partnerships with government departments focused on service delivery related to sexual and gender-based violence.

43. The Centro Yanapasíñani Bolivia para el Desarrollo de la Mujer y la Familia is implementing a project to address violence against women and girls in Coro, a small rural Indigenous Aymara community in Pacajes Province, La Paz Department, in the Plurinational State of Bolivia. In 2023, the project raised the awareness of 1,011 women leaders and community members on women's rights, preventing violence against women and girls and referral mechanisms, including Indigenous justice procedures. It launched the first municipal network of community promoters for the fight against violence in the presence of local authorities. This network of 38 specially trained women volunteers provided support, referral and counselling services to 155 women survivors of violence in communities targeted by the project, with 90 per cent reporting having received satisfactory, prompt and timely assistance.

## **VI. Spotlight Initiative of the European Union and the United Nations**

44. The Spotlight Initiative is a global, multi-year partnership between the European Union and the United Nations to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls by 2030. Projects funded by the trust fund under this initiative continued to focus on strengthening and supporting autonomous women's rights organizations and civil society organizations (outcome 6 of Spotlight Initiative theory of change) in 15 countries in sub-Saharan Africa and 5 countries in Latin America. In addition to the initial 35 projects funded in 2019, a further 20 grantees in sub-Saharan Africa were awarded Spotlight Initiative funds to advance institutional strengthening for crisis response and to maintain or adapt existing interventions to end violence against women, with a focus on the most at-risk and marginalized women and girls in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. In total, \$24 million has been awarded for trust fund projects under this initiative, including resources to create and manage SHINE, a multilingual practitioner-based online collaboration hub that is connecting civil society, the United Nations, academia, the private sector and others to collaborate, co-create and amplify knowledge to drive global efforts to end violence against women and girls through policy, programming and advocacy.

45. In 2023, grantees under the Spotlight Initiative worked to create significant change for women and girls while making strides to strengthen women's movements. Effective adaptations by grantees illustrate the value of localized interventions, often in collaboration with local feminist networks and alliances, while pivoting rapidly in changing contexts from development to humanitarian settings.

46. In Eswatini and South Africa, Sonke Gender Justice, a women-led human rights organization, is working to empower members of civil society with knowledge, skills and strategies to hold their Governments accountable for implementing laws and policies aimed at preventing violence against women and girls. In 2023, Sonke engaged 266 government officials through monthly meetings to address blockages in the judicial systems faced by survivors of violence. This included addressing challenges related to implementing legislation at the local level. In addition, Sonke strengthened the capacities of 15 women's rights and civil society organizations, equipping them with skills to implement, monitor and evaluate their interventions on violence prevention and response.

47. In Honduras, the Women's Rights Centre (Centro de Derechos de Mujeres), a women-led organization, is implementing a project to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls in 12 municipalities. During the final year of implementation of the project, 240 women survivors or those at risk of violence were assisted through

16 self-help groups, which exceeded the project's initial goal by 166 per cent. Two women's networks supported by the project also addressed 287 cases of violence, including through the provision of legal services and psychosocial and emotional support. Furthermore, 16 justice officials, including police officers and public prosecutors, were trained to acquire knowledge on women's and human rights and on intersectional approaches to preventing and addressing violence. Finally, 54 women service providers for survivors of violence reported a significant improvement in the quality of care provided to women survivors or those at risk of violence in municipalities targeted over the course of the project.

48. The Art & Global Health Center Africa in Malawi is strengthening the efforts of civil society organizations and local government to prevent violence against women and girls and improve the empowerment of women. The project has improved the lives of 21,187 women and girls by enhancing their capacity to challenge and address forms of violence through empowering women, establishing support groups and raising awareness of women's rights and opportunities. The organization also improved the capacity of 57 civil society organizations to scale up their projects and to strengthen community structures. Throughout the year, the organization observed positive shifts within the community, in particular an enhanced awareness of violence against women and how to respond. This was evidenced by a notable increase in reports, with 733 women coming forward to report incidents of violence to authorities, including to the police.

49. In December 2023, as the grant period for trust fund grantees funded under the Spotlight Initiative came to an end, the trust fund brought all of these grantees together in Nairobi. This co-regional learning exchange built on lessons from grantee experiences to enable wider learning within the ecosystem on ending violence against women. The event explored key themes arising from grantee experiences such as intersectional approaches to programming related to ending violence against women and girls, organizational resilience and adaptability, and lessons learned related to movement-building, especially in the context of backlash.

## VII. Practice-based knowledge and learning

50. During 2023, the trust fund continued to focus on promoting practice-based knowledge and learning from grantee civil society organizations. Those efforts included the production of a series of papers on the trust fund's special funding windows on (a) ending violence against women and girls who are refugees or forcibly displaced and (b) ending violence against women and girls with disabilities. Further, in 2023, the trust fund launched a series of papers on its work across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

51. The first paper in the series<sup>9</sup> was a synthesis review of the trust fund's special window on ending violence against refugee or forcibly displaced women and girls, which funded 18 civil society and women's rights organizations between 2016 and 2022. The review identified overarching lessons on how projects employed diverse strategies to improve services and prevention programming for women and girls. Grantee organizations were able to improve the mental health, well-being and resilience of refugee and forcibly displaced women and girls and demonstrate how programming related to violence against women and girls can meet the needs of refugee and forcibly displaced women and girls with intersecting identities. The evaluations of these projects funded under the special window informed a second

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<sup>9</sup> Erin Stern, "'A window of hope': a synthesis review of the UN trust fund's special window on ending violence against women & girls who are refugees and/or forcibly displaced" (New York, UN-Women, 2023).

paper in the series, which found that the work of grantees demonstrated impact at all levels of the socioecological model for preventing violence.<sup>10</sup>

52. A third paper in the series<sup>11</sup> explored how humanitarian action operates in increasingly overlapping, protracted and complex crises, and how it intersects with violence against women and girls. According to the paper, women-led and women's rights organizations are underfunded and often overlooked in humanitarian contexts, and many humanitarian funding mechanisms are short term and do not respond to longer-term complex humanitarian needs, making the trust fund, through its long-term, flexible and core funding to civil society and women's rights organizations, uniquely positioned to support organizations working in protracted crises and build their resilience across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

53. In 2023, the trust fund also released a series of papers on disability inclusion and intersectionality. The creation of the special funding window focusing on women and girls living with disabilities, under which 22 grants were awarded between 2018 and 2022, was an attempt to address previously identified gaps, challenges and barriers in addressing violence against women and girls living with disabilities. The findings of the synthesis include that grantee organizations play important roles in helping societies move away from harmful or outdated paradigms for understanding disabilities. Grantee organizations accomplished this through developing disability-specific tools and approaches to address violence and fostered inclusive movements to end violence against women and girls living with disabilities. Further, a paper focused on the evaluations of the projects under the special window showed strong results not only at the individual level, but also in creating an enabling environment at all other levels of the socioecological model for preventing violence and response. Four cross-cutting themes emerged, namely, the grantee's ability to: increase the visibility of women and girls living with disabilities; transform mindsets; increase systemic thinking; and inform the development of disability-inclusion focused resources. One of the most significant overall insights that emerged was a strong commitment to operationalizing the mantra of the wider disability inclusion rights movement of "nothing about us, without us" in practice.

### **Small grant summaries**

54. In 2023, the trust fund co-created and co-authored a series of small grant<sup>12</sup> project summaries, contributing results to the knowledge base on ending violence against women and girls for use by other practitioners and partners. These published summaries showcase the important work of small organizations<sup>13</sup> funded by the trust fund. For instance, Women Challenged to Challenge implemented a project in Kenya to engage women and girls with disabilities in preventing and responding to violence and improving responses from service providers. The project reached 120 women and girls with disabilities, who were trained as activists and paralegals to support other women and girls with disabilities in their communities in reporting cases of violence to the authorities, thereby improving such reporting. The social learning model training helped enhance their own knowledge – and prevention – of violence and

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<sup>10</sup> Erin Stern, "Addressing violence against refugee and/or forcibly displaced women and girls: results from UN trust fund's special window on ending violence against women & girls who are refugees and/or forcibly displaced" (New York, UN-Women, 2023).

<sup>11</sup> Marta Perez del Pulgar, "Supporting civil society and women's rights organizations working to end violence against women and girls in protracted, complex and overlapping crises".

<sup>12</sup> Small grants are defined as grants for organizations managing annual operating budgets of less than \$200,000 and that are eligible for a trust fund grant of up to \$150,000.

<sup>13</sup> Small organizations are defined as those with an average annual operating budget of less than \$200,000 over the previous three years.

equipped them as activists. By the end of the project, 255 perpetrators were facing court proceedings, and 11 had been sentenced.

55. The trust fund commissioned a meta-analysis building on the work under 18 small grants, extracting results and lessons learned with a focus on knowledge-sharing. The analysis provides valuable recommendations on how small grass-roots organizations can best be supported. Firstly, the three-year funding period provided rare stability for grass-roots organizations, and the flexibility in budget revisions was crucial to organizational resilience in crisis situations. Secondly, these organizations addressed the unique challenges faced by marginalized women and girls, ensuring that their voices were heard. Lastly, the grants bolstered the reputation and organizational capacities of partner organizations. For example, in Kenya, the Forum for Women in Development, Democracy and Justice project had a positive impact on 755 refugee and trafficked women. Through the “Learn a skill to earn” programme, survivors gained economic independence and became champions for combating gender-based violence in refugee and host communities. To further amplify the voices of small civil society and women’s rights organizations that are leading initiatives to end violence against women and girls around the globe, the trust fund also co-created the “Small and mighty!” podcast series. Across five episodes, practitioners and advocates from small organizations directly shared their unique expertise, experience and challenges from their work to prevent and address all forms of violence against women and girls.

## VIII. The way forward

56. The trust fund remains unwavering in its dedication to supporting civil society, especially women-led and women’s rights organizations, in leading local, national, regional and global efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls. The trust fund’s ongoing support to these organizations is crucial for fostering meaningful change at all levels and across complex humanitarian and development settings.

57. In the third year of implementing its strategic plan for 2021–2025, the trust fund and its grantees have achieved significant milestones, navigating complex landscapes, with multiple and overlapping crises, showing that core and sustained support to civil society and women’s rights organizations across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus is essential. Key insights from the past year underscore the necessity of the trust fund providing core and flexible funding, including emergency responsive measures, to enable grantees to pivot when crises hit. For instance, in its twenty-seventh grant-giving cycle, for grants to be awarded in 2024, the trust fund will increase its grant duration from three to four years, and further increase its threshold for core funding, especially for small organizations applying for small grants. The trust fund’s midterm review of its strategic plan for 2021–2025, currently ongoing, will be aimed at gaining an understanding of how well the trust fund is meeting its stated goals outlined in the plan to best support women’s rights and civil society organizations in creating meaningful change for women and girls globally.

58. The trust fund is strategically positioned within the United Nations system and has a key role to play in bringing diverse stakeholders together to advance knowledge, strategies and funding approaches to civil society and women’s rights organizations on ending violence against women and girls. New partnerships built during the year, such as the partnership with the Advocacy, Coalition Building and Transformative Feminist Action to End Violence against Women programme, which is led by UN-Women and funded by the European Union, will advance these efforts through the next phase of the trust fund’s strategic plan implementation. As new and ongoing

overlapping crises continue to unfold around the world, the trust fund remains a key driver of change for women and girls through its unwavering support of civil society and women's rights organizations, especially in its ability to provide long-term funding with increasing thresholds for core and flexible funds.

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